Spring 1-1-2015

The Beyul Campaign: Spatial Articulations of Territory and Religion in Khumbu, Nepal

Lindsay Ann Skog

University of Colorado Boulder, lindsayskog@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/geog_gradetds

Part of the Asian Studies Commons, Buddhist Studies Commons, and the Geography Commons

Recommended Citation


https://scholar.colorado.edu/geog_gradetds/77

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Geography at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Geography Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
THE BEYUL CAMPAIGN: SPATIAL ARTICULATIONS OF TERRITORY AND RELIGION IN KHUMBU, NEPAL

by

LINDSAY ANN SKOG

B.A., Lewis & Clark College, 2000
M.S., Portland State University, 2004
M.A., Portland State University, 2010

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Geography
2015
This thesis entitled:
The Beyul Campaign: Spatial articulations of territory and religion in Khumbu, Nepal
written by Lindsay Ann Skog
has been approved for the Department of Geography

_______________________________________________
Emily T. Yeh

_______________________________________________
Joe Bryan

Date _________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 12-0708
Abstract

Skog, Lindsay Ann (Ph.D., Geography)
The Beyul Campaign: Spatial articulations of territory and religion in Khumbu, Nepal
Thesis directed by Professor Emily T. Yeh

Increasingly, non-governmental organizations and social movements, ranging from the local to global in scale, are mobilizing sacred landscapes—intimate, yet contested and politically charged lifeworlds and expressions of beliefs—to support environmental conservation programs, development agendas, and indigenous peoples’ territorial claims. Yet, such mobilizations often essentialize and depoliticize understandings of such landscapes as well as human-environment relations in such places. The purpose of this research was to investigate the ways in which the concept of sacred landscape works to shape articulations between global movements and local concerns, with specific attention to the role of space, and multiple spatialities, in such processes. In Nepal, constructions of sacred landscapes embody enunciations of indigenous identity and territoriality produced out of articulations between global environmental and development discourses and localized political and social agendas. Despite the seemingly fertile ground for articulations between the concept of Khumbu as a beyul—a sacred valley in the Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist tradition—and global discourses of environmental conservation, development, and indigenous politics, Khumbu Sherpa informants, outside of a small group of academic elites and community leaders, were indifferent toward mobilizing the beyul concept to support environmental conservation and development, or as the basis for a territorial claim in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. I used qualitative methodologies to explore
Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with Khumbu as an animate territory, how those relations are performed through everyday practices and rituals, and the disconnections between those relations and local concerns over environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights. I show that the *beyul* concept produces an ideological space that lacks reference to the material and everyday spaces Khumbu Sherpas produce through practices and rituals maintaining relationships with localized deities and spirits. Further, I find that the spaces produced by the state and through tourism and mountaineering buffer Khumbu Sherpas from the political and economic marginalization driving participation in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement among some other groups in Nepal. I conclude that the multiple spaces produced in Khumbu have worked to *disrupt* the development of the specific indigenous and territorial consciousness necessary for the space of the *beyul* to enunciate in Khumbu.
Acknowledgements

This project was generously funded by a U.S. National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, a Pruitt National Dissertation Fellowship awarded by the Society of Women Geographers, a SYLFF Research Abroad Fellowship funded by the Tokyo Foundation, and a Dissertation Research Grant from the Association of American Geographers. I am grateful to the IIE Fulbright program, the Department of Geography at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the Department of Geography at Portland State University, and the Tokyo Foundation for providing funding, tuition waivers, and support during my master’s research and doctoral coursework in preparation for the current project. A Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship and tuition assistance from Cornell University allowed me to study Tibetan and Nepali languages in preparation for this research. Finally, I am grateful to the Department of Geography and the Graduate School at the University of Colorado at Boulder for a Gilbert White Fellowship and a Dissertation Completion Fellowship in my final year.

I am indebted to my dissertation committee, which was chaired by Emily Yeh and included Timothy Oakes, Joe Bryan, Holly Gayley, and Elizabeth Olson. I am especially grateful to Emily Yeh, who has supported me as much as she has challenged me throughout this project. Many thanks go to Joe Bryan and Timothy Oakes for their feedback, support, and encouragement. Also, I appreciate and am grateful to Holly Gayley and Elizabeth Olson for sharing their valuable time and insights in developing this research project.

This research project could not have been possible without assistance and support from many, many mentors, colleagues, friends, and strangers in Nepal. First and foremost, I am grateful to all the informants in Khumbu and Kathmandu who shared their time with
me by participating in this project. In gratitude of the time committed to this research, I have made a donation to the American Himalayan Foundation and earmarked it to be used to support schools in Khumbu. I am significantly indebted to Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, who shared both the *beyul* and his wisdom as a mentor with me. I am grateful to Dr. Om Gurung and Tribhuvan University for sponsoring this project, as well as the government of Nepal’s Ministry of Forests, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, and Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park for permitting this project. Research assistance from Kami Doma Sherpa, Tashi Sherpa, Pemba Tshering Sherpa, Phurba Gyaltsen Sherpa in Khumbu, Tshering Ongmu Sherpa in Kathmandu, and Surya Joshi in the U.S. were invaluable to the success of this project. In Kathmandu, I am grateful to Laurie Vasily and the USEF-Nepal staff for their ongoing logistical support and to Geeta Manandhar for bringing my Nepali up to snuff! In Khumbu, I am especially thankful to Ching Doma Sherpa, Pemba Gyaltzen Sherpa, Tsering Tenzing Sherpa, Dr. Kami Sherpa, and Da Doma Sherpa for opening their homes to me. Tuche!

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Geography Department at the University of Colorado at Boulder who have enriched this project! I am especially grateful to writing group colleagues, including Meagan Todd, Kathryn Wright, Chris Jochem, Josh Rodd, and Britt Crow-Miller. Barbara Brower, Jeremy Spoon, David Banis, Ian Cogar, Frances Klatzel, Jemima Diki Sherpa, and Pasang Yangje have all provided valuable insight, encouragement, and mapping support, which has kept this project moving forward. Thank you!

Finally, thank you to my friends, ever-growing famly (I endeavor not to miss any more additions!), Finnegan, and family who have been wondering what the heck I’m doing up in those mountains. I am grateful for your support, wine, encouragement, and love!
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... iii

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... ix

Notes about Translation and Transliteration ..................................................................... x

Abbreviations and Terms ..................................................................................................... xi

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
  Case study and research site ............................................................................................. 6
  The ‘perfect package’? : Research questions ................................................................. 14
  Positionings ...................................................................................................................... 19
  Project background and methodology ........................................................................... 23
    Some challenges ........................................................................................................... 26
  Structure of the dissertation ............................................................................................. 27

Chapter 1: Producing sacred landscapes .................................................................... 30
  Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 30
    The Beyul Campaign: Building Livelihoods Along Beyul Trails ............................. 36
    The Beyul Campaign: Khumbu Community Conserved Area ............................... 43
  Approaching sacred landscapes ...................................................................................... 46
  Interrogating sacred landscapes .................................................................................... 54
    Politics and poetics ...................................................................................................... 56
  Narrating sacred landscapes ............................................................................................ 59
  Producing sacred landscapes in movement ................................................................ 62
    Sacred landscapes as traveling packages .................................................................. 62
    Articulation and global discourses ............................................................................. 66
    Attention to spatiality .................................................................................................. 68
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 73

Chapter 2: Ethnography and Khumbu Sherpas ....................................................... 75
  Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 75
  Ethnography and spatial fixing ....................................................................................... 77
  Himalayan ethnography .................................................................................................. 81
  Sherpas through an ethnographic lens .......................................................................... 86
    The narrative of the ‘traditional’ Sherpa .................................................................... 89
    Sherpas and the rest: Continuing the narrative ......................................................... 93
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 102

Chapter 3: Khumbu Sherpas and the state ............................................................... 105
  Timeline of Khumbu Sherpa and state relations ......................................................... 105
  Early state formation ..................................................................................................... 107
    The Rana era ............................................................................................................... 111
    Meanwhile, in Khumbu (and Darjeeling) . . . ............................................................ 117
    An experiment in Democracy and the Panchayat era .............................................. 120
  Forest nationalization ..................................................................................................... 123
  Rise of mountaineering and the formation of Sagarmatha National Park ................. 125
Establishment of Sagarmatha National Park ................................................................. 127
The end of the Panchayat era and the rise of ethnopolitics in Nepal ................................ 132
Democratic transition in Khumbu .................................................................................... 134
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 137

Chapter 4: Territory and the cultural politics of religion: Khumbu’s animate territory .... 139
Introduction: Nauche’s Dumje ......................................................................................... 139
Claiming territory: Power, performances, and alternatives ........................................... 150
Non-state constructions of territory .............................................................................. 153
Everyday practices and performances of territory ....................................................... 155
Khumbu’s animate territories ........................................................................................... 157
Lu, tsen, and other land spirits ....................................................................................... 158
Land spirits in a transforming landscape ....................................................................... 161
Khumbu’s mountain deities ............................................................................................ 165
Khumbi yullha .................................................................................................................. 168
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 182

Chapter 5: Territory and the cultural politics of religion: The Buddhist beyul .......... 184
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 184
Narrating Khumbu Sherpa religion ................................................................................ 185
Claiming territory through the beyul ............................................................................. 191
The beyul and everyday life ............................................................................................. 195
Renegotiating the cultural politics of religion ................................................................ 197
Conclusion: Territorial consciousness and everyday practices ....................................... 199

Chapter 6: Khumbu Sherpas and the adivasi janajati movement ................................ 201
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 201
Adivasi janajati movement and indigeneity in Nepal ..................................................... 206
Adivasi janajati identity among Khumbu Sherpas ......................................................... 213
The "cocon" of tourism ..................................................................................................... 220
Bypassing the state ......................................................................................................... 223
Conclusion: The delicacy of Khumbu Sherpa positioning ............................................... 226

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 229
Future directions ............................................................................................................. 235

Appendix A. Informed consent scripts ........................................................................... 237
Appendix B. Permission and affiliation letters ............................................................... 241
References ....................................................................................................................... 246
List of Figures

Figure 1. Painting of Beyul Khumbu ................................................................. xiii
Figure 2. Digital aerial image of Khumbu ............................................................ xiv
Figure 3. Map of Khumbu ................................................................................. xv
Figure 4. The village of Nauche ........................................................................ 10
Figure 5. The villages of Khunde and Khumjung .............................................. 11
Figure 6. The village of Thame ......................................................................... 12
Figure 7. Thakmeru. ......................................................................................... 34
Figure 8. Ang Norbu’s measuring the time during the monsoon ....................... 98
Figure 9. A Mani Rimdu performer turns his camera on the tourists during a comedic interlude ................................................................. 100
Figure 10. Image of a lu as painted at Phortse gonde ......................................... 158
Figure 11. Lu site ............................................................................................... 158
Figure 12. Torma commissioned for Khumbi yullha ......................................... 169
Figure 13. Khumbi yullha with his khor ............................................................ 171
Figure 14. Image of Khumbi yullha painted on rock above Nauche .................... 172
Notes about Translation and Transliteration

The research presented here includes concepts and terminology in Sherpa, Tibetan, Nepali, and Sanskrit. Sherpa language is primarily only a spoken language. When it is written, it is most often written in Tibetan script. Not surprisingly, many Sherpa and Tibetan words are identical. In what follows, I indicate Sherpa words as “Sh.”, even if they are identical in Tibetan. I indicate other languages as follows: “Tib.” for Tibetan, “Nep.” for Nepali, and “Sk.” for Sanskrit. For ease of reading and pronunciation, upon first usage I present foreign language terms in a simplified or common rendering, and, where necessary, provide the Wylie transliteration (Wyl.).

A note on quotations from interviews

Interviews were conducted in English, Sherpa, or Nepali, and often in all three. Quotations from interviews conducted in Sherpa or Nepali were transcribed by Sherpa research assistants, and translated into English by research assistants and myself. These are marked as [translated]. Quotations from interviews conducted in English appear as recorded. In some quotations, I have altered grammar in order to improve readability.

On field notes

Following Sherry Ortner (1978, 1989b), I use my field notes from research trips in 2009-2010 and 2013 as primary sources. I distinguish my otherwise unpublished field notes by placing them in italics and citing the year in which they were recorded. My field notes are altered only to correct grammar and spelling.
## Abbreviations and Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>beyul</em></td>
<td>(Sh.; Wyl. <em>sbas yul</em>) sacred hidden valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHHE</td>
<td>'high' caste hill Hindu elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Conservation International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNPWC</td>
<td>Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (Nepal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dumje</em></td>
<td>(Sh.) an annual festival celebrated in each of Khumbu’s main villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBC</td>
<td>Everest Base Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>gonde</em></td>
<td>(Sh.; Tib. <em>gompa</em>) monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guru Rinpoche</em></td>
<td>(Sh./Tib.; Sk. <em>Padmasambhava</em>; also Sh. <em>Urken Rinpoche</em>) Indian tantric master who traveled from India to Tibet at the request of the Tibetan King, 'taming' place-based deities in the Himalaya along the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCA</td>
<td>Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (aka Indigenous peoples’ and community conserved territories and areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Indigenous Conservation Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO 169</td>
<td>International Labour Organization’s Convention 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>International Union for Conservation of Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jomolungma</em></td>
<td>(Sh.; Nep. <em>Sagarmatha</em>) Mount Everest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCCA</td>
<td>Khumbu Community Conserved Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Khumbi yullha</em></td>
<td>(Sh.) Khumbu’s protector territory deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Khumbila</em></td>
<td>(Sh.) mountain home of <em>Khumbi yullha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lhapsang</em></td>
<td>(Sh.; Wyl. <em>lha bsang</em>) fumigation and prayer offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lhawa</em></td>
<td>(Sh. also <em>dhami</em>) village shamans or mediums with the ability to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communicate with place-based spirits and deities

*lu* (Sh.; Wyl, *klu*) water spirit

*Mani rimdu* (Sh.) an annual monastic festival celebrated at Thame and Tengboche monasteries

*Nyingma(pa)* (Tib.) sect of Tibetan Buddhism

*pechas* (Tib.) monastic texts

*puja* (Sh.) generic term for ritual

*Rinpoche* (Tib.) reincarnated head monk and teacher

*serkem* (Sh.; Wyl. *gser skyems*) a libation ritual offering of prayers and *chang* (rice beer)

*Shinggi nawa* (Sh.) localized forest management system in Khumbu Villages

*SNP* Sagarmatha National Park

*SPCC* Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee

*Tamsaling* Tamang territory and homeland based on understandings of the region as the territory of a local *yullha*

*TMI* The Mountain Institute

*tsen* (Sh.; Wyl. *bstan*) worldly spirit or deity

*UNDRIP* United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

*UNESCO* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

*WWF* Worldwide Fund for Nature

*yullha* (Sh.; Wyl. *yul lha*) territory deity

*zhidak* (Tib; Wyl. *gzhi bdag*) territory deity
Figure 1. Painting of Beyul Khumbu. Khumbila (with yeti climbing), with the villages of Khunde and Khumjung at its base in upper center of painting. Painting by Passang Sherpa
Figure 2. Digital aerial image of Khumbu. For orientation: This image views Khumbu from the south, with the Tibetan plateau in the upper quarter of the frame. The Dudh Kosi valley can be traced from the lower center of the image to its confluence with the Bhone Kosi (image center). Khunde and Khumjung are situated on the flat area of land above the fork, and Khumbila is the peak directly above it. Image courtesy of Dr. William Bowen, director, California Geographical Survey (http://geogdata.csun.edu)
Figure 3. Map of Khumbu
Introduction

The monks and nuns who stayed in the east country and their retinue
The decorations of the torma offering are to bring all success
All the protector gods of Beyul Khumbu
Tichen gyalpo [Khumbi yullha] and his retinue
The decorations of the torma offering are to bring all success
The other holy places and their gods, and their retinue
The decorations of the torma offering are to bring all success

Excerpt from Khumbu libation ritual (Sh. serkem), composed at Rimbuk Gompa, Tibet
(author unknown, n.d.)

The Himalayan Beyuls present a significant opportunity for biodiversity conservation. They are large in size, have natural boundaries with relatively pristine conditions, and topographic variations that support a large diversity of life. Beyuls are home to important wildlife species such as snow leopard and grey wolf, as well as socio-economically significant plant species. Most importantly, beyuls are home to people who have strong conservation traditions including aversion to hunting and killing, and respect for landscape features such as sacred sites. Since, [sic] beyuls provide a strong cultural basis for conserving ecosystems; they present opportunities to promote environmental conservation through strengthening of indigenous cultural values.

Excerpt from the proceedings of the Beyul Workshop, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2008
(The Mountain Institute 2008, 1)

Claims to sacred landscapes and sites are increasingly common in struggles over resource access and control, environmental conservation, development, and indigenous
rights. For example, in the early 1990s Native Hawaiians mobilized sacred understandings of Kanaloa, an island used by their ancestors for spiritual regeneration, in order to end U.S. military bombing exercises conducted on and near the island since World War II and reclaim use of the island. In 1993, a U.S. congressional act recognized the cultural significance of the island and an act by the State Legislature of Hawai‘i protected the island and Native Hawaiians’ use of it by forming the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve (Sponsel 2001, 2012). Similarly, starting in 2006, peasants and environmentalists in the Peruvian Andes mobilized constructions of sacred mountains, including Cerro Quilish and Sinakara, to protest mine development (de la Cadena 2010). And in northwest Yunnan Province, China, beginning in the early 2000s international and national NGOs, the Chinese state, and local and international actors alike began mobilizing the sacredness of the region’s mountain complex in Tibetan Buddhist traditions to support environmental conservation, tourism development, and agropastoral protection (Coggins 2014).

More generally, mobilizations of sacred landscapes are part of an increasingly common global narrative in which localized understandings of and practices associated with religious landscapes and sites are reconceptualized and reworked as environmental conservation mechanisms, to promote tourism development, or as the basis of indigenous rights claims to territory and resources, and, at times, all three of these are combined (i.e. UNESCO 2003, 2006; The Mountain Institute 2008). Indeed, such mobilizations of sacred landscapes are supported, and arguably encouraged, in international legal forums through the 1989 International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO 169) and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), both of which recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to maintenance and governance of territories held as sacred.

While geographers have generally approached religious landscapes by considering the ways in which religion shapes the environment—especially the built environment—or the ways in which lived religion is expressed through landscape, mobilizations and uses of sacred landscapes and sites in environmental conservation and development, and indigenous political, movements compel us to think of religious, or sacred, landscapes in yet another way—as “activist packages” connecting environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political agendas across scales (Tsing 2005). As local communities, often indigenous, work to make their concerns and grievances legible at a broader scale, one mechanism available to them is the narrative and language of sacred landscapes and sites. That is, by shaping localized, often indigenous, religious practices and associated human-environment relations into a globally recognizable form—a sacred landscape or site—local activists render their struggles legible to international legal forums and connect to similarly positioned peoples and social movements elsewhere. Simultaneously, as global environmental conservation and development efforts seek traction in specific places, the narrative and language of sacred landscapes and sites evokes a moral responsibility to conserve and protect the environment. In this way, narratives of sacred landscapes and sites connect people in diverse places and with divergent interests, while the strength of the narrative itself gains global recognition. By narrowly focusing on mobilizations of religious landscapes as activist packages, I am able to investigate the spatial, historical, and social factors shaping the ways in which notions of sacred landscapes are being remade and taking on new meanings in order to find traction in some
places and times. At the same time, this conceptualization allows me to consider the ways in which mobilizations of sacred landscapes may simplify what are otherwise complex religious landscapes and spaces.

Constructions of sacred landscapes and their mobilizations entwine and naturalize the relations between people, place, and nature in a ‘traditional’ time—what Tracey Heatherington (2010) refers to as the “global dreamtime of environmentalism.” Heatherington uses the Australian Aboriginal concept of Dreamtimes—the linking of people, place, and nature in an ancestral time—as a metaphor for global approaches to the environment and ecology. Heatherington insists that, like Aboriginal Dreamtimes, global approaches to the environment and ecology often rely on apolitical and timeless narratives of indigenous peoples’ relationships with the environment to rework contemporary relations to place. She explains,

... we can understand the dreamtimes of environmentalism as a supple dimension of cultural imagination which overlays regional geographies with stories evoking the presence of a universal, sacred, transcendent, timeless, and global Nature (23).

Yet, despite the timelessness of the Aboriginal Dreamtime, Heatherington also points out that the Dreamtime engages and reworks current political, economic, social, and physical contexts. ‘Songlines,’ which trace ancestors’ journeys, serve to connect the timeless Dreamtime and the contemporary world, and in doing so, remake the world. Thus, for Heatherington,

The dreamtime metaphor reminds us that the stories told by environmental advocates cannot be considered free of culture, history, class, religious sentiment, or real-world political contexts. Instead, we can recognize that globally oriented environmentalisms are largely rooted in Western, ethnocentric, Christian-influenced, modernist, liberal, and romantic inspirations (23).
I suggest broadening Heatherington’s concept of the global dreamtime of environmentalism to include the entwined dreamtime of indigenous politics. That is, like environmentalism and development, indigenous political movements often rely on a global imagination of timelessness and an apolitical set of narratives connecting human experience and place, which must be contextualized in the same ways we are compelled to do by Heatherington’s global dreamtime of environmentalism.

I propose that sacred landscapes—by which I refer to activist packages that are mobilized by international, national, and local actors and with a variety of claims—both embody and are forged in the environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political movements constitutive of a more broadly understood global dreamtime. As products of the global dreamtime, constructions of sacred landscapes generally rely on ahistorical and apolitical narratives of the essential connections between humans and nonhumans in place, while obscuring exactly those political, historical, and spatial conjunctures from which they emerge. Following Heatherington (2010), I find the metaphor of the global dreamtime useful because it illuminates the political and temporal complexity of claims associated with, yet obscured by, mobilizations of sacred landscapes forged in movement.

This dissertation explores efforts to mobilize understandings of Khumbu, Nepal as a beyul (Sh./Tib.; Wyl. sbas-yul), a sacred hidden valley in the Nyingma Buddhist tradition, to support environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights. In doing so, I show that mobilizations of the beyul concept in Khumbu become a node of interaction, negotiation, and contestation for claims to territory and authority from Khumbu’s Nyingma monastic institution, lay community, a mountain-dwelling territory deity, international and
local development actors, and the Nepali state. Through this case study I demonstrate the ways in which multiple spatialities and their associated claims of authority, including the spaces of a national park, a protector deity’s territory, a community conserved area, and a Buddhist sacred valley, shape the outcomes of programs aimed at supporting environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political movements.

**Case study and research site**

Khumbu, a 1,500 km² area nestled in the heart of the Himalaya and in the shadow of Mount Everest (Sh. Jomolungma; Nep. Sagarmatha), is considered by many residents to be a Sherwayul (Sh., Sherpa country). Rising from approximately 2,800 meters at its southern boundary to 8,848 meters on the summit of Mount Everest, the region is surrounded by snow-capped peaks and ridges, which indeed give one the impression of a hidden valley. Glaciers descending from Khumbu’s high mountains flow into rivers carving valleys separated by rugged ridges, draining toward a confluence at Khumbu’s southern tip, where the Bhote Kosi waters join the Dudh Kosi flowing south through Nepal’s middle hill regions, and ultimately into the lowland Terai and Indian plain. Beyond the high peaks crowning Khumbu’s northern border, including Mount Everest, Lhotse (8,414 meters), Lhotse Shar (8,393 meters), and Cho Oyo (8,153 meters), the Tibetan plateau is seasonally accessible from Khumbu through the Nangpa la pass.

The region comprises the northern portion of Nepal’s SoluKhumbu District, and was designated Sagarmatha National Park in 1976 and a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. A majority resident population of over 3,000 ethnic Sherpas resides alongside an ever-growing population of non-Sherpa national park employees, military and police officials,
school teachers, healthcare workers, and domestic workers. In addition, non-Sherpa Nepali and Tibetan high-altitude workers, porters, and leasing lodge managers are drawn to Khumbu’s lucrative trekking and mountaineering industry. The 2011 census recorded a total population of 112,946 Sherpas in Nepal. Of this, Khumbu Sherpas comprise approximately 2% of the total Sherpa population (Central Bureau of Statistics 2014), whereas the remaining 98% of the Sherpa population is spread throughout Nepal with concentrations south of Khumbu in Pharak and Solu, to the east and west of Khumbu, and in Kathmandu. Yet, on a global stage, Khumbu Sherpas are the most visible of any ethnic group in Nepal.

The name Sherpa, or Sherwa (Sh.), is derived from shar meaning east in Tibetan, and pa (Tib.) or wa (Sh.), meaning people. Thus, Sherpa, or Sherwa, are the people of eastern Tibet. It is generally assumed that Sherpa ancestors came to the SoluKhumbu region over 500 years ago, originating from the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, with an intermediary stay in central Tibet (Oppitz 1973; Ortner 1989b). Most of these migrants settled in the three adjoining areas of Khumbu, the area above approximately 3,000 meters; Solu, a lower and warmer region; and Pharak, the middle region, including the narrow gorge, between

---

1 The exact Sherpa population residing in Khumbu varies depending on how one defines residency. While most sources suggest a resident Sherpa population of 3,000-4,000, Stevens (2008) approximates a population of 5,400, which likely includes Sherpas residing in other parts of Nepal or abroad. The 2011 census recorded 2,572 Sherpas in Nauche and Khumjung Village Development Districts (Central Bureau of Statistics 2014); however, it is likely many Khumbu Sherpas are registered in Kathmandu.
2 I capitalize Sherpa when referring to the ethnic group, and use sherpa, not capitalized, to refer to the high-altitude job position sometimes held by ethnic Sherpas and more frequently held by individuals identifying with one of Nepal’s other ethnic groups.
3 A small number of informants state that Sherpa refers to the people of eastern Nepal, as opposed to the people of eastern Tibet. Indeed, the Nepali state has assigned peoples throughout Nepal to various ethnic categories for the purposes of legibility (Hangen 2007). For state purposes, Sherpa has come to designate some mountain people with Tibeto-Burmese origins (Ortner 1999).
Khumbu and Solu. Today, these three regions comprise the SoluKhumbu District. Early ethnographers in the region were quick to recognize that despite sharing clan structures and practices of intermarriage between the regions, “relatively real and objective” differences (Ortner 1989b, 6), including environmental differences shaping livelihood activities, make considering SoluKhumbu Sherpas as a homogenous ethnic group problematic (von Furer-Haimendorf 1964, 1984; Ortner 1978, 1989b); rather, scholars tend to focus on one of the three—Solu, Pharak, or Khumbu Sherpas—with limited comparison between the regions.

Just as there are “relatively real and objective” differences between Sherpas in Khumbu, Pharak, and Solu, similar differences as well as many more limit the usefulness of considering Sherpas throughout Nepal as a homogenous ethnic group. First, Khumbu’s location on one of the main trading routes to Tibet and its proximity to Mount Everest has shaped a different set of livelihoods for Khumbu Sherpas than those living in other parts of Nepal. As a result, Khumbu Sherpas are uniquely positioned vis-à-vis the Nepali state and the global arena. This unique positioning exposes the fault lines between global indigenous politics, identity, territory, and religion, which are otherwise often obscured by mobilizations of sacred landscapes.

Today, mountaineering and tourism dominate Khumbu’s economy. Increasing dramatically from 20 visitors in 1964 (Brower 1991) to over 33,000 annual visitors in 2013 (Sherpa 2013), much has been written exploring the growth of tourism and mountaineering as a driver of change in Khumbu. Indeed, the shift to a tourism and mountaineering-based economy perpetuated social stratification through unequal

---

4 While Sherpas remain mostly concentrated in the three regions of SoluKhumbu, Sherpas also migrated and settled along nearly the entirety of the Nepalese Himalayan expanse.
distribution of resources and opportunities among Khumbu Sherpas, especially between those living in villages located on the main trekking route toward Mount Everest and those located off the trekking route, which has led to unequal access to education, travel, and employment (Fisher 1990; Stevens 1993; Ortner 1999; Spoon 2012).

This stratification is easily observable in villages and along trails in Khumbu. Trekkers landing at the short take-off and landing (STOL) airstrip at Lukla are immediately met with two and three story lodges, pubs, teahouses, internet cafes, an imitation Starbucks coffee shop, and countless shops as they make their way north through the village to begin the two-day trek to Nauche. As this is the only trail leading from Lukla to Nauche—the gateway and market village in Khumbu—the large lodges, teahouses, and shops continue to line the majority of the trail all the way to the entrance of Sagarmatha National Park at Monju. After Monju, trekkers pass only a few teahouses as they make their way to the base of the Nauche Hill and begin a steep ascent to Nauche.

Arriving in Nauche—a bowl nearly 1,000 meters above the raging waters of the Bhote Kosi—can be overwhelming at first (Figure 4). Modest lodges and family homes are nestled among five and six story guesthouses, which are built into the village’s steep slopes. As trekkers make their way past the hydro-powered mani wheels (Sh., prayer wheels) and into the main commercial area of the village, they are met with shops selling every trekking provision one can imagine. Like Kathmandu, but unlike elsewhere in Nepal where trekkers

5 While flying into the airport at Shyangboche—just above Nauche, would allow trekkers to avoid the two-day hike to Nauche, the altitude at Shyangboche has proven problematic for unacclimatized tourists. As a result, Shyangboche is used mainly for cargo and, occasionally, in the event of a medical emergency. Some Khumbu residents and Nepali officials frequently use helicopter pads at Nauche and Shyangboche to travel by “heli” between Khumbu and Kathmandu, but the altitude still proves problematic for unacclimatized trekkers. The nearest road in Nepal is at Selleri, the district capital and a four-day trek from Nauche.
can only purchase high-quality (and low-quality) brand name knock-offs, genuine Patagonia, The North Face, and Mountain Hardwear clothing and gear are readily available in Nauche—as are imitations.\(^6\) Trekking gear shops aside, bakeries, coffee shops, internet cafes, and a pizzeria cater to trekkers’ desires during their mandatory two-night acclimatization stays in the autumn and spring trekking seasons. Past the commercial area, a *gonde* (Sh.; Tib. *gompa*, monastery), a Nepali health post, a lower school, and a police post sit at the upper edges of the village.

Continuing another 350 meters up the hill, past Nauche, and at the base of *Khumbila*—Khumbu Sherpa’s most sacred peak and the home of *Khumbi yullha*, Khumbu’s

\(^{6}\) Several Nauche merchants travel to the U.S. seasonally to purchase their stock.
Figure 5. The villages of Khunde (in the foreground) and Khumjung beyond, with *Ama Dablam* (Sh., mother’s jewel box) showing through the clouds. Photograph by the author.

territory deity—are the villages of Khumjung and Khunde (Figure 5). As the largest village in Khumbu and once the administrative seat of the region, the Khumjung School—constructed by Sir Edmund Hillary—is located in Khumjung. The school is the largest school in the region and serves those students who do not attend school in Kathmandu. Unlike Nauche, however, tourists generally visit Khumjung and Khunde during day trips from Nauche, rather than staying overnight.

Continuing along the trail to Everest Base Camp (EBC), guest houses and teahouses with expansive dining rooms, large windows to take in the mountain views, and guest rooms with en suite bathrooms and showers continue in abundance (though, of course, budget accommodations are also available). Should a trekker decide, however, to take a
trail heading northwest out of Nauche, instead of the northeastern EBC trail, a starkly different landscape awaits. Within a couple hours trek of Nauche are the villages of Thamo, Thame, and Thameteng—often collectively referred to as Thame Og. As opposed to the large guesthouses and teahouses lining the EBC trail, the lodges in these villages remain as relatively small additions to family homes, which reflects the drastically diminished demand for accommodations in this part of Khumbu. Moreover, unlike villages along the EBC route, two story single family homes, where the first floor is used for storing fodder and housing livestock and the upper floor houses the family in a single large room, are interspersed among agricultural fields to comprise the village landscape (Figure 6).

Figure 6. The village of Thame. Photograph by the author.
While the rise of tourism and mountaineering in Khumbu is a significant part of the story that follows—and certainly shapes the contrasting village landscape described above, I de-privilege the tourism lens and instead look at the interactions between the multiple spaces, territories, and authorities overlapping in Khumbu. By doing so, I illustrate a complex picture of political and social relations in Khumbu today. Indeed, Khumbu is more than a trekking and mountaineering destination. Khumbu is also a homeland, a landscape animated by finicky water spirits and protective mountain deities, a sacred hidden valley, and a conservation area. Each of these multiple territories overlap, bringing together Sherpas, spirits and deities, monastic authorities, development agents, the state, and tourists in a complex web of constantly fluctuating authority, claims to territory, and negotiation.

Anthropologist Donald Moore (2005) calls attention to the ways in which multiple spatialities and competing technologies of spatial discipline, sovereignty, and subjection may co-exist. Moore usefully conceptualizes the postcolonial landscape of Kaerezi, Zimbabwe as an entangled landscape where simultaneous claims of authority and territory from state officials, a local chief and headman, and a rainmaker produce multiple subjectivities. Moore warns that attempting to disentangle this landscape may only tighten its knot. Following Moore, I do not attempt to disentangle the multiple spatialities in Khumbu; rather, I trace the distinct trajectories leading to the production of Khumbu as a conservation and state space, capitalist space, an animate space, a religious space, and their entanglements. Further, this dissertation shows the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas negotiate the multiple claims of authority, territory, and subjectivity accompanying those
multiple spatialities, as well as how such multiple spatialities shape the outcome of processes of articulation.

The ‘perfect package’?: Research questions

My entry point into Khumbu’s entangled landscape is through two efforts in the past decade to mobilize understandings of Khumbu as a beyul. The first was an environmental conservation and development program aimed at promoting the importance of the beyul concept in conserving Khumbu’s environmental and cultural resources. The second drew on understandings of Khumbu as a beyul to propose designating the region an Indigenous Conservation Territory (ICT) or an Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Area (ICCA). I refer to these efforts collectively as the Beyul Campaign and will elaborate at length on these in Chapter 1.

Concomitant to the efforts to mobilize Beyul Khumbu, Nepal—having endured a decade long civil war and transition from a Hindu constitutional monarchy to a democratic republic in 2006—began the process of writing a new constitution and reorganizing the country into federalist states. While some political parties at the time of this research advocated for the creation of ethnic states, others supported multi-ethnic states. In this context, and drawing on the support of the global indigenous rights movement, marginalized ethnic groups throughout Nepal mobilized claims of indigeneity in order to secure territory and authority in Nepal’s permanent constitution. Some groups based claims for self-rule and autonomy in Nepal’s new constitution on understandings of religious landscapes (i.e. Tamang 2009). Observing this, Sharon, an American researcher that has been living in Nepal for nearly 30 years and who is currently working on questions
over ethnicity and federalism, stated to me that she saw sacred landscapes as simply another tool for ethnic groups to make claims in Nepal.\textsuperscript{7} From this perspective, the mobilization of sacred landscapes in Nepal is reduced to an act of strategic essentialism. Mario Blaser (2014), however, warns that this perspective silences the subaltern voice by denying the possibility of multiple ontologies, including a subaltern ontology in which the more-than-human have agency and authority. While I suggest that religious landscapes, and their mobilizations as sacred landscapes, are more complex than this, Sharon’s comment captures the ways claims of sacred landscapes are being mobilized and received in Nepal’s current political context.

To date, Nepal’s constitution writing process is still underway and highly contentious. Indeed, today, struggles for indigenous rights, territorial claims, and territoriality are at the forefront of Nepal’s political and social agenda. The specific form of federalism—the division of Nepal into states—to be codified in the permanent constitution and the rights to be granted to Nepal’s 59 officially-recognized indigenous groups continue to be among the most contentious issues hindering the constitution writing process. More recently, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly appears to be backing away from models of ethnically based, single-identity federalism to consider more inclusive and multi-ethnic, multi-identity models. While not an intended goal of the Beyul Campaign (L. N. Sherpa, personal communication, 2013), some informants suggested the beyul concept should be mobilized as it may prove to be a powerful tool in garnering support for increased control over access to and management of natural resources in light of ILO 169 (The Mountain Institute 2008), or even to support a claim for a Sherpa province within Nepal.

\textsuperscript{7} Informants’ names have been changed.
The perceived potential of the *beyul* concept to support environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights led one of my Sherpa key informants to refer to the *beyul* as the “perfect package for Khumbu Sherpas.” Yet, as the following chapters will demonstrate, despite the seemingly fertile ground for articulations between the concept of Khumbu as a sacred landscape and global discourses of environmental conservation, development, and indigenous politics, Khumbu Sherpa informants, outside of a small group of academic elites and community leaders, express little interest in or enthusiasm for the *beyul* concept, and arguably even greater apathy toward mobilizing the *beyul* concept to support environmental conservation, the designations of Khumbu as an ICT and ICCA, or as the basis for a territorial claim in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement.

Starting from this seeming contradiction, this research project asked: *Why are Khumbu Sherpas not mobilizing the beyul concept toward localized social and political concerns to any significant degree, thus articulating those concerns with broader environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights agendas?* I show that part of the explanation is that efforts to mobilize the *beyul* concept to support environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights necessarily belie the multiple spatialities both at work in and constitutive of Khumbu as a place. My previous research conducted among Khumbu Sherpas over the age of 50 in 2009-2010 revealed that while some older Sherpas adhere to the Nyingma Buddhist tradition in their conceptualization of the whole of the region as a *beyul*, other Sherpas hold to their beliefs that deities and spirits dwelling in the rivers, lakes, trees, rocks, and mountains shape everyday life. Many Sherpas seamlessly combine these beliefs, others hold them to be mutually exclusive, and still
others question the existence of the beyul altogether. Thus, a significant contribution of this research is to show that Khumbu Sherpas construct, and perform, their own territory, a Sherwayul, through relationships with a host of water, land, and mountain deities and spirits, while also negotiating constructions of Khumbu as a beyul, which I argue buttress a claim of territory and authority in Khumbu by the Nyingma Buddhist monastic institution.

For Sherpas and scholars alike, Khumbu’s status as a beyul is contested. While many people claim Khumbu is identified as a beyul in monastic texts (Sh. pechas), most also admit that they have not seen these texts. My own search for such texts has produced no such evidence. In an interview recorded for a documentary produced in 2007 and associated with one of the efforts to mobilize Beyul Khumbu, the Rinpoche (Sh., reincarnated head monk and teacher) of Tengboche monastery, whose authority over Nyingma belief and practice is nearly unchallenged in Khumbu, supported the claim that Khumbu was a beyul. Yet, the first time I met Tengboche Rinpoche in person, in 2009, he explained that Khumbu was a beyul at one time, but that the westernization of Khumbu Sherpas has threatened to destroy the beyul, or perhaps has done so already. Likewise, some informants claim that Khumbu was a beyul in the past, but too many people have come to Khumbu—both foreigners and non-Sherpa Nepalese—and, as a result, the beyul has been lost. Nonetheless, it is not the purpose of this research to take up the ontological question of Khumbu’s status

---

8 I will not elaborate on the findings of my previous research here (see Skog 2010).
9 Khumbu is mentioned in several parts of the Northern Treasure Cycle, including the gnas-yig (guidebook) and lam-yig (description text) of Beyul Khenbalung—the area directly east of Khumbu (Reinhard 1978; Diemberger 1997; Wangmo 2008); however, each of these texts describe Khumbu as a special place on the way to Khenbalung, not a beyul itself. A few participants claim the text is located in someone’s home, but cannot remember where; others claim the text burned in a fire that destroyed Tengboche gonde in 1989.
as a *beyul*; rather, I am concerned with attempts to mobilize understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul*.

Throughout this dissertation I show that Khumbu Sherpa’s indifference toward mobilizations of the *beyul* is the result of historically and politically contingent factors, which have created multiple overlapping spaces in Khumbu. These factors and spaces are entwined with Khumbu Sherpas’ sedimented everyday practices and performances of territory (Sletto 2009), thus calling attention to spatiality and spatial contingencies in attempts to articulate the *beyul* concept in Khumbu. As opposed to practices associated with the *beyul*, informants demonstrated a stronger affiliation to a local mountain deity, *Khumbi yullha*, in constructing both a territorial consciousness and Khumbu Sherpa identity. Indeed, for many Khumbu Sherpas understandings of Khumbu as a spiritual place and as a Sherpa territory—a *Sherwayul*—are more closely tied to everyday practices and rituals worshipping and appeasing *Khumbi yullha*, rather than the *beyul*.

The suggestion that *Khumbi yullha*, as opposed to the *beyul*, may be more significant in Khumbu Sherpas’ everyday practices, performances of territory, and material and ideological spaces illuminates a further point of inquiry: *Why are Khumbu Sherpas not articulating understandings of Khumbu as a Sherpa territory based on their belief in Khumbi yullha with global environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political agendas?* Indeed, Nepal’s Tamang community has constructed a robust and well-known claim to self-governance and statehood based on symbolic formations of territory protected by a local *yullha* (Tamang 2009). I demonstrate that, historically, Khumbu’s remote location and the presence of Mount Everest have worked together to buffer Khumbu Sherpas from the state intrusion and exploitation shaping much of Nepal’s current
indigenous peoples’ struggles in other parts of the country. Further, I show how the rise of
mountaineering and tourism in Khumbu has created significant and unique economic
growth and accumulation opportunities for some Khumbu Sherpas. Propelled by
international sponsors, educational and employment opportunities outside of Nepal, and a
global imaginary of ‘the S/sherpa,’ this exceptional situation positions many Khumbu
Sherpas globally, which allow Sherpas to move between local and global social, political,
and economic networks, while jumping over the scale of the state. Thus, Khumbu Sherpas
are largely removed from and disinterested in indigenous political agendas in Nepal.

In sum, while many Khumbu Sherpas accept the narrative of Beyul Khumbu, they
remain indifferent toward taking up the beyul concept in dialogue with environmental
conservation, development, and indigenous political movements to any significant degree.
This curious disconnect between constructions of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha's territory, the
beyul concept, and the global dreamtime led to the following questions:

1. In what ways does the production and maintenance of Sherpas’ relationships with
Khumbi yullha construct and reproduce Khumbu as a religious landscape?
2. How do the multiple spatialities at work in Khumbu shape the outcome of
interventions mobilizing understandings of Khumbu as a sacred landscape?
3. Why do Khumbu Sherpas demonstrate a lack of enthusiasm for articulating either
the beyul concept or Sherpas’ relationships with Khumbi yullha with global
environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political discourses?

Positionings

My research brings together debates around religion and the sacred, territory and
landscape, and indigeneity—all highly contested terms. More importantly, these terms
proved even more problematic as my research assistants and I sought suitable equivalents
in Sherpa and Nepali. Such negotiations highlighted the tension at the heart of this
research: as highly-educated global elites participate in struggles for the rights of those
people and places who are marginalized by dominant knowledge systems and exploited by a capitalist mode of production, can those living such struggles recognize themselves in these movements? That is, what happens as global environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political discourses seek traction in localized everyday practices? In this dissertation, I take up a poststructural and postcolonial position to explore three main themes driving this research: articulation, spatiality, and the sacred and religion. Cross-cutting these themes, I take up secondary themes including territory, landscape, the relation between global and local, and indigeneity to situate my arguments and highlight key considerations.

I draw inspiration from Gillian Hart’s (2004) “critical ethnography,” which brings attention to spatiality and articulation. For Stuart Hall, a theory of articulation “is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a certain discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (Hall 1996, 141). While Hall, in a reworking of Antonio Gramsci, and many since him have alerted us to the historical and political contingencies and conjunctures of articulation (Gramsci 1972; Hall 1996; Li 2000; Clifford 2001; Moore 2005; Yeh 2007), I focus on spatiality. In this dissertation, I call attention to spatiality as notions of sacred landscapes seek traction. That is, in addition to articulations between global discourses and local agendas being historically and socially contingent (Hall 1996; Li 2000; Moore 2005; Yeh 2007), they are both productive of space and spatially contingent. In this context, attention to spatiality requires us to examine the production of space in processes of articulation, as well as the
ways in which spatial situation, processes, and practices shape articulation. Thus, the first two themes, spatiality and articulation, are woven together throughout this dissertation.

Mobilizations of sacred landscapes are an ideal lens through which to investigate spatiality and articulations, but they also carry with them a necessary attention to religion. This attention to religion is not secondary or inconsequential to questions of spatiality and articulation; rather, the cultural politics and spatiality of religion are deeply entwined with spatial processes of articulation. In what follows, I show that the collective efforts of the Beyul Campaign work to essentialize connections between Khumbu Sherpas, the Khumbu environment, and a traditional, ancestral, and sacred time. In doing so efforts to mobilize Beyul Khumbu draw on the role of sacred landscapes in the global dreamtime to articulate local conservation and development agendas with global environmental conservation movements.

Yet, such mobilizations obscure the cultural politics of religion. By cultural politics of religion, I mean the struggles between Khumbu lay and monastic communities over the authority to direct the symbolic representations and material practices constitutive of Sherpa lifeworlds, which, I demonstrate, play out spatially in Khumbu. I conceptualize Sherpa religion as the complex of Sherpa practices aimed at maintaining relations with place-based deities and spirits, as well as monastic practices and rituals associated with Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist traditions. I recognize that religion has been critiqued as an etic category of classification that, at times, encourages problematic comparisons and generalizations across diverse epistemologies (Asad 1993; McCutcheon 2003; Masuzawa 2005; Mandair 2009). I use it here, however, both in the sense of institutionalized world religions—in this case monastic Buddhism—and in the sense evoked by Meredith
McGuire’s (2008) lived religion, in which religion is conceptualized “at the individual level, as an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy—even contradictory—amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important” (4). Holding both these uses of the term religion simultaneously foreshadows the cultural political struggles of negotiating lived beliefs and practices with institutionalized monastic authority.

My work does not aim to refute the significance of Khumbu as a spiritual and powerful place or challenge claims of self-rule, or Khumbu’s designation as an ICA or ICCT. Indeed, for many Khumbu Sherpas, Khumbu residents, and foreigners, Khumbu is a deeply religious and powerful place. Further, significant research has demonstrated the ecological importance of the region and the significance of Sherpa practices, beliefs, and traditions in supporting the unique biodiversity of the region (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993; Byers 2005; Spoon 2011). Nor does this work claim a stand on the positions of Nepal’s constitution-making process. Rather, this research explores the reasons why such claims and positions have not been taken up within the Khumbu Sherpa community. Stuart Hall’s attention to articulation is particularly useful here in that, for Hall, articulation draws attention away from questions surrounding authenticity or invention and focuses instead on the ways in which, in this case, mobilizations of sacred landscapes may be understood as positionings (Yeh and Bryan 2015).

More broadly, this research suggests that mobilizations of sacred landscapes are more complex—embroiled in cultural and political struggles—than activists may expect. Thus, this work, following a long tradition of similar discussions, mainly in political ecology (i.e. Neumann 1992), is not an assessment or evaluation of the impact of the Beyul
Campaign, or similar projects; rather this work is intended to illuminate the dynamics shaping the outcomes of such projects, and thus contributes to broader academic and policy-oriented conversations about the politics and practices of territory, natural resource management and rights-based development, and is intended to be of use to policy planners and program designers. That is, the contexts in which planners and development actors work to articulate notions of sacred landscapes are culturally, politically, and spatially complex, and must be given greater attention.

**Project background and methodology**

I conducted the primary research for this dissertation from March 2013 through October 2013 in Khumbu and Kathmandu. This project, however, extends from research I began in 2009 in Khumbu. At the time, I was interested in exactly how older Khumbu Sherpas incorporated the *beyul* concept into their material and symbolic relations with the Khumbu environment. What I had not anticipated, but quickly came to realize, was just how politicized and contested the *beyul* concept was in Khumbu, and how indifferent many Khumbu Sherpas appeared toward mobilizations of the concept. Further, in time, I came to see the subtle boundaries informants drew between monastic practices and practices oriented toward place-based deities and spirits—relations I had previously understood as hierarchical and cohesive. Focusing on these moments of tension and the ruptures in an otherwise cohesive narrative of Sherpa religiosity began to reveal the cultural politics of Khumbu Sherpa religion. It is from these points of rupture that I conceived the project at hand.
In total, this research is based on 58 semi-structured interviews. Of these, I interviewed six NGO program managers, directors, or associates involved in environmental conservation and/or indigenous politics in Nepal. These included two Americans, one Indian, and three Nepalese. These interviews focused on establishing the contours of the indigenous rights movement in Nepal and/or the organization’s approach to environmental conservation in Nepal and the Himalaya more broadly. More specifically, I focused interviews on the role of sacred landscapes, territory, and religion in these movements.

I conducted 52 interviews with Khumbu Sherpas in both Khumbu and Kathmandu.\textsuperscript{10} While I conducted the majority of interviews in Nauche and Thame/Thameteng—twin villages half a day’s hike off the main trekking route, I also conducted interviews in Thamo, Khumjung, Khunde, Pangboche, and Phortse. I selected interview participants based on location, gender, age, and monastic affiliation in order to best approximate a range of perspectives and experiences. That is, the participant base for this research is not a random sample; rather, it is designed to trace the contours of the heterogeneous field of beliefs and everyday practices informing Khumbu Sherpa religiosity. Further, the informant base was designed to focus on the perspectives of non-expert Sherpas—that is, Sherpas who are not ‘experts’ on religion and spirituality such as shamans, lamas, monks, and academic elites. Like Sherry Ortner’s (1989b) experience conducting fieldwork exploring Sherpa religion, I too found that many informants referred me to an expert on religion, environmental, or political issues out of discomfort in their own knowledge or experiences with these issues;

\textsuperscript{10} A much-needed upgrade to the micro hydro-electric dam at Thamo in Khumbu required that the electricity be shut off in my two main research sites in Khumbu for four months of the seven that I was in Nepal during 2013. As a result, many Khumbu Sherpas retreated to Kathmandu for the summer months—an otherwise ideal time to conduct research as there are few tourists and many Sherpa residents stay close to home for the numerous summer festivals.
however, I found the majority of these informants were assuaged when I explained that, in fact, I already knew the experts’ opinions, and now I was interested in hearing their opinions.

In addition to interviews in Kathmandu and Khumbu, I was both an observer and participant in several community rituals and celebrations throughout my time in Khumbu. Some rituals and celebrations I attended and participated in were clearly oriented toward maintaining spiritual relationships with Khumbu’s numerous deities and spirits, such as Dumje in Nauche, Mani Rimdu in Thame and in Tengboche, as well as numerous household pujas (Sh. generic term for ritual). Other events were more oriented toward maintaining community relations, such as the summer Phangne celebration and community picnic with annual bathing in the early summer runoff from Khumbila—Khumbu’s central and most sacred mountain. I recorded my observations and experiences at these events and rituals as field notes. In addition, my field notes included observations of everyday occurrences, informal yet illuminating discussions with friends and visitors often while sitting in the kitchen with tea, chang (rice beer), or whiskey, and a plate of boiled potatoes or rigi khor (Sh. ‘potato circle’ or potato pancake). Following Ortner (1999), I analyzed my field notes as ‘fixed texts,’ like interview transcripts. When used throughout this dissertation I only alter the notes to correct grammar, but not content.

Finally, my research relies on a variety of textual sources outside of academic literature, including ‘gray literature,’ websites, newspaper articles, planning documents, and environmental conservation and development program publications. I use these documents to trace the dominant discourses shaping relationships between religion and the environment at work in global discourses of environmental conservation and
development, as well as within Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. I use *pecha* to illuminate the role of *Khumbi yullha* and the *beyul* in Sherpa religion.

*Some challenges*

I originally designed this project to include a significantly larger sample of informants in more villages throughout Khumbu, which would have allowed me to ask and consider a different set of questions; however, the long-feared effects of research subject ‘burnout’ among Khumbu Sherpas is readily apparent, and with good cause. The effects of this burnout materialize in a variety of ways. Among these is what I have come to refer to as the ‘canned’ interview in which the informant tells me of her or his experience as a shaman, porter, *sidar* (Sh. expedition or trekking group leader), lodge owner, or livestock herder in Khumbu without engaging the interview questions—seemingly assuming that, like other researchers, this is what I’ve come to ask about. Others simply refuse to participate in an interview through passive means (i.e. agreeing to an interview, but not being available or locatable at the agreed upon time), or requesting payment for an interview ranging from $5 US to $100 US.\(^{11}\) Other informants openly complained that foreigners come to conduct research and never return, or directly point out that they will likely gain nothing from helping me. This is not to say that resistance to research was uniform, only to illuminate the ways in which several generations of research in Khumbu and among Khumbu Sherpas are now shaping, and for the most part, limiting research.

\(^{11}\) Informants were always quite surprised when I told them I was making a donation, out of my own funds, to the American Himalayan Foundation—a trusted organization among many Khumbu Sherpas—that was earmarked for schools in each of Khumbu’s villages. It has become commonplace to pay informants for interviews in Khumbu, thus creating an expectation of payment and difficulty for researchers with limited funds. I did not pay any informants for their interviews or time.
design in the region. Nonetheless, a smaller informant pool also allowed for more in-depth interviews.

**Structure of the dissertation**

Chapter 1 introduces the *beyul* concept as well as the ways in which Beyul Khumbu has been mobilized in recent years. Throughout this dissertation, I will show that Beyul Khumbu is a node at which multiple actors, and their associated claims of authority and territory come together. Thus, mobilizations of the *beyul* concept provide an entry point into my investigation of the ways in which multiple spatialities in Khumbu shape the outcomes of development interventions. The remainder of the chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the case study of Khumbu Sherpas and positions this research in relation to contemporary debates and discussions about religious landscapes, place and space, and the articulation of global movements and agendas in specific places. I then build a conceptual framework drawing on Stuart Hall’s (1996) theory of articulation, Henri Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) theory of the production of space, and Donald Moore’s (2005) attention to spatiality and “entangled landscapes.” Through this framework I present one of my key arguments and contributions from this research: *Space plays a key role in shaping, enabling, or disabling the processes of articulation that ground global movements in local contexts.*

In Chapter 2, I turn to my case study of attempts to mobilize Khumbu as a *beyul* to support environmental conservation goals and an indigenous political agenda. Chapter 2 shows that the large majority of research on Sherpas in Khumbu has inadvertently worked to fix Sherpas in both space and time by constructing a narrative of a traditional ethnically
Tibetan Buddhist Sherpa, and by discounting the larger national and transnational networks shaping Sherpa lifeways and the spaces informing those lifeways. I acknowledge that researchers have long been alert to the ways in which Sherpas have been engaged in regional and trans-Himalayan trade networks; nonetheless, recent mobilizations of Khumbu as a sacred landscape rely on and contribute to a similar effect of spatial fixing by attaching a set of beliefs about the landscape to a set of people in a specific place without attention to the ways in which those beliefs and practices are contested.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the production of Khumbu as a state space, the ways in which the Nepali state has claimed authority in Khumbu, and historical, political, and spatial conjunctures shaping Khumbu Sherpas’ positionings vis-à-vis the state and global communities. Despite, Khumbu’s designation as a national park, I show that the state’s claim to authority in Khumbu has always been weak. Further, this chapter considers the ways in which tourism and mountaineering in Khumbu has produced a highly politicized capitalist space in the form of a national park.

Chapters 4 and 5 engage with the production of sacred space and the cultural politics of religion in Khumbu by exploring the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas construct Khumbu as a Sherpa territory based on everyday practices associated with Khumbi yullha—a local mountain deity. In Chapter 5, I argue for the importance of examining the cultural politics of religion among Khumbu Sherpas. To do this, I explore the myriad ways in which Western academics have attempted to make sense of the complex set of traditions, practices, and beliefs intermingling and morphing as religion in the Himalaya. I then lay out the ways in which understandings of Khumbu as a beyul act as a territorial claim by both the Nyingma Buddhist monastic community and the development community. In addition
to presenting the key argument of my dissertation, this chapter explores current rethinkings of territory in order to tie together Sherpas’ everyday territory-making practices and constructions of a Sherpa territory.

Chapters 4 and 5, however, leave us with the curious question of why global indigenous political movements are not finding traction in Khumbu Sherpas’ understandings of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha’s territory. In Chapter 6, ompal show that the production of Khumbu as a capitalist and state space has buffered Khumbu Sherpas from ethnic politics in Nepal. Moreover, Sherpas’ relationships with foreign mountaineers and other tourists, themselves largely the result of Khumbu’s proximity to Mount Everest, have led to global affiliations that allow Sherpas to jump the state scale, thus rendering national indigenous politics moot. In the end, these arguments converge to highlight the ways in which multiple spatialities converge and are entwined with historical and political contingencies and conjunctures, to shape the outcome of Khumbu Sherpas’ uptake of Beyul Khumbu.
Chapter 1: Producing sacred landscapes

Introduction

Nyingma Buddhist texts foretell a time “when the world becomes so corrupt that continuing one’s spiritual practice becomes impossible and our planet [will be] on the verge of destruction” (Sherpa 2008, 7). For Nyingma Buddhists, followers of the oldest Tibetan Buddhist sect, *Guru Rinpoche* (Tib.; Sk. *Padmasambhava*), a revered Indian Buddhist teacher, hid valley refuges, *beyul*, throughout the Himalaya where Nyingmapa practitioners and Nyingma traditions would be protected in times of turmoil and need. Some assert, more specifically, that *beyul* offer protection to the divine Tibetan royal lineage when it is threatened and that, following the destruction of the rest of the world, society will be remade as an idealized Tibetan society from those protected in the *beyul* (Childs 1999; Obadia 2008). Nyingma texts explain that in times of invasion, threat, and need a treasure revealer (Tib. *terton*; Wyl. *gter-ston*), often thought to be a reincarnation of one of *Guru Rinpoche’s* disciples, will discover a guidebook and key (Tib. *lamyig*; Wyl. *lampa-yig*), which will lead followers into a *beyul*. Nyingmapas often identify such guidebooks as hidden treasures (Tib. *terma*; Wyl. *gterma*), sediments of ancient knowledge, left to advance Nyingma traditions in contemporary times (Sherpa 2008).

Some believe *Guru Rinpoche* protected 108 *beyul* throughout the Himalaya. While many of these remain hidden, or unrevealed, monastic scholars and academics have identified 20-22 opened, or revealed, *beyul*, including Pemako, Kyimolung, Namgo Dakam, Dremochung, and Kongpo in the eastern Himalaya; and Yolmo Kangra, Dolpo, Nubri,

The Buddhist geography of Beyul Khumbu is situated in a complex and multi-layered beyul tradition. Those Khumbu Sherpa informants most knowledgeable about beyul often describe a beyul as having three levels: an outer, inner, and secret level. Descriptions usually suggest the outer beyul to be a place of safety, where all the needs of the residents are met. The inner beyul is believed to have a powerful sacred element to it in which the benefits of the Buddhist practice are magnified. Finally, the esoteric, secret beyul is thought to contain wisdom and power accessible only to initiated practitioners. The three levels of the beyul evoke a common Buddhist theme also associated with the three levels of a mandala (Tib.), a map of the Buddhist cosmos at its outer level and a soteriological tool in meditation at its inner and secret levels (Walcott 2006). For many Nyingma monastics, the sanctity and power of a beyul exponentially increases the benefits of meditative practices. This metaphor is enhanced by a synergy between Beyul Khumbu and the neighboring beyul, Beyul Khenbalung. Khumbu’s Tengboche Rinpoche Zangbu situates Beyul Khenbalung at the center of a circle of beyul forming a mandala (2000), thereby incorporating Khumbu’s Buddhist geomancy into a larger Buddhist cosmology.

Completing a triad between the beyul and the mandala is the mind, also often referred to in Buddhist practice as containing three levels. While there is significant room for investigations on the inner and secret levels of the beyul, this dissertation is concerned only with the outer, physical level of the beyul—the territory of the beyul—as this is the
understanding of the *beyul* concept that some Khumbu Sherpa community leaders and academics are working to articulate with global environmental conservation, specifically community-based management, development, and indigenous political movements.

In Khumbu, some informants point to the ways in which the *beyul* both protects and provides for the needs of its Sherpa residents. When I asked Ang Norbu, a former monk, to tell me about the *beyul*, he explained,

**AN** The *beyul* was hidden by *Guru Rinpoche*. There are no Maoists and no harm from Maoists in the *beyul* [a reference to Nepal’s recent civil war] . . . Inside the *beyul* there is no fighting, outside there is fighting. Inside the *beyul* there is no hunger. In the *beyul*, only potatoes grow, but everything is provided. Inside the *beyul*, there are no communicable diseases.

Similarly, Aau Gyalbu, a Nauche elder and community leader, stated,

**AG** Thirteen hundred years ago *Guru Rinpoche* made *beyul* in Bhutan, Sikkim, Khenbalung, Khumbu, Rolwaling, and many other mountain regions. There are many natural products available in the *beyul*. Outside the *beyul*, all the people will be destroyed, but the people in the *beyul* will be safe. All the people will be remade in the *beyul* [the world will repopulate from those within the *beyul*]. There has been conflict throughout the rest of Nepal, but not in the *beyul*.

[translated]

Kami Futi, a young Sherpa woman with close social ties to Khumbu’s Nyingma monastic community, describes the *beyul* as follows,

**KF** The *beyul* is a sacred place and there are many rituals here. People never sin here. In the *beyul* there is no flooding and no hunger. Everything is here inside the *beyul* because it all comes from Kathmandu and China. In the *beyul* there are many forests, no dangerous communicable diseases, no war, no shooting. The *beyul* brings people here to see the *himal* [mountains].

[translated]

As in these descriptions, those informants familiar with the *beyul* concept generally describe it in the same way: within a *beyul*, there is no hunger, fighting, killing, flooding, or communicable diseases. Moreover, within a *beyul*, all residents’ needs are met and they are
protected from outside violence and threats. Like Ang Norbu and Kami Futi, informants frequently state that even though “only potatoes grow in Khumbu” (a generalization about the limits of agriculture at high altitudes), residents have an abundance of food and commercially produced domestic and imported goods.

Interestingly, these comments also point to the ways in which some Khumbu Sherpas are remaking understandings of the *beyul* and contextualizing their understanding of Khumbu as a *beyul* in contemporary social and political contexts. Kami Futi’s comment that all one’s needs are met in the *beyul* because goods arrive from Kathmandu and China is certainly not what Nyingma monastic texts intended. Likewise, understandings of protection from the Maoist army, which did not pose a threat to monastic Buddhist practice, also demonstrate how the *beyul* concept is being remade. Such remakings begin to illuminate the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas negotiate and navigate Khumbu’s entangled social, political, and religious spaces.

Informants point to specific sacred places and sites in the Khumbu landscape as evidence of its sanctity as a *beyul*. For some, Guru Rinpoche’s footprints left in rocks and caves are proof of his visits and blessings upon the *beyul*. Some informants point to a large, conspicuous rock at the eastern border of the region, *Thakmeru* (Sh., red rock) that marks the gate to Beyul Khenbalung (Figure 7). Older informants believe that one of the keys to

---

12 The quotations included here are not meant to be representative of commonly held knowledge about the *beyul* concept; rather, they are meant to present a more thorough definition of the *beyul* concept through Khumbu Sherpas’ own voices. As will be discussed later in this chapter, *beyul* knowledge is arguably “fading” with each generation (Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2008; Spoon 2011). I have demonstrated elsewhere that *beyul* knowledge is uneven (also see Spoon 2008) and appears to be greater among Sherpas who are socially proximate to Khumbu’s monastic community (Skog 2010).
Beyul Khenbalung, likely a text describing how to enter the protective neighboring beyul, is hidden in or beneath the rock. Older Khumbu Sherpas account for the sanctity of this rock through a common story:

*We know that something important is hidden at Thakmeru because it was revealed to a young boy from Khumjung who visited there. In the springtime, the boy went to the red rock to look after his zopkio [yak-cow crossbreed]. As he rested there, all the rocks turned into a big gonde with a lama, and a field of spinach and a large dog appeared. The boy hung his slingshot on the rock to remember the place. He returned the next day, but the gonde, field, and dog were gone; only his slingshot remained. This means that something is hidden there.*

Figure 7. *Thakmeru* marks the western gate to Beyul Khenbalung. Photograph by the author.
Yet, like *beyul* knowledge, knowledge about *Thakmeru* is uneven among Khumbu Sherpas. Older Khumbu Sherpas, like Dorje Tenzing, who learned about the *beyul* concept from his grandfather, whose grandfather—Dorje Tenzing’s great great grandfather—was a lama, demonstrate more knowledge about *Thakmeru* than younger Khumbu Sherpas. As I sat with Dorje Tenzing discussing the *beyul* concept in the dining room of his lodge in Nauche, he explained,

**DT**  Guru Rinpoche hid the beyul. In the future, this will be a good place, where there is no war. The places in Khumbu are a map to *beyul*. Shyangboche is like the hanging stomach of a goat. Above there, Khumjung and Khunde are a horse. Beyond the horse, Phortse looks like a place where someone would lay back and Dingboche looks like a pig’s body. In the future these features will be followed to the *beyul* [Beyul Khenbalung]. The key to the *beyul* [Khenbalung] is hidden in *Thakmaru*. In the future, the *beyul* will become available after a bad situation. Now is not the time for the key. The seven suns will come and all the things will melt. The temple at Dorje Din at Bodh Gaya [India] will hang in the air and everything else will burn. When this happens, man can follow the landscape features like a map to the key to the beyul where the seeds of man are kept.

In contrast, the following demonstrates the unevenness of this knowledge:

*KD and I hiked four days from Thameteng, past the villages of Dingboche and Chikhung, and half way to Island Peak base camp in search of Thakmeru. As lodge owners and passers by along the trail inquired about our destination, my research assistant selectively answered either Thakmeru or Chikhung—clearly distinguishing between those elders who would know of Thakmeru from those younger Sherpas who would not, or perhaps may find our journey frivolous. We inquired in the last lodge we reached in Chikhung about the whereabouts of the rock, and were told to follow the ridge toward Island Peak then descend into an open space. From there we were told we couldn’t miss it. Indeed, after several more hours of hiking, we could see in the distance a large erratic rock square in the center of a massive dried lakebed. As we approached, a group of foreign climbers returning from Island Peak was packing up their lunch after taking a break at the rock. We spoke briefly with their guide and inquired if he knew about the significance of the rock; however, he laughed and said he only knew it as a resting spot between base camp and Chikhung. The aged weiwei instant noodle wrappers, Fanta bottles, cigarette butts strewn about, and the make-shift benches constructed out of pieces of wood and rocks indicated that this was not the only group to use the rock as a resting place. (Field notes 2010)*
Like the trekking guide, some informants knew little about *Thakmeru* or had only heard of its existence, while others, like Dorje Tenzing were far more knowledgeable.

In the past decade, despite the unevenness of knowledge about the *beyul* concept, two distinct, but related initiatives have worked to mobilize Khumbu’s religious landscapes, including both understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul* and Khumbu Sherpas’ relationships with a local territory deity, to support environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights efforts. The first is a program initiated by The Mountain Institute—a North American non-profit institute operating in Nepal to promote sustainable livelihood development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. The second is an effort to recognize Khumbu as an Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Area. Throughout this dissertation I refer to these programs collectively as The Beyul Campaign.

*The Beyul Campaign: Building Livelihoods Along Beyul Trails*

In 2008, I was first introduced to understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul* through a short documentary developed by Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa and produced by The Mountain Institute (TMI) as part of their *Building Livelihoods Along Beyul Trails* program. Interspersed among images of Khumbu’s snow-capped peaks and ridges, wildlife, and sacred sites—such as *gondes, mani* wheels, and prayer flags, the documentary featured interviews with Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, the *Rinpoche* at Tengboche Monastery—who has long been concerned about the growing impact of tourism on Sherpa culture and the Khumbu environment, Jeremy Spoon—a TMI program associate at the time and researcher
in Khumbu, and several Khumbu Sherpas, representing a cross-section of social standings in Khumbu, discussing their understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul* and the significance of the *beyul* in promoting environmentally-friendly behaviors supporting environmental conservation in the region.\(^{13}\) The film describes the *beyul* as an umbrella that includes all of Khumbu's numerous small-scale sacred sites, such as mountain deity abodes and sacred springs, within it. In the film, Lhakpa Norbu advocated for greater attention to and awareness of Khumbu as a *beyul*. To emphasize the importance of the *beyul* concept to conservation in Khumbu, Lhakpa Norbu stated,

\[\ldots\text{we have to capitalize on peoples’ culture, peoples’ belief systems, and all those human side of things in order to get stronger support from the local people. Because without the support of the people who live inside the national park and around the national park the enforcement of rules and regulations alone is not sufficient to protect all the species and valuable endangered species that we have.} (T. R. Sherpa 2007)\]

As the film continued, the interviews turned to concerns over the loss of *beyul* knowledge among Khumbu Sherpas, with several interviewees explaining that they know little about the *beyul* concept, or that they've never heard of it (T. R. Sherpa 2007).

Indeed, some Khumbu Sherpas along with resident monks and nuns in Khumbu’s monastic community and a handful of interested foreign academics believe Khumbu to be a *beyul*. Yet, older generations of Sherpas and foreign academics have observed and demonstrated a loss of knowledge about Sherpa cultural traditions and specifically, the *beyul* concept, among Sherpas under the age of 50 (Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2007; Spoon and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\text{ Tengboche Rinpoche supported the founding of the Sacred Lands Eco-Center at Tengboche, where visitors could learn about connections between Buddhism and ecology, the effects of tourism on Khumbu’s culture and environment, and practices to help reduce waste and environmental impacts.}\]
Sherpa 2008; Spoon 2011). Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa (2003) insists that the weakening and loss of the beyul concept is the result of external and internal factors, including “globalization, nationalization, education, cultural assimilation, domination, and tourism” (103). He claims, “national and regional laws have replaced locally grown customary regulations governing forest and wildlife conservation” (103).

For Lhakpa Norbu, however, The Mountain Institute project was more than an NGO development program; it was a project deeply connected to his understandings of Khumbu as his homeland. Lhakpa Norbu grew up in Thameteng, a village located a half day's hike to the northwest of Nauche and off the main trekking route to Everest Base Camp. Despite recently building a new home in the nearby village of Thamo with the cosmopolitan conveniences of internet, electricity, and an in-house Western-style flush toilet, Lhakpa Norbu’s family home in Thame is lauded as one of only a few traditional Sherpa homes left in Khumbu. Lhakpa Norbu attended primary and secondary school at the schools established by Sir Edmund Hillary before receiving a scholarship to attend Lincoln University in New Zealand, as well as a Fulbright student grant to study in the United States.

Lhakpa Norbu returned to Nepal to serve as Park Warden at Rara Lake and then Sagarmatha National Parks in the 1980s. He was the second Khumbu Sherpa to hold the post of warden in Sagarmatha National Park. Lhakpa Norbu was instrumental in the planning of Makalu-Barun National Park and the establishment of the Qomolangma Conservation Program in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The first Khumbu Sherpa to do so, Lhakpa Norbu earned a Ph.D. in Forest Resources from the University of Washington in
1999 and was a Visiting Fulbright Fellow at Yale University in 2009. When I first met Lhakpa Norbu in Nepal in 2009, he was serving as a Senior Fellow at The Mountain Institute and had just started a new non-profit mountain advocacy group, Mountain Spirit.

Beginning in the early 2000s, Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa began writing about and discussing the ways in which Beyul Khumbu serves as an environmental conservation mechanism that regulates Khumbu Sherpas’ behaviors toward the environment and each other (2003, 2005). In 2003 and 2005 Lhakpa Norbu presented his ideas at a set of international workshops hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These workshops brought together environmental conservation and indigenous rights activists, like Lhakpa Norbu, to explore the potential significance of sacred sites and landscapes in meeting their various environmental management and conservation, sustainable development, and indigenous rights goals. The goal of the UNESCO workshops was to document and share the ways in which sacred values have preserved and conserved sacred sites and landscapes as ‘natural’ environments, and to build a body of evidence to support the conservation of such religious values, especially among indigenous peoples. The 2005 symposium in Tokyo resulted in the Tokyo Declaration, which, in addition to urging government and non-government agencies and actors alike to adhere to numerous previous international declarations for the rights of indigenous peoples and the conservation and management of sacred sites, including ILO 169 and the Convention of Biological Diversity, calls upon:

. . . governments, protected area managers, the international system, governmental authorities and nongovernmental organizations and others to respect, support and promote the role of indigenous peoples and local communities, as custodians of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes, through the rights-based approach, in
order to contribute to their well-being and to the preservation of cultural and biological diversity of such sites and landscapes … (UNESCO 2006, 325).

Further, the symposium produced a set of guidelines, endorsed by both UNESCO and the IUCN, for the conservation and management of sacred natural sites. The guidelines begin with the following framing:

In many societies, traditional sacred natural sites fulfill similar functions as government-declared protected areas. Due to spiritual values attributed to these sites, access restrictions often apply, and such sites (groves, mountains, rivers and lakes, caves, even entire landscapes) are therefore natural or near-natural ecosystems and biotopes where human-induced disturbances and impacts are minimal. In many cases, these sites have survived environmental degradation because they are deeply embedded in local cultures and traditional belief systems. They can provide sanctuaries to rare or endangered species and therefore can play an important role as potential gene pools that can be used to restore degraded environments (UNESCO 2006, 326).

The working guidelines go on to index a range of challenges and opportunities generally associated with sacred sites, including the competing interests of multiple stakeholders, increased tourism pressures, and land tenure questions. Finally, the guidelines list a set of management recommendations, including community-inclusive practices, integrated “modern science and traditional knowledge” approaches, and training and capacity building.

At the time, Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa was the co-Director of The Mountain Institute’s programs in Nepal and, as a result of his interest in the beyul concept and his concern that knowledge of the concept was “fading” among younger generations of Khumbu Sherpas (Sherpa 2003, 2005), he developed and implemented the Building Livelihoods Along Beyul
Trails program in 2006.\textsuperscript{14} For three years, The Mountain Institute program aimed to “spread the benefits of tourism more equitably among the local people in the Everest region of Nepal, while preserving indigenous culture and environment through education and awareness-building” (The Mountain Institute 2010). In addition to encouraging tourism and trekking in the less-frequently visited areas of Khumbu in order to spread the economic benefits of tourism more evenly, this program worked to promote Sherpa culture and identity by educating Khumbu Sherpas and visitors to the region about the beyul concept. The program was premised on the idea that promoting Sherpa culture, language instruction, and especially knowledge of the beyul concept would support environmental conservation in Khumbu as well as reinforce Sherpa culture in the face of mass tourism and foreign influence. Among its many accomplishments, the project produced a documentary, illustrated Sherpa cultural guide, two Sherpa language dictionaries, and an educational display at the entrance to Sagarmatha National Park. Further, through workshops and a Sherpa language instruction program in Khumbu schools, the project worked to link Buddhist and environmental ethics by calling upon Khumbu Sherpas to observe and enforce a set of environmentally-friendly behavioral taboos-cum-conservation practices associated with the beyul concept (Sherpa 2003, 2005, 2007; T. R. Sherpa 2007; The Mountain Institute 2008; also see Morrow 2006).

Finally, the project worked to draw trekkers and other visitors off Khumbu’s well-trodden main trekking route to Everest Base Camp and onto a new Sacred Sites Trail,
which leads trekkers through less-visited Khumbu villages in order to take in Khumbu’s significant sacred sites and *gondes* or stay in Sherpa homestays. The new trail and new homestay program was intended to promote economic development in those villages not on the main Everest Base Camp trekking route and spread the economic benefits of tourism more evenly between all of Khumbu’s main villages. Homestay programs were established in Thameteng, Phortse, and Gyiphide; however, at the time of this research, foreign student groups, rather than tourists, had primarily used the homestay program.

While Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa acknowledges “*beyuls* are sacred refuges for people, not biodiversity,” he suggests the “inherent natural and cultural qualities of *beyuls* lend themselves to the conservation of biodiversity” (2003, 102). For Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa (2003, 2005), *beyul*, as large-scale landscapes with a variety of topographic features and eco-zones have and continue to support biodiversity conservation. Moreover, Lhakpa Norbu argues that the cultural values of *beyul* residents encourage biodiversity conservation, making residents more amenable to contemporary environmental conservation practices. In further recognizing the connection between sacred hidden valleys and environmental conservation, Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa (2005) points out that most Himalayan *beyul* are included in state protected areas.¹⁵ Indeed, the *beyul* concept presents a powerful opportunity to bring together one understanding of Khumbu as a sacred landscape with efforts to preserve biodiversity and promote environmental conservation.

¹⁵ For example, Pemako is part of Pema Nature Reserve in China, Rongshar and Kyirong are included in the Qomolungma Nature Reserve in Tibet, Dremochung is part of Kangchenjunga National Park in Sikkim, Beyul Yolmo is part of Langtang National Park, Kangchenjunga is included in a conservation area-turned-national park in Nepal, Beyul Khumbu is part of Sagarmatha National Park.
Paralleling The Mountain Institute’s program in Khumbu, Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation partnered with several Kathmandu-based NGOs to host a workshop in 2008 aimed at exploring linkages between sacred natural sites in Nepal, especially *beyul*, and environmental conservation ideals and practices (The Mountain Institute 2008). The workshop featured talks by monastic leaders, environmental conservation advocates, and state conservation officials each exploring the ways in which practices and values associated with sacred sites and landscapes encouraged environmental conservation.

*The Beyul Campaign: Khumbu Community Conserved Area*

In 2008, and separate from The Mountain Institute’s program, Khumbu community leaders gathered at the request of the locally-elected members of the Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee, including the chairperson of the Namche Village Development Committee, and Dr. Stan Stevens—a U.S.-based academic and long-time Khumbu researcher, to discuss the ways in which linkages between understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul* and Sherpa land management practices support designating Khumbu an Indigenous Conservation Territory (ICT) and an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA). Such designations are endorsed by both the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to recognize effective local governance and conservation of natural resources by indigenous peoples and as correctives to state-designated protected areas, which have
often violated the rights of resident indigenous peoples. (Stevens 2008). Toward this end, Stevens (2013) asserts,

The Sharwa people conserve all of Khumbu as an ICT through their cultural values and customary law, including their belief that as a Buddhist people they have a responsibility to protect all life . . . Sharwa spiritual and cultural leaders, moreover, maintain that the Sharwa people have a responsibility to care for this region as a sacred place and to strictly adhere to tenets of non-violence in the beyul (38).

In advance of this meeting, community and conservation leaders prepared a brief document outlining the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas have cared for and maintained Khumbu’s forests and wildlife for generations (Stevens 2008). The following excerpt from that document declares the significance of Khumbu as an ICCA and highlights the ways in which Khumbu’s community conservation leaders assembled traditional and new Sherpa land management practices and understandings of Khumbu as a sacred landscape within the ICCA framework:

For Sherpas Khumbu has been a sacred, protected place for centuries. We believe that Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) declared Khumbu a sacred valley (beyul) 1,200 years ago after meditating in Akha Cave on our sacred mountain Khumbu Yul Lha. We believe that Khumbu is a special place because Guru Rinpoche watches over and cares for it, as does Khumbu Yul Lha, the guardian god of Khumbu and its people, livestock, wildlife, and nature who lives on our most sacred mountain. And Khumbu is special because this is the home of Miyolangsangma, the goddess of Chomolungma (Mt. Everest/Sagarmatha), who is a provider of sustenance to humans.

Sherpas believe that an important part of being Sherpa is respecting all life and not harming other beings. Some think this is especially important because Khumbu is a beyul, a hidden, sacred valley. This honoring of Buddhist values has made Khumbu a wildlife sanctuary for centuries.

Sherpa communities maintain traditions of respecting sacred mountains and sacred forests. We also maintain our community management of forests, grasslands, and alpine areas through regulations and enforcement by village officials called nauwa and through the policies and programs of our buffer zone institutions and our local NGOs such as KACC [Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council] and SPCC [Sagarmatha
Pollution Control Committee]. We integrate traditional values, institutions, and practices with new institutions and programs which oversee trail and base camp clean-ups, alpine conservation and restoration programs, anti-poaching patrols, solid waste and water treatment, alternative energy development, and a Khumbu-wide firewood collection management system. (Excerpt from Declaration of the Khumbu Community Conserved Area, 2008, reprinted in Stevens 2008, 57, sic)

This excerpt highlights one of the ways in which understandings of Khumbu as a beyul, as well as other Sherpa spiritual traditions, have come be connected to both traditional environmental conservation practices and new practices. Significantly, efforts to recognize Khumbu as an ICCA were thwarted by government actions declaring the above informal declaration illegal (an event I will return to more thoroughly in Chapter 6).

Both The Mountain Institute program and efforts to recognize Khumbu as an ICCA seek to establish a “space of engagement” through which to articulate claims of authority and territory with global environmental conservation and indigenous political movements (Cox 1998). By doing so, Khumbu Sherpas are working to make their lifeworlds legible in such movements. Acknowledging the reversal of James Scott’s (1998) use of “legibility” in which the state works to define and categorize the local in order to exploit peoples and resources through state regulation and subjugation, Chris Coggins and Tessa Hutchinson (2006) argue that “it is precisely through ritual reclamation of local modes and rules of landscape interpretations that indigenous culture finds its greatest durability” (91). That is, for Coggins and Hutchinson, Tibetans in northwest Yunnan are actually working to buttress local land tenure and relations to spiritual space by rendering themselves and their spiritual practices legible to the Chinese state, NGOs, and activists.

Both the example from Yunnan Province and the Khumbu Community Conserved Area (KCCA) controversy are especially illustrative of my larger argument, which is that
contemporary understandings of Khumbu as a sacred landscape are forged in movement, productive of space, and embroiled in power struggles between monastic authority, state authority, global social movements, and Khumbu’s lay community. In what follows, I adopt a critical reconceptualization of sacred landscapes as being highly politicized localized articulations of an activist package, and thus, forged in movement. I call attention to the ways in which spatiality shapes the ability of sacred landscapes to find traction in specific places. That is, in addition to articulations between global discourses and local agendas being historically and socially contingent (Hall 1996; Li 2000; Moore 2005; Yeh 2007), they are both productive of space and spatially contingent.

Approaching sacred landscapes

Until recently, geographers of religion have been largely concerned with four main areas of research: Patterns and distributions of religious communities at large scales (i.e. Zelinsky 1961); the origins and diffusion of religious beliefs and practices (i.e. Shortridge 1976); sacred places and landscapes (including pilgrimage)(i.e. Tanaka 1981); and the impact of religion on demography, environment, and conflict (i.e. White 1967; Harris 1966) (See also Sopher 1967; Büttner 1980; Park 1994; Kong 2004 for reviews of the field). In 1990, Lily Kong identified that most research to date took religion as part of the theorized superorganic cultural structure that shapes the cultural landscape, or fell into the category of religious ecology. She challenged geographers of religion to take up the line of inquiry coming out of the ‘new’ cultural geography in order to adopt a more critical approach to culture.
In the two decades since Kong’s (1990) call for more engagement with the critical approaches coming out cultural geography in particular, geographers of religion have taken up a number of themes and debates that illuminate the social life of religious landscapes. These include the politics and poetics of religious space, identity, and community (Dwyer 1999; Kong 2001); the rise of religious fundamentalism in the context of new phases of globalization and increased mobility and migration (Nagar 1997; Chivallon 2001; Secor 2004; Gökarıksel 2009); debates about the processes and significance of secularization (Proctor 2006; Gökarıksel 2009), and the influence of non-representational theory (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009; Yorgason and della Dora 2009). Indeed, Kong (2010) lauds the diversity of research in the field and asks “Has the geographical study of religion finally arrived?” (2).

As the geography of religion has grown so have geographers’ interest in the dynamics of religious landscapes. Elizabeth Olson (2013) points to two general ways geographers have considered religious landscapes. Capturing the impulse of the first approach, Eric Isaac wrote, “the geography of religion is the study of the part played by the religious motive in man’s transformation of the landscape” (1960, 14). While much early work focused on the ways in which religion shaped built environments—including unofficially-sacred sites (Park 1994; Kong 2010), Olson (2013) points out that later work in this vein takes up a more critical perspective to investigate the ways in which religious communities remake places in often highly politicized contexts. For example, Edward Holland and Meagan Todd (2015) explore the politics of mosque construction and Buddhist temple renovation in Post-Soviet Russia as Muslim and Buddhist communities remake
Russia’s religious landscapes (see also Lewandowski 1984).

Second, geographers have approached religious landscapes as expressions of lived religion. Olson explains,

lived religion emphasizes the embodied character of religion, focusing on the embodied emotions, experiences, and biographies of being religious (Streib et al. 2008), but it is only through a grounding in space and scale that lived religion transforms into lived landscape (2013, 78).

For Olson (2013), this perspective plays out in two Peruvian villages where myths and stories at once describe and construct two quite difference embodied religious landscapes.

In this dissertation, I focus on a third approach to religious landscapes: I examine the ways in which religious landscapes and sites are being put into conversation with globally-circulating environmental conservation and development, as well as indigenous political, discourses. While many of these investigations certainly overlap with geographers’ interests in the ways in which lived religion is expressed through religious landscapes, my focus here is on the mobilizations, and associated uses and practices, of religious landscapes.

Interest in the relationships between religious landscapes and sites, indigenous land management practices, and conservation and development has been steadily rising since the 1960s (Berkes 1999; Dove, Sajise, and Doolittle 2011b; Sponsel 2012). For example, early cultural ecological investigations sought to illuminate how ritual and religion function as mechanisms systematically mediating human-environment relations (Harris 1966; Rappaport 1968, 1979). Yet, such functionalist approaches were largely abandoned as early political ecologists challenged the ways in which communities and ecosystems were treated as closed units of analysis, and called for greater attention to the ways in which
such peoples and places were situated in broader socio-cultural systems, and especially
political-economic structures (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Peet and Watts
1996a; Forsyth 2003; Robbins 2012). Concerns over the marginalization of local peoples in
the formation of conservation areas ushered in attention to local engagement in
conservation efforts (Neumann 1997). As investigations in community-based conservation
came into dialogue with investigations in ethnobotany and traditional ecological
knowledge, geographers, biologists, and anthropologists began to explore the numerous
ways in which religious sites and landscapes act as mechanisms in natural resource
management and conservation (Berkes 1999; Dove, Sajise, and Doolittle 2011b). Such
investigations demonstrate how taboos and practices associated with both small-scale
religious sites and larger-scale religious landscapes, indigenous knowledges and beliefs,
and religious traditions protect fragile ecosystems containing sacred medicinal plants
(Anderson et al. 2005; Salick and Moseley 2012), conserve biodiversity in sacred groves
and surrounding sacred lakes (Gold and Gujar 1989; Ramakrishnan 1996; Sharma, Rikhari,
and Palni 1999; Allison 2004; Jain et al. 2004), support forest conservation practices in
sacred forests and groves (Stevens 1993; Ingles 1995; Sherpa 2003, 2005; Arora 2006;
Spoon and Sherpa 2008), and support hydrological conservation (Coggins 2014). Out of the
growth in scholastic interest in the relationship between religion and spirituality, and
conservation and development, emerged variously named interdisciplinary sub-fields,
including religious ecology (Tucker and Grim 2001), (dark) green religion (Taylor 2010),
and spiritual ecology (Sponsel 2001, 2012). Demonstrating the salience of these
investigations today, Leslie Sponsel’s 2012 book, Spiritual ecology: A quiet revolution and
subsequent review (Vayda 2014) recently prompted a spirited debate on the Ecological Anthropology list-serv about the effectiveness of such approaches in addressing persistent environmental degradation (also see Sponsel 2014 for Sponsel’s response to Vayda).

In the global arena, conservationists, indigenous rights activists, and scholars remain particularly interested in the ways in which religious landscapes may be mobilized to support environmental conservation efforts and indigenous rights claims (Dove, Sajise, and Doolittle 2011a; Sponsel 2012). For example, in the High Asian context of the Himalaya and Tibetan plateau, interest has taken shape in the form of the Sacred Himalaya Landscape initiative, which is a joint project between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and several other governments and NGOs to establish a transnational conservation area extending between Nepal, Bhutan, and China. WWF’s materials explain that the program “taps into the spiritual beliefs and conservation ethics of local communities to restore essential habitats and protect endangered species such as the snow leopard” (WWF Eastern Himalayas n.d.). Likewise, Conservation International-China’s Sacred Lands program in southwest China works to revive both “Tibetan cultural values toward nature and traditional land protection” (Yeh 2014, 257, quoting CI-China Sacred Lands brochure n.d.). Finally, the Kailash Sacred Landscape, a transnational protected landscape initiative sponsored by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and straddling the borders of western Nepal, northern India, and western China, mobilizes the sacred values of Mount Kailash (held significant to Buddhists, Hindus, Bonpo, Jains, Sikhs, and others) to promote tourism as a “sustainable adaption strategy” that addresses livelihood threats resulting from climate change while also addressing sustainable
development needs and poverty-alleviation (Adler et al 2013).

Notions of sacred landscapes have also played a key role in the global movement to recognize and support the rights of indigenous peoples (Darlington 2003; Sheridan 2008; cf. UNESCO 2003, 2006; Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2005; Arora 2006; Mallarach 2008; Escobar 2008; Pfaff-Czamecka and Toffin 2011; Sax 2011). International legal forums, most notably The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 (ILO 169) codified the significance of indigenous sacred sites and territories in recognizing indigenous peoples rights to self-determination. In the past decade, through integrative approaches such as rights-based conservation and development (Alcorn and Royo 2007), conservationists and activists have increasingly been recognizing the ways in which environmental conservation, sustainable development, and indigenous rights are entwined. Significantly, indigenous notions of sacred landscapes and sites figure prominently in such programs.

Indigenous land management practices, conceptions of sacred landscapes, and behavioral practices associated with religious landscapes and sites in many instances do indeed function to preserve biodiversity and protect fragile ecosystems, albeit, often indirectly or unintentionally (Tomalin 2004). Furthermore, by incorporating socio-cultural factors, including religion, ethnicity, and gender, into considerations of environmental conservation agendas, as well as calling for collaboration between local communities, including indigenous peoples, and conservation managers, much of this work offers correctives to disenfranchising and exclusionary approaches to environmental
conservation (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Yeh and Coggins 2014).

Yet, much of this literature also perpetuates an essentialized, ahistorical, apolitical, and uncritical understanding of constructions of religious landscapes by imagining and depicting such places as ‘natural’ spaces separated from everyday life and revered by community members. In doing so, such constructions and mobilizations of sacred landscapes obscure the historical, social, and spatial contingencies and conjunctures productive of these relations. In other words, these constructions are both produced from and productive of the global dreamtime. One way to make sense of these essentialisms is as strategic deployments of essentialized understandings of human-environment relations and religion. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), groups may find such “strategic essentialism” advantageous, despite persistent internal differences and struggles, in presenting themselves in a way that achieves specific goals. On the other hand, as Heatherington (2010) points out, cultural politics and internal difference may undermine such strategies and, thus, shape the outcome of such mobilizations. My interest is not in the effectiveness of representational strategies; rather, I am interested in demonstrating that the relationships between people, religion and the sacred, and the environment are fluid relationships situated in the coming together of historical and current events, ever-changing social relations, practices of spatiality, and the ongoing production of space.

In order to explore these processes I distinguish the mobilizations of religious landscapes in global environmental conservation and development, and indigenous political movement from the forms of such landscapes discussed in the literature on the geography of religion by referring to them as sacred landscapes. I use this term, rather than
religious landscapes, to indicate what I will conceptualize below as globally circulating “activist packages.” I derive this usage from contemporary environmental conservation and development programs and efforts that employ the same language, such as ICIMOD’s Kailas Sacred Landscape initiative, the Sacred Lands film project, CI-China’s Sacred Lands Program, and the WWF Sacred Himalayan Landscape program.

My conceptualization of sacred landscapes, however, does not deny the experiences of people believing in or dwelling in religious landscapes. Like Kong (2004), Olson (2013), and Holland and Todd (2015), I continue to use religious landscape to generally refer to the dialectic relationships between people and religious environments and sites. More specific to the case study at hand, in conceptualizing Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with place-based deities and spirits—both in the ways in which such relations structure some human-environment interactions and in how such relations construct a Khumbu Sherpa territory—I am inspired by Chris Coggins’ (2014) use of animate landscape to capture the material and everyday relationships between place, nonhuman and more-than-human agents, and people. As elsewhere in the Tibetan ethnic region, the experiences of such animate landscapes “disallow a distinct separation between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ environments and render ‘sacred geography’ more a matter of everyday practice and ritual performance than one of absolute spatial demarcation (in a physical or cognitive sense)” (Coggins 2014, 210). As a result, such everyday practices and ritual performances often shape and are entwined with human-environment relations. As the following chapters will demonstrate, however, such relations in landscape are also deeply entwined with understandings of territory and claims of authority, whether such claims are based on the
authority of a local territory deity or clan deity. Thus, I work to illuminate claims of territory and authority in the landscape by using animate territory to refer to the un-mobilized constructions of territory within communities, which are no less politicized than other constructions.

**Interrogating sacred landscapes**

Emma Tomalin (2004) observes that much of the attention to the intertwining of religious, spiritual, or sacred practices and environmental conservation and development, such as that exemplified by the above body of literature, is attentive to the unintentional practices supporting environmental conservation. Tomalin draws attention to a shift from interest in the ways in which religion and spirituality are unintentionally supportive of conservation and development to intentional mobilizations of religious and spiritual ethics, values, and practices to support contemporary environmental concerns. Yet, reminiscent of Tracey Heatherington’s (2010) global dreamtime of environmentalism, Tomalin argues such “religious environmentalism” is in part premised problematically on the myth of an “eco-golden age,” an imagined time when people lived close to nature. Tomalin warns against constructions of “religious traditions [as] inherently environmentally friendly or that the people who practiced them [are] environmentalists” (268). Rather, drawing on the movement to protect sacred groves in India, Tomalin asserts that religious traditions reinvent themselves as environmentally friendly “precisely through making claims about the past” (268). I follow Tomalin’s insistence on the importance of deconstructing discourses about relations between religion (or the sacred and spirituality) and the
environment in order to illuminate such constructions as situated claims.

Like Tomalin and challenging mobilizations of African sacred groves in conservation policy, sociologist Michael Sheridan (2008) demonstrates that while sacred landscapes are thought to embody a static, timeless, and apolitical ‘tradition,’ their meanings and symbolism are actually associated with highly politicized and dynamic contemporary issues. For Sheridan, scholarship on African sacred groves and efforts to incorporate the spiritual values constitutive of sacred groves into conservation policy fail to consider the social, historical, and political constructions of those groves. Further, he argues that the mobilization of sacred groves in environmental conservation agendas is actually a call to conserve the ideology behind them without attention to the politics behind that ideology. Indeed, as sacred groves, and more broadly, sacred landscapes are mobilized in new ways, we must be attentive to the ideology behind them, as well as their historical and political situations. Using sacred values to guide policy and management decisions may reinforce highly politicized ideological positions and contested power structures.

In what follows, I add to these critiques by drawing on the politics and poetics of ontological debates about sacred space, exploring the ways in which sacred landscapes reinforce essentialized narratives of relations between indigenous peoples, nonhuman actors, and the environment, and how the concept, as a representational and symbolic landscape, obscures both social relations in place and the material relations and labor transforming places.
Politics and poetics

Anthropologists, sociologists, and religious studies scholars have long debated the politics, poetics, and, more recently, the materialism of sacred space and religious landscapes (Eliade 1958; Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Lane 2001, 2002; Ivakhiv 2003; Knott 2008; Vásquez 2011). Some focus on the interpretations and meanings of religious landscapes as derived from religious texts or interpreted by religious institutions (cf. Wylie 1970; Reinhard 1978; Diemberger 1993; Ramble 1995), while others consider the ways in which community values, beliefs, and ideologies are embedded in landscapes (Basso 1996; Stutchbury 1999; Arora 2006; Thornton 2008). Still others, following current critical and social theoretical perspectives in the social sciences and humanities, investigate how religious landscape knowledge circulates through oral sources (Orofino 1991; Diemberger 1998), and the ways in which religious landscape traditions are situated within the historical social and political struggles of religious and political institutions (Diemberger 1996; Childs 1999; Arora 2006). Taken together, this literature illustrates a range of concurrent meanings, interpretations, and experiences tied to religious landscapes that are at once contested and complementary.

The debate over the politics and poetics of sacred space parallels the debate between essentialist and constructionist approaches to the sacred. Mircea Eliade’s (1959) essentialist theory of the sacred, in which the sacred ontologically exists and is revealed, or exposed, through varying epistemological frameworks, anchors substantialist, or poetic, understandings of sacred space. On the other hand, Émile Durkheim (1912) theorizes sacred space as socially constructed differentiations between sacred and profane. In this
political construction of sacred space, differentiation in space occurs only through human agency—the meanings culture imposes on a landscape.

Recently, religious studies scholars have worked to destabilize the entrenched politics/poetics dichotomies and the Eurocentric category of religion and the sacred in a number of ways. Inspired by, yet pushing beyond Durkheim, David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995), for instance, assert sacred space must be understood as produced out of power relations and “... intimately entangled in such 'profane' enterprises as tourism, economic exchange and development, and the intense conflict of contending nationalisms” (1). Chidester and Linenthal subvert Eliade’s poetic of sacred space by asserting that a substantialist understanding belies the cultural labor of producing a sacred place and, more importantly, hides the epistemological, cultural, and material violence inherent in the production of sacred space.

Belden Lane (2001, 2002) suggests a phenomenological perspective as a corrective to the essentialist perspective’s disregard for the social and the constructionist perspective’s lack of attention to the role of place in formations of sacred space. For Lane, the phenomenological perspective is concerned with the role of place as an active agent in the production and experience of sacred space. Phenomenology allows for human participation in the world, rather than limiting experience to description or construction. To illustrate, Adrian Ivakhiv (2003) offers a corrective to the poetics and politics dichotomy by arguing that social constructionist understandings of sacred space overstate the role of humanity and disregard the interactions between human and nonhuman agents in the construction of sacred space. Drawing on contemporary postmodern spatial
theorists and reminiscent of Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005), Ivakhiv posits that the production of sacred space, vis-à-vis the relationship between humans and nonhumans, may be captured more appropriately by the terms "enactment, enrolment [sic], enlistment, performance, dialogue, network-building, choreography and orchestration" (12), rather than construction, which, he suggests, implies absolute human agency. Ivakhiv illustrates his argument with an example of the relationship between humans and nonhumans in the orchestration of a New Age ecospiritualism medicine wheel on Schnebly Hill near Sedona, Arizona. Ivakhiv describes the medicine wheel—a stone circular formation—as delineating a sacred space that encompasses and heals a ‘broken’ Earth energy line. Through the medicine wheel ritual, elements of the landscape are rearranged, making the nonhuman actors—the stones, the Earth energy line, etc.—active agents in the process of orchestrating the sacred space. Overall, Ivakhiv concludes that Eliade’s essentialist understanding of sacred space should not be hastily abandoned, nor should social constructivist approaches be uncritically embraced; rather, sacred spaces may indeed be understood as moments in which the nonhuman and human worlds overlap.

Finally, and most recently, Manuel Vásquez (2011), drawing from Jonathan Z. Smith’s (2004) reconfiguration of Eliade, as well as critical social theorists’ concern with spatial analysis, calls attention to the ways in which religion is emplaced in space. Like Smith, Vásquez suggests Eliade’s concern with the spatial as an analytic offers an appropriate counterpoint to some scholars’ over-concern with the social; however, neither Smith nor Vásquez adopt Eliade’s essentialist notion of the sacred. Vásquez articulates a materialist approach to theorizing religion, which “...highlights complexity, inter-level
connectivity, emergence, situated knowledge, and relative indeterminacy and openness against monicausal, unidirectional, and totalizing explanatory schemes” (2011, 5). Vásquez’s materialist framework, therefore, calls for multidimensional understandings of sacred spaces and the ways in which these understandings are linked together, as well as the ways in which global flows of people, knowledge, and power interact with these understandings, and how these dynamics shape the lived experience of religion. While Chidester and Linenthal, Lane, Ivakhiv, and Vásquez certainly offer varying ways out of apolitical and uncritical understandings of sacred landscapes, their efforts have had little effect on the constructions of sacred landscapes and spaces deployed in contemporary social movements.

**Narrating sacred landscapes**

Especially in environmental conservation efforts, notions of sacred landscapes are mobilized as nature-society hybrids—new approaches to conservation that incorporate people and conservation goals (Zimmerer 2000); yet, ironically, notions of sacred landscapes in these mobilizations often essentialize relationships between indigenous peoples, nonhuman actors, and the environment.

An article exploring relations between ‘Tibetan culture’ and environmental conservation posted on Conservation International’s (CI) website illustrates this point:

The sacred land tradition in which faith and stewardship of nature are intertwined has allowed the unique ecosystems of the Mountains of Southwest China Biodiversity Hotspot [sic] to thrive even as the environment in other parts of the country has come under increasing pressure . . . Tibetan Buddhists were treating their environment with reverence and respect centuries before the rest of the world realized the pressing need to conserve flora and fauna. Now, as the region’s rich
traditions compete with outside influences, it is critically important to preserve and empower them. They may be the best hope for an ecosystem that is home to some of Asia’s most critically important biodiversity (Kolb 2006).

While this passage works to highlight the hybridity of nature-culture relations, it simultaneously undermines these efforts. By describing Buddhist practice and environmental management as “intertwined” and pre-dating contemporary concerns for environmental conservation, this passage constructs an essentialized, timeless, and apolitical connection between an (also) essentialized Tibetan culture, the sacred, and environmental conservation. The essentialized connection between Tibetan culture and environmental conservation is further reinforced when it is identified as threatened and in need of protection: “[Conservation International] is also working to develop local capacity for protecting [Tibetan peoples] biodiversity and revitalizing the Tibetan cultural values of respect and reverence for nature.” That is, by essentializing the relationship between Tibetan peoples and the environment, the imaginary of the sacred landscape drawn from the global dreamtime, obscures the social and political struggles productive of such relationships.

In Nepal, The Mountain Institute makes a similar maneuver in its 2008 workshop materials, stating,

The Himalayan Beyuls present a significant opportunity for biodiversity conservation. They are large in size, have natural boundaries with relatively pristine conditions, and topographic variations that support a large diversity of life. Beyuls are home to important wildlife species such as snow leopard and grey wolf, as well as socio-economically significant plant species. Most importantly, beyuls are home to people who have strong conservation traditions including aversion to hunting and killing, and respect for landscape features such as sacred sites. Since, beyuls provide a strong cultural basis for conserving ecosystems; they present opportunities to promote environmental conservation through strengthening of indigenous cultural values (The Mountain Institute 2008, 1).
By situating beyul residents in “relatively pristine conditions” and with “strong conservation traditions” that reinforce qualities of respect for the environment, this passage essentializes beyul residents’ relations with the environment, and, even more problematically, depicts residents as close to nature. By essentializing relations between people and places, notions of sacred landscapes obscure the social politics and production of such landscapes.

Following this, sacred landscapes obscure the sociocultural, economic, and political relations of their production in two ways. First, mobilizations of sacred landscapes problematically represent homogenized and singular imaginaries of community beliefs, traditions, and practices, which are at times contested and uneven. As a result, sacred landscapes essentialize the ideology of the religious authority productive of that landscape and obscure the cultural politics of religion. Second, mobilizations of sacred landscapes, forged in movements, obscure the processes of articulation between local environmental conservation efforts, development agendas, and indigenous political claims and global social movements by appearing to be essentialized, timeless, and apolitical. To view Beyul Khumbu as a sacred landscape essentializes both Khumbu Sherpas as monastic Buddhist subjects and the authority of Buddhist monasticism and Khumbu. It is not my point to contest Sherpas’ affinity to the monastic community, nor to diminish monastic authority in Khumbu; rather, I show that monastic authority is entangled with claims of territory and authority from the Nepali state, Khumbu’s protector and territory deity—Khumbi yullha, and from within the Khumbu Sherpa lay community.

The above critique overlaps with concerns raised by political ecologists over the
bounding of ecological systems and communities. That is, constructions of sacred landscapes work to bind a place, to separate it, and endow it with meaning, albeit often with porous boundaries (Skog 2010), and in doing so suggests a closed unit of analysis. Drawing on a political ecology critique of ecological and social systems as closed units of analysis, constructions of sacred landscapes obscure the broader socio-ecological context in which they are situated (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Peet and Watts 1996b; Forsyth 2003; Robbins 2012).

**Producing sacred landscapes in movement**

In what follows I conceptualize sacred landscapes as traveling activist packages. Such packages find traction in specific socially and historically contingent moments through processes of articulation. I contend that in addition to political and historical contingency, articulations of sacred landscapes are also spatially contingent.

*Sacred landscapes as traveling packages*

In the past half century, growing global and transnational movements to support environmental conservation, sustainable development, and indigenous rights respond to what Tania Li (2007) refers to as “globally circulating concerns” (147) about environmental degradation, unequal access to goods and resources in both global and local economies, and human rights—especially as they relate to indigenous peoples. While these global movements appear to share a homogenous and global agenda, Anna Tsing (2005) usefully insists that such “universals,” are not essential, independent, or complete; rather
they are constituted of and made powerful by the friction of specific historical and spatial conjunctures and as a result their ability to be taken up in specific movements and places is historically contingent. Thus, for Tsing, localized actors shape and sustain universals through processes of articulation in which situated concerns engage, shift, and are shifted by universals.

Sustaining universal concerns, indeed the very characteristic of becoming global, suggests they must be able to travel and find traction (Collier and Ong 2005; Tsing 2005; Li 2007). Steven Collier and Aihwa Ong (2005) conceptualize the ability of “global forms,” universals, to travel by way of an analytic of assemblage, which they theorize to be the amorphous gathering and territorialization of global forms in specific contexts. Yet, I find the specificity and materiality of Tsing’s conceptualization of “charismatic packages” more useful because it works to ground, ironically, the abstract notion of traveling universals.

Tsing conceptualizes activism associated with universal concerns as charismatic packages:

… allegorical modules that speak to the possibilities of making a cause heard. These packages feature images, songs, morals, organizational plans, or stories. They introduce us to heroes and villains; they show us how an unrepresented group can become a political force (2005, 227).

Tsing’s conceptualization is inspired by the everyday practices of NGO-workers and activists who regularly gather to share stories of project successes and failures, as well as brainstorm ways to make strategies and tactics effective in particular locations. The set of UNESCO workshops described above demonstrate one of the ways in which such interactions play out. At these workshops, activists and community leaders from around the world, and with divergent interests and agendas, gathered to share their diverse experiences and take away the tools found useful in other places. In this way, narratives of
sacred landscapes and sites came to connect people is diverse places, while the strength of the narrative itself gained global recognition. Yet, Tsing argues activist packages abstract from the specific historical, political, and social contexts from which they emerge in order to create allegories, and than travel through translation and into situated interventions. A key aspect of Tsing’s formulation is attention to the historical and political conjunctures allowing for an activist package to find a “receptive audience” (Yeh 2014, 261). Furthermore, Tsing observes a package is reformulated in each use, and through constant reformulation is able to find new audiences, thus traveling.

The usefulness of Tsing’s conceptualization of interventions as packages became clear as one of my key informants described the beyul concept as the “perfect package” for Khumbu Sherpas (personal communication, 2013). Inspired by this comment, I conceptualize the Beyul Campaign as an attempt to effectively articulate understandings of sacred landscapes as “activist packages,” intervention packages, offering Khumbu Sherpas an opportunity to gain political force in land management, especially in conservation, and in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. As demonstrated above, notions of sacred landscapes, along with efforts to establish international conservation and human rights standards, tied to notions of sacred landscapes, in the forms such as ICCAs, have been lauded in a variety of transnational forums as effective mechanisms to support biodiversity conservation, indigenous rights, and development (UNESCO 2003, 2006; Stevens 2008).

Traveling packages, however, do not simply land in place; rather, they are appropriated, taken up, and reworked by local agents (Tsing 2005; Coggins and Hutchinson 2006; Yeh 2007). I follow Tsing’s concern with the ways in which local agents appropriate
packages, that is, the ways in which universals find an audience, engage, or otherwise become “practically effective.” She insists on the historical contingencies and conjunctures of this moment. For Tsing, this moment happens through productive friction. I break from Tsing on this point and follow Li’s (2007) concern with the ways in which interventions find traction, or take hold. The particular historical conjunctures offering traction to universals are entwined with particular, and I argue highly political, spatial contingencies and conjunctures. In my case study of Beyul Khumbu, I demonstrate that sacred landscapes, as traveling activist packages, require an entwined complex of historical, social, and spatial formations in order to find traction in a specific place.

Tracing the movement of global packages through their localized articulations, however, risks reifying a problematic and hierarchical divide between global and local scales (cf. Hart 1982; see also Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005 for critique). Popular attention to global processes and globalization has tended to treat the global as a homogenizing force acting upon, and transforming local specificities (i.e. Harvey 1996, Escobar 2001). Yet, such accounts belie the ways in which the global is productive of place (Massey 1994), people are at once local and global actors—they are affected by larger scale interactions and processes while simultaneously acting to shape those interactions and processes in a specific time and place (Herod 2009), and the ways in which scale is coproduced and reproduced (Brenner 2001). Thus, tracing activist packages as they find traction in place enacts a ‘politics of scale’ in which scales are produced through negotiation. As local agents take up and rework global activist packages, they allow the global ‘to become’ local and the local ‘to become’ global (Herod 2009). Yet, such a
formulation reifies a problematic local-global dichotomy. An analytic of articulation provides a means out of the problematic local-global dichotomy by illuminating the ways in which scale is constructed and co-produced. For Tsing, the global-local dichotomy breaks down when we give attention to how “contingent articulations . . . make [globalist projects] possible and bring them to life” (76). Following this, a sacred landscape, as an activist package, does not simply ‘fit’ into place, nor does it organically emerge from the local; rather, mobilizations of articulated sacred landscapes may be viewed as nodes of place-making, joining together processes at a range of scales (Massey 1994).

Articulation and global discourses

Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation is a useful starting point for thinking through the ways in which universal concerns find traction in specific places. In arguing against deterministic constructions of identity and insisting on attention to the cultural politics of identity construction (Hall 1980, 1990, 1996, 1997), Hall recalls the dual meaning of articulation: (1) “to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate” (1996, 141), and (2) to make a non-necessary connection between two elements. For Hall, these two meanings alert us to the ways in which agents situate, or enunciate, identity claims in relation to other social movements, and in doing so, make their own agendas legible at a broader scale while simultaneously shaping and perpetuating the movement, the travel, of universals. Moreover, for Hall, the seemingly ‘natural’ connection between grounded localized agents and untethered circulating universals is itself constructed through social, political, and historical contingency. Hall explains,
Cultural identity ... is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (1990, 225).

Tania Li (2000) and Emily Yeh (2007) productively draw on Hall’s theory of articulation to explore the ways in which indigenous communities in Indonesia and Tibet, respectively, articulate a cohesive identity, and how and why (or why not) those communities articulate, or join, their goals and aspirations to those of global movements. Such appropriations of Hall’s theory of articulation are attentive to the historical, political, social, and cultural contingencies and conjunctures enabling articulation. I add to this a concern for the spatial contingencies and conjunctures at work in processes of articulation. Building on Hall and Tsing, as intervention packages, associated with global concerns for environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights, travel their ability to articulate, to find traction, at a local scale is spatially contingent, just as it is historically and politically contingent.

Hall’s primary concern in elaborating a theory of articulation is to theorize “how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how a subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it” (Hall 1996, 142). For Hall, this process is historically, culturally, and politically contingent. Hall’s inattention to the role of space in processes of articulation suggests that, for Hall, articulation simply happens in space. An understanding of space as socially produced and productive, rather than absolute, however, allows us to
similarly ask how an ideology, discourse, or traveling package “discovers” (following Hall), or, rather, is productive of, space, rather than how it finds traction in essentialized spaces.

Donald Moore “insist[s] that micropolitics matter, that the outcome of cultural struggles remain crucially dependent on the diverse ways land comes to be inhabited, labored on, idiomatically expressed, and suffered for in specific moments and milieus” (2). In doing so, Moore usefully expands Hall’s theory of articulation by calling attention to spatiality, or the discursive and material practices productive of space, in cultural politics (2005). I follow Moore in arguing for attention to spatial contingencies in cultural politics. That is, space, as produced out of both discursive and material practices at historical, social, and political conjunctures, shapes the outcomes of intervention packages, as materialized articulations.

Attention to spatiality

Khumbu is at once a Sherpa homeland, a mountaineers’ playground, a foreign trekker’s Shangri-la (another aspect of the global dreamtime), a national park, a UNESCO world heritage site, a place for young Nepali children to run away to in order to earn money, Khumbi yullha’s territory, a beyul, and more. Like elsewhere, different people experience Khumbu as different places (Cresswell 2004; Moore 2005). Each of these is produced from the coming together of social relations and meanings linked at multiple scales, and embodied through everyday practices (Massey 1994). Yet, what is often overlooked in discussions of multiple places overlapping at a single site is that these are also places co-produced by and co-productive of multiple spaces (cf. Liechty 1996). That is,
the multiple places constitutive of Khumbu are produced from and productive of indigenous space, capitalist space, conservation space, state space, rural space, mountain space, and sacred space. Each of these spaces is intertwined, mutually produced, and embroiled in the production of place in Khumbu. Moreover, each of these spaces is productive of identity in Khumbu—a Khumbu Sherpa identity, Western mountaineer identity, a state official identity, a conservationist identity, a monk or nun identity, a gendered identity, and, indeed, a researcher identity. Thus, Khumbu is the site of negotiations between state authority and management, local management and practices, global and local conservation and development agendas, and tourists’ desires and mountaineers’ aspirations.

Several decades of debates over place and space have generated numerous definitions, approaches to, and theorizations of the relations between the two (Cresswell 2004; Hubbard and Kitchin 2011b; Also see, for instance, Massey 1994; Escobar 2001). Massey (2005) observes that most of this literature boils down to a distinction between place as meaningful and everyday and space as abstract and static, or as a bounded, fixed container providing a backdrop in which social, cultural, and political phenomena simply occur (also see Moore 2005; Thrift 2009; Yeh 2013). For Massey, such treatments deprive peoples of their own histories and trajectories by assuming a singular homogenized space constructed out of a hegemonic Western conception of history upon which all peoples dwell and from which all peoples derive meaning. Instead, Massey argues for an
understanding of space “as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist” (2005, 9).16 Similarly arguing against an imagery of space as “[a]bstract, empty, and exchangable” (2005, 19) and following Henri Lefebvre (1991), Moore asserts such treatments of space deny the ways in which spaces and notions of space themselves are produced out of historical contingency. Following well-established understandings of both space and place as socially constructed and relational, my attention to spatiality and focus on space, rather than place, contributes to literature insisting upon a social, and thus political, understanding of space.

As opposed to notions of space as an empty vessel in which social processes occur, Lefebvre (1991) theorizes space as both socially produced and simultaneously productive of social relations. Extending, and arguably completing, Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism, Lefebvre’s main intellectual project explores the ways in which a capitalist mode of production transforms space, unmooring the absolute space of pre-capitalist modes of production and producing an abstract capitalist space (Lefebvre 1991; also see Shields 1999; Brenner and Elden 2001). For Lefebvre, space is constituted by the dialectical relations between spatial practices, representations of space, and perceptions of space—which are both products of and productive of social relations. In this triad, spatial practices

16 Significantly, Massey also alerts us to the relationships between space and gender (Massey 1994). While outside the scope of the project at hand, gender certainly plays a significant role in the production of space among Khumbu Sherpas. The most striking of these divisions is marked by the ways in which gender limits or enables access to the empowerment rituals and meditative practices necessary to access the inner and secret realms of the beyul. The division between monastics and laity further limits such access. Indeed, Makley (1999) identifies the gender division and the division between monastic and lay Tibetans as the two major divisions in Tibetan society. Such divisions also persist among Khumbu Sherpas.
include the everyday practices shaping social production and reproduction, representations of space include the ways in which space is conceived and idealized through technologies including maps and blueprints—and I would add monastic texts, and representational space is space as perceived through experience. At times working together and at times in conflict these forms of space are unique to each mode of production.

While bearing in mind that Lefebvre’s broader intellectual project has been arguably obscured by focused, and at times selective, interpretations of *The Production of Space* (Elden 2001, 2004), several scholars have found sufficient room for broad interpretation and inspiration in Lefebvre’s theorization of space. In doing so they have developed an analytic with which to examine how power, both outside of and in conjunction with, capitalist forces, produces space as both an effect of power and enabling that power. For instance, Moore (2005) reads Lefebvre as more than a critique of the ways in which capital forces determine the production of space; rather, Moore draws from Lefebvre’s emphasis on “conjunctures, which are not reducible to structures” (citing Lefebvre 1991, 20) to illuminate how the produced spaces of Kaerezi, Zimbabwe are embroiled in, as well as productive of, historically contingent socio-political struggles.

Drawing inspiration from Lefebvre’s spatial triad, Paige West (2006) relies on Lefebvre to show that the spaces of both Crater Mountain, Papua New Guinea, itself and the management area designed to ‘protect’ it and its inhabitants are produced through spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. For West, these are the material, social, and mental practices of space. Further, she argues, the act of producing an
area in need of conservation and that area’s resident peoples as being in need of
development is a highly politicized act productive of “space, place, and culture” (Gupta and
Ferguson 1992). Following Lefebvre, West points out that in these productions, space itself
becomes a tool of power, control, and domination.

Similarly, Coggins and Yeh (2014) and Coggins (2014) work to bring Lefebvre’s
theorization of space into dialogue with debates over the relations between global
environmental conservation movements and localized spiritual beliefs. Coggins and Yeh
(2014) argue that, like a form of government, development, including environmental
conservation, “deploys a variety of techniques and micropolitics that structure fields of
action for its subjects; it is a set of practices that tries to accomplish rule by creating
governable subjects and governable spaces” (13). Coggins (2014) demonstrates this by
arguing that attempts to articulate Tibetan sacred spaces in Yunnan, China with secular
environmental conservation movements represent the latest effort to obliterate absolute
space, following, first, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist productivism and, second, state
commodification of nature (207). Thus, while most use Lefebvre in relation to the
production of state and capitalist space, these works demonstrate that Lefebvre can be
expanded.

In this dissertation, I focus on the historical and spatial contingencies and
conjunctures produced from human and nonhuman agency, and the ways in which those
contingencies are productive of multiple spatialities. Throughout this dissertation I will
demonstrate that these spatial contingencies and conjunctures include the proximity and
role of Mount Everest in reshaping Khumbu Sherpa livelihoods and economic relations at
the local, state, and global scales, the declaring of Sagarmatha National Park, and
understandings of Khumbu as the territory of a powerful mountain deity and constructions
of Khumbu as a beyul. This work illuminates the multiple spatialities shaping Khumbu
Sherpas’ everyday and material practices, which, in turn, shape the ways in which the Beyul
Campaign finds traction.

Conclusion

As insiders and outsiders work toward meeting local goals of environmental
conservation, development, and indigenous rights, they often rework local oral traditions
and practices, as well as relations with nonhuman agents in order to make those claims
legible as sacred landscapes in globally circulating movements of environmental
conservation, development, and indigenous rights discourses (Coggins and Hutchinson
2006), thereby evoking the global dreamtime. This chapter has drawn on epistemological
and ontological debates in the social sciences and humanities about religion, place, and
space, to call attention to the ways in which religious landscapes are mobilized as highly
politicized traveling activist package forged in articulations between local agendas and
global social movements.

This chapter has laid the groundwork for the arguments I will make through the
remainder of this dissertation. In the chapters that follow I will turn attention to the case
study of Beyul Khumbu in order to demonstrate that sacred landscapes, as activist
packages, find traction in specific places through historically, socially, and spatially
contingent processes of articulation. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that such
articulations are both productive of space and spatially contingent. In the end, this dissertation demonstrates the significance of spatial contingency and conjunctures in the cultural politics of the articulation of a sacred landscape.
Chapter 2: Ethnography and Khumbu Sherpas

Introduction

In mid-May 2013, a couple days after Lhakpa Zangbu had returned to Nauche from his seasonal work at Everest Base Camp, we sat in his kitchen playing Marriage—a Nepali card game—with a neighbor and Lhakpa Zangbu’s cousin who was visiting from Kathmandu. Lhakpa Zangbu proudly showed off his brand new North Face down jacket, which he had purchased with a portion of his climbing season earnings. His neighbor described a similar jacket he was planning to buy, if the local seller would lower the price. Lhakpa Zangbu’s cousin, whose style reminded me more of the ‘hipster’ trend taking hold in Kathmandu—skinny jeans, leather jacket, and long bangs swept to one side—than the mountaineering couture popular in Khumbu, studied his cards. He was clearly the opponent to watch out for. We all sipped warm arak (Nep., fermented rice liquor), except Lhakpa Zangbu. In the five years I’ve known him, I’ve never seen him consume alcohol—a rarity among young men in Nauche. As a member of the leadership council for the Nauche Youth Group and with a prominent position at EBC, he had told me once that he thought he needed to set a good example by not drinking. After awhile our conversation turned to whether or not Lhakpa Zangbu would start attending the daily Tibetan language classes offered in Nauche. He had started attended about a year earlier, shortly after a former monk from Dingboche first offered the classes. As in Thame and Thameteng, a former monk had started holding daily classes to teach lay Khumbu Sherpas how to read Nyingma prayers written in Tibetan. My own observation was that attendees were simply memorizing the prayers
rather than learning to read the Tibetan script. Regardless, Lhakpa Zangbu’s neighbor and cousin started teasing him about attending the classes, and explained to me that he only goes because all the single young women in Nauche also attend. At the time, Lhakpa Zangbu was not yet married and very much ready to be. Light-heartedly, the men queried: Where better to find a potential wife than at a prayer class? Admittedly, none of us could fault the logic. After a mild laugh and slight blush, Lhakpa Zangbu turned to me and solemnly explained why he attended the classes,

LZ Sometimes I don’t feel like I’m Sherpa. The older generation, our parents, they are not teaching us the traditions.

Suddenly serious, Lhakpa Zangbu’s cousin reiterated the point by explaining that Sherpa traditions and culture are part of his identity, but like Lhakpa Zangbu, he often does not feel connected to these. Several weeks later, after Lhakpa Zangbu returned to classes, I inquired about how the classes were going, to which Lhakpa Zangbu replied that he was enjoying them because for so long his participation in puja was “copy-paste.” That is, he didn’t know the meanings of the puja, just the actions and words. Through the class, Lhakpa Zangbu felt he better understood the meanings of prayers and their use in puja.

Lhakpa Zangbu’s original statement begs the question: What does it mean to be Sherpa? While the answers to this question are as numerous as there are people to answer it, this chapter explores the narrative of a ‘traditional Sherpa,’ fixed in a particular place and ambiguous historical time. I will show that this narrative has been constructed from both within and outside of the Khumbu Sherpa community and that, more importantly, it

17 I will continue to use ‘tradition,’ ‘traditional,’ and ‘modernity’ as problematic and relational terms, but for ease of reading will not offset them with quotation marks.
has come to serve as a point of reference against which Khumbu Sherpas measure their own identity and belonging. Ultimately, mobilizations of Beyul Khumbu rely on the narrative, or imaginary, of a traditional Sherpa, which are entwined with the global dreamtime in the same way as sacred landscapes. This chapter shows the ways in which early ethnographic projects contributed to constructions of the traditional Sherpa, which now circulate in the global dreamtime. Further, I highlight the limitations of the ethnographic project, both in general and specifically in Khumbu, in order to illuminate the underlying tensions shaping mobilizations of Khumbu as a beyul, as a mechanism making Khumbu legible vis-à-vis global and national social movements.

**Ethnography and spatial fixing**

Ethnography works to situate the observations of researchers within a specific time and place by appreciating, over time, the context of the observations being made. Social scientists laud ethnography as a methodology that, in part, complicates and enriches data that is otherwise abstracted, simplified, and incomplete. Traditionally, ethnographers have approached their craft by spending extended periods of time among a group of people in a particular place, documenting, describing, and analyzing everyday practices, rituals, kinship systems, economic activities, and so on. While such efforts have gone far in describing people and places, the project of ethnography more generally has been critiqued in numerous ways, including its complicity with the colonial project and its fixing of essentialized groups of peoples in place and time, especially in the colonial context.
The critique of the ethnographic project as a technology of colonialism is familiar and well-trodden terrain (Asad 1973; Ortner 1984; Fardon 1990; Des Chene 2007). For some, the relationship between the colonial state and the ethnographic project is problematic in that ethnographic description provided information that the colonial state could use to dominate and subjugate colonized peoples. For others, the relationship is problematic because the colonial state made feasible ethnographic projects. Richard Fardon (1990) suggests that the relationship is more complex than either of these explanations. Drawing on Foucauldian and Marxist frameworks, he describes ethnography as “colonialism’s twin” and argues “political and economic relations were the condition for the others to be constructed in specific terms and as particular types of objects of knowledge” (6). Despite postcolonial critiques, the legacy of such early ethnographic projects persists in shaping the ways in which ethnographers and social science researchers approach and frame their inquiries, albeit in often more subtle, though no less violent, ways.

Entwined with the critique of the ethnographic project as a technology of colonialism, is a reflexive critique of ethnography that highlights how ethnographies have problematically worked to fix groups of people to a single place (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Fardon 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Malkki 1997). For instance, Donald Moore (2005) demonstrates that the British colonial administration in Rhodesia at the turn of the twentieth century subjugated African rule by “embedding [them] within an administrative grid of intelligibility—of space, sovereignty, and cultural identity” (2005, 177). This, for Moore, is “articulation—understood in its dual sense of joining and
enunciation, producing emergent alliances as well as tensions” (177). Moore usefully draws on Michel Foucault to point out that production of knowledge about a place, and the people who live there reifies the relationship between ethnic groups and territory and must be understood as a political project (also see Malkki 1997). Such projects in ethnic spatial fixing belie the larger national, transnational, and global networks shaping constructions of territory, relations to place, and peoples’ lifeways, and are, thus, always partial, while appearing to be comprehensive and complete.

While Moore focuses his attention on the ways in which the colonial state works to fix ethnic groups to territory, Arjun Appadurai (1988) illuminates the complicity of Western scholarship in this process through his critique of the legacy of the term native in anthropological ethnographic literature. While it is rare today to see this term in well-informed scholarship, I suggest the legacy of its use continues in ways that critical social sciences are only now beginning to break. Appadurai observes that the term native indicates more than an innocent origination from a place; rather, the term implies that people are “somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places,” (37) and thus rendered immobile, especially in relation to the highly mobile outsider (i.e. researcher, tourist, NGO worker, state official, etc). Further, Appadurai observes that,

The slightly more subtle assumption behind the attribution of immobility is not so much physical as ecological. Natives are those who are somehow confined to places by their connection to what place permits. Thus all the language of niches, of foraging, of material skill, of slowly evolved technologies, is actually also a language of incarceration. In this instance confinement is not simply a function of the mysterious, even metaphysical attachment of native to physical places, but a function of their adaptions to their environment (1988, 37).
Finally, and Appadurai argues most critically, there is “a moral and intellectual dimension” (37) to the sense of confinement. That is, for Appadurai, “[Groups identified as native] are confined by what they know, feel, and believe” (37).18 Expanding on this and as part of her broader critique, Liisa Malkki (1997), observes that the term *culture*, from the Latin for cultivation, is tied to soil, and thus place. Stacey Pigg (1992) similarly presents a critique of the term *villager*, and *the village*—an oft-employed shorthand found in development discourses, scholarship, and, indeed contemporary everyday parlance among Nepalis and foreigners alike to indicate areas outside of Nepal’s urban centers. For instance, it is common to hear, “I returned from *the village* yesterday” or “I’m heading out to *the village* tomorrow,” where *the village* acts as a signifier of rural Nepal. Following Appadurai, Pigg argues that the imaginary of the villager “[perpetuates the idea] that villagers are, in Appadurai’s (1988) words, ‘incarcerated’ in a way of thinking by virtue of being ‘natives’ of a kind of culture-territory” (505). Thus, for Pigg, a generic and essentialized category of villager emerges that binds people and place. In the end, Appadurai urges scholars “to remain aware that the ideas that claim to represent the ‘essences’ of particular places reflect the temporary localization of ideas of many places” (46). Like Moore and Appadurai, Arun Agrawal (1995) argues that the articulations of Western academic constructs in places, including indigenous knowledge, conservation practices, development discourses, and I add ideas about religion and the sacred, work to fix people in place.

18 Mary Des Chene (2007) similarly insists that ignorance of and dismissal of Nepali scholarship works to mobilize and make seemingly natural metropolitan theoretical frames—that is, discursively constructed, “institutional arrangements, scholarly predilections, and theories of the day [shaping] representations of particular places, call these the ‘Anthropological Middle East,’ the ‘Anthropological South Asia’” (208), while ‘incarcerating’ “native thought.”
For the most part, qualitative and ethnographic projects since the critical turn in the social sciences have been more attentive to the problematic of politics and representation (though this has created its own set of questions and critique). As a result, Mary Des Chene suggests, “it is no longer really possible to write in the mode: “The X believe that . . .’ or to be unselfconscious about the political dimensions of depicting other peoples’ lives for a living” (2007, 207). Expanding on Des Chene, I assert that we can no longer write: “The X of place Y believe that their homeland is a sacred landscape” without attention to the myriad forces constructing that notion, and especially as it relates to state and global relations.

In the 2000s, much scholarly attention is focused on the processes of globalization. In this context, ethnography has taken on new meanings, as scholars turn to the experiences of globalization (Burawoy 2000; Gille and Riain 2002). Yet, Gillian Hart (2004) urges caution in this project as it risks perpetuating the “impact model,” in which globalization acts as a force dominating and annihilating the local. Hart, rather, advocates “critical ethnography,” which focuses on “a dialectical relationship between the concrete-in-history and the production of knowledge “ (97). For Hart, attention to spatiality and articulation are key elements of critical ethnography. What follows is inspired by Hart’s call for attention to spatiality and articulation in critically examining the material and ideological relations in articulations and mobilizations of sacred landscapes.

**Himalayan ethnography**

Sara Shneiderman (2010) effectively illustrates the relationships between spatial fixing and the ethnographic project in the context of the Himalaya. Shneiderman observes
that the Himalaya is frequently described as a zone where Indic and Tibetan cultural forms, especially related to Hindu and Buddhist religious practices, as well as Buddhist and localized Shamanic practices, converge to produce a set of syncretic beliefs and practices (e.g. Mumford 1989). Such ‘interface’ or ‘buffer zone’ models problematically identify a specific set of traits, bind those traits to a defined group of people, and situate them in a specific ecological zone—the high Himalaya, and as a result, confine people in place. While Ramble (2008) argues that such syncretic models simplify what is a far more complex set of practices among Himalayan peoples, Shneiderman, similar to Appadurai’s argument above, pushes further to insist that, in fact, such fixing of peoples to a particular ecological place borders on problematic notions of ecological determinism.

Like many colonial era ethnographic projects, early ethnographies of Nepal’s numerous ethnic groups inadvertently worked to fix constructed groups of people in place and time; however, unlike the settings of many early and contemporary ethnographic projects, Nepal was never formally colonized by a Western state. Thus, until recently, Western and Nepali scholars alike have failed to robustly engage postcolonial literature. Mary Des Chene (2007) observes that the lack of colonial ethnographic literature to write against delayed the postcolonial critique of early ethnographic projects in Nepal and allowed an orientalist ethnographic tradition to persist much longer in the Himalaya than among, for instance, Indian scholars. Shneiderman (2010), following Des Chene, suggests that without a Western colonial legacy to provide historical context, nor an overt engagement with postcolonial theoretical frameworks, early Western ethnographers working in the Himalaya failed to historically and politically situate their subjects.
James Scott (2009), arguing for a Zomia region comprised of the highland areas of Southeast Asia, observes that ethnographies of Southeast Asia are histories of the state that largely obscure the histories of highland areas.\textsuperscript{19} Further, Scott argues that the “treatment of lowland cultures and societies as self-contained entities . . . replicates the unreflective structure of scholarship and, in doing so, adopts the hermetic view of culture that lowland elites themselves wish to protect” (2009, 27). He observes that, in fact, the histories of Southeast Asia’s lowland centers and highland peripheries are intimately entwined, and their constructions must be understood in dialogue. For Scott, “hill peoples, cannot be understood in isolation, say, as tribes, but only relationally and positionally vis-à-vis valley kingdoms” (2009, 32). In a reversal of James Scott’s (2009) argument for a Zomia, Shneiderman (2010) points out that Himalayan literature has largely focused on ethnographic accountings of local groups within a broader regional cultural formation and with little attention to the role of states, but that Scott’s same conceptual and analytical considerations apply.\textsuperscript{20} That is, early ethnographies in the Himalaya, especially Nepal, are the histories of highland peoples with a near total absence of the state—centered in the relatively lowland valley of Kathmandu. As a result, for Shneiderman, state-periphery relations, and especially highland peoples’ agency vis-à-vis the Nepali state, remain undertheorized.

\textsuperscript{19} Willem Von Schendel (2002) originally proposed a Zomia region to include the highland areas of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and China. Shneiderman points out that it is unclear why Scott limited his discussion of Zomia to Southeast Asia.

\textsuperscript{20} Shneiderman points out that there is “‘curious division of labor’ between Western anthropologists and Nepal historians”: Western anthropologists write the histories of highland peoples, while Nepali scholars write the history of state formation (2010, 296, citing Onta 1993, 30).
Recent ethnographic work in Nepal, especially in light of the democratic transition, has taken on the postcolonial critique in order to better engage highland/village-state relations (cf. Holmberg 2006; Shneiderman 2009). Yet, Pigg (1992) suggests global development forces must also be considered in these relations. Pigg observes that developmentalism in Nepal was and continues to be a significant colonial engagement with the West. As a result, she calls for scholars to approach periphery-state-international relations in the context of critical development scholarship, rather than postcolonial frameworks. Global development forces, including environmental conservation and indigenous political movements, certainly play a significant role in Nepal today. I follow Pigg in examining a tripartite of localized-state-international relations.

While much of the contemporary ethnographic and qualitative research involving peoples living and working in Khumbu, as well as throughout the Himalaya, today has granted greater attention to the role of the state than in the past, the legacy of early ethnographic work persists in shaping our inquiries. Following Fardon (1990), the effects of this legacy persist in delimiting the terrain upon which scholars engage each other, the questions being asked, and the ways places and peoples are conceived. In addition to this, Shneiderman (2010) identifies a second reason scholars have tended to minimize the role of the state. Early Himalayan ethnographers often sought to substitute one part of the Himalaya, and especially Nepal, for another. This is especially true for scholars interested in Tibetan peoples and religions, but who were unable to conduct research in Tibetan areas of China. However, to make such substitutions effective, scholars had to construct a more broadly conceived culture region uninfluenced by the individual states involved—thus
rendering a “timeless and apolitical Himalayan region” (Shneiderman 2010, 294).

Capturing this, Charles Ramble opens his ethnography exploring the complex relationship between Buddhism, paganism (Ramble’s term to describe localized village practices), and civil institutions in Te, Nepal,

Sylvain Lévi notoriously remarked that Nepal (meaning the Kathmandu Valley) was India in the making. By the same token, it could be said that Nepal (meaning the northern borderlands) is a kind of inchoate Tibet. Buddhism entered Central Tibet in the seventh century AD, and proceeded to eliminate or absorb the indigenous beliefs and practices that it encountered. The outer margins of the Tibetan cultural world, located today within the national boundaries of Nepal, might offer examples of the same process at an earlier stage (2008, 3).

Thus, Nepal stands in as a timeless, pre-Chinese occupation Tibet. More pointedly, in The Sherpas of Nepal in the Tibetan cultural context (the title itself exemplifying my point), Robert Paul writes,

In the present study . . . my entire attention is directed to the culture and society of Tibet. I will begin my analysis in that corner of the Tibetan world with which I have direct personal acquaintance, namely, the ethnology of the Sherpas of the Solu-Khumbu region of eastern Nepal (1989, 17).

Similarly, in her first ethnography of Sherpas in Khumbu, Sherry Ortner situates Sherpas in a broader Tibetan culture region absent of state borders or influences. She writes,

. . . In buoyant, outgoing social style as well as in robust physical type, [Sherpas] resemble their own racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious cousins the Tibetans, and differ substantially in both style and physique from the South Asian and the Chinese, the two major groups that bracket the greater Tibetan culture area” (1978, 10).

These passages work to situate Khumbu Sherpas in the Tibetan landscape and, recalling Malkki (1997), attach Sherpa culture to the Tibetan soil. While, at the time, this was accepted, or at least tolerated, practice for studying Tibetan culture and religion while Tibet remained closed, it also contributed to an imaginary of a traditional Sherpa identity
that privileged Buddhism, fixed Khumbu Sherpas in a specific place and time, and largely ignored the relationship between Khumbu Sherpas and the Nepali state. Taken together, each of these moves shapes the ways in which the multiple spaces overlapping in Khumbu are constructed, perceived, and mobilized both from within and outside of Khumbu.

Sherpas through an ethnographic lens

Sir Edmund Hillary once observed that Khumbu is “the most surveyed, examined, blood-taken, anthropologically dissected area in the world” (Stevens 1993, 1, citing Rowell 1980: 61). Indeed, Khumbu Sherpas have been the subjects of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of research projects over the past 60 years.\(^{21}\) The body of literature produced from these projects is broad and growing, as researchers carve out their individual perspective on Sherpas and Khumbu’s dynamic environment. Khumbu Sherpa studies originate with Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf’s ethnography (1964) based on fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequent follow-ups describing change in Sherpa society (1975, 1984), Michael Oppitz’s investigations of Sherpa culture and clan history (1968, 1973), and Sherry Ortner’s research on Sherpa ritual and religion (1978, 1989b). Noteworthy contributions have since built on these early ethnographies. Among these, Inger-Marie Bjønness explores animal husbandry (1980a), the impacts of tourism and the national park on Sherpa culture (1980b, 1983), and Sherpa risk perceptions and adaptation strategies (1986). Similarly, Barbara Brower (1991, 1996) contributes an in-depth look at changing Khumbu Sherpa animal husbandry and pastoral practices and transformation in

---

\(^{21}\) Several university and college study abroad programs ask students to conduct individual research projects in Khumbu, which drives up the numbers of investigations.

While on one hand, this body of research provides insights into the lifeways and practices enabling Khumbu Sherpas to thrive in the harsh Himalayan hinterlands, on the other hand it inadvertently contributes to an ethnographic narrative that works to naturalize relations between Khumbu Sherpas and the environment, thus fixing Sherpas to the Khumbu landscape. I am not denying the strong relationships that many generations of Khumbu residents have fostered with the challenging environment of the High Himalaya, nor do I aim to diminish the contributions and commitments of those scholars whose
tremendous work, observations, and insights my own research rests upon. As Mary Des Chene eloquently writes: “The point is not to attack any particular study but to learn, by examining the whole . . . , about the conditioning influences on our scholarship” (2007, 213 footnote). Rather, I aim to show the ways in which much of this work, especially research prior to 1980, constructs and reinforces a fixed narrative and set of tropes of Khumbu Sherpas, their lifeways, religious beliefs and practices, and social forms that came to stand in as traditional Sherpa culture tied to the Khumbu landscape in later academic work. That is, later ethnographic and qualitative research in Khumbu tends to lament the rise of tourism and introduction of ‘modernity’ as forces corrupting traditional Sherpa lifeways. Further, much of this work limits considerations of the role of the state in Khumbu to the ways that Nepal’s Forest Nationalization Act and the formation of Sagarmatha National Park, as state influences, reworked or interrupted traditional Sherpa lifeways; however, these considerations treat the state, like tourism and modernization, as a force of interruption and dominance over an otherwise fixed Sherpa cultural system, tied to a specific Sherpa place—Khumbu. Shneiderman (2010), however, calls for us to consider the dialogue between the state and the Himalayan hinterlands, not as a conversation of dominance and subjugation, but rather as a process of co-production. I will explore the dynamics of the relations between Khumbu Sherpas and the Nepali state, and the ways in

---

22 Jeremy Spoon (personal communication 2014) suggests we exercise caution when considering human-environment relations in Khumbu. It is important to recall that Sherpas have only been residing in Khumbu for around 500 years, which is a significantly shorter amount of time than other peoples who are thought to demonstrate profoundly deep human-environment relations. While Sherpas have certainly altered the landscape and developed intimate knowledge of the Khumbu environment, we must keep realistic expectations of demonstrable environmental knowledge.
which these relations shape space, more thoroughly in Chapter 3. Likewise, as demonstrated above, much of this work situates Khumbu Sherpas in the Tibetan cultural sphere, which, at the time, privileged Nyingma monastic Buddhism in understandings of religion among Khumbu Sherpas and obscured the complexity of Khumbu Sherpa religion. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will explore that ways in which, like relations with the Nepali state, the complexity of Khumbu Sherpa religion shapes the production and mobilization of space in Khumbu. My point in what follows here is to highlight the production of a traditional Sherpa narrative, the work that narrative performs, and what such a narrative obscures.

*The narrative of the ‘traditional’ Sherpa*

Western scholars began arriving in Khumbu in the mid-20th century, interested in describing the customs and culture of the people living on the Nepal side of Mount Everest. Grounded by Christopher von Fürer-Haimendorf’s original ethnographic project, *The Sherpas of Nepal* (1964), followed closely by Michael Oppitz’s *Geschichte und sozialordnung der Sherpa* (1968), and later by Sherry Ortner’s *Sherpas through their rituals* (1978), researchers and scholars constructed a narrative, a simplified story, of Sherpa migration, settlement, subsistence, and transformation that persists today both within Sherpa society and in academic literature. While the details of the narrative have long been debated, the contours tell the story of how a small group of Tibetan migrants eked out a living in the harsh and isolated environment of the high Himalaya, and today find themselves living a life of relative affluence and prosperity.
The Khumbu Sherpa narrative explains that the first people to arrive in Khumbu were Tibetan migrants from Kham. Historians and most Khumbu Sherpas generally agree that this small group of migrants came to the Khumbu region in the late 15th century and early 16th century with a secondary wave of migrants following in the mid-18th century (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Oppitz 1973; Ortner 1989b). While traveling from Kham, Sherpa ancestors likely stopped for a while in central Tibet, and finally crossed the Nangpa pass—a low point in the Himalayan massif—into the region now known as Khumbu.23 The original migrants’ motivations for leaving Tibet remain subject to speculation. Some suggest Sherpas migrated to escape religious persecution by the dominant, theocratic Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which at the time was subduing other religious movements and especially Bön, Tibet’s dominant pre-Buddhist tradition (Childs 1999; Zangbu 2000; Sherpa 2008). Sherpa ancestors, thought to have practiced Nyingma Buddhism, may have been subject to this persecution as the result of their close relationship with Bön practice (cf. Karmay 1998; Sherpa 2008). Others attribute the Sherpa migration to threats of harm at the hands of the invading Mongol army (Oppitz 1968; Ortner 1989b). These two reasons for the Sherpa migration are not mutually exclusive. Karmay (1998) explains that a Kham Buddhist ruler elicited the assistance of the Mongol army in persecuting Tibet’s non-ruling religious movements, including both Bön and Nyingma practitioners. Some suggest Sherpas journeyed to Khumbu believing it to be a

23 Despite Fisher’s claim that “In those days [Khumbu] was empty, or at least nearly empty, and theirs for the taking.” (1990, 55) Sherpa ancestors may not have been the first visitors or settlers in the Khumbu region. Evidence from soil samples suggest human habitation, or at least use, in Khumbu, either by other ethnic groups or by visiting Sherpas, prior to the 15th century (Byers 1987, 2005); however, both Brower (1991) and L. N. Sherpa (1999) question the validity and interpretation of this evidence.
beyul, a sacred valley where they and their Nyingma beliefs would be protected (Fisher 1990; Brower 1991; Sherpa 2008; Skog 2010). Under such threat and persecution, the Kham Sherpas may have sought the beyul for protection in their time of need. Yet another oral tradition tells of a hunter who pursued a musk deer across the Nangpa pass. For some, the musk deer was an embodiment of Khumbi yullha, the region’s territory deity (Stevens 1993).24

Considerable debate both within the literature and among Sherpas remains as to which of Khumbu’s six main settlements was established first. Nonetheless, Sherpas established permanent settlements at Thame Og, Khunde, Khumjung, Phorste, Pangboche, and, eventually, Nauche. Until recently, most Sherpa families maintained permanent homes in one of these six villages with smaller, secondary homes at higher elevations for use while seasonally moving herds between pastures up and down the valleys, tending to higher elevation agricultural fields, and during trading excursions to the Tibetan plateau. Due to the harsh climatic conditions in the high elevations of the Himalaya, agriculture was limited to barley, buckwheat, and tho (a tuber that is dried and ground into flour for noodles; the leaves may also be fermented), and later, potatoes, which were introduced in the mid-1800s (Brower 1991). Today kitchen gardens and greenhouses boast carrots, greens, turnips, garlic, and green onions. Yak, zom, dzo, and zopkio (Sh. the later three are yak/cow crossbreeds) provided dairy and, occasionally, meat; however, yak, cows, and their

24 There are several other origin stories in the literature, including the possibility that Sherpas actually migrated north from Solu or west from the Rowaling area (Brower 1991); however, I found these narratives to be rare.
crossbreed offspring were valued as beasts of burden, and thus only consumed following unfortunate, and surprisingly frequent, accidents (cf. Childs 2004).

Despite these harsh conditions, Khumbu’s geography—at a crossroad between the Tibetan plateau and the lower hills of the Himalaya and Gangetic plain—proved lucrative to early Sherpa migrants who found themselves serving as middlemen trading salt from the Tibetan plateau for grains from the lowlands. Thus, in addition to pastoralism and agriculture, Sherpa lifeways until the mid-twentieth century were shaped even more by a trading economy linking the Tibetan plateau, Khumbu, and the Gangetic plain. Stevens (1993) points out that until this time many Sherpa families spent four or five of the harsh winter months, sometimes longer, away from Khumbu. Families spent this time on trading excursions or living in the grain-rich south where food was abundant, less expensive, and did not need to be carried back to Khumbu. Stevens further observes that this changed with the decline of the salt trade and beginning of the market in Nauche, which brought goods to Khumbu.

And so it goes that Khumbu Sherpas, through the unintentional efforts of early ethnographies by Western scholars, came to be constructed as ethnically Tibetan Buddhist people living in the high Himalaya and as relatively isolated pastoralists, subsistence agriculturalists, and traders. This narrative fixes Khumbu Sherpas to the Khumbu landscape and a traditional and mythic time, and becomes a yardstick against which to measure authenticity (cf. Nadasdy 2005) and lament change (Ortner 1999).
Sherpas and the rest: Continuing the narrative

The narrative of Khumbu Sherpas continues into the twentieth century with a focus on the rise of mountaineering and tourism. While, indeed, the twentieth century did bring great change to both Sherpa society and the Khumbu landscape, as it did throughout the world, I find the focus on these transformations and lamentations for traditional Sherpa lifeways especially paralyzing in understanding the contemporary dynamics of Khumbu Sherpa society. What I lay out below is a brief overview of Khumbu Sherpa contemporary history in order to illustrate the changes that some scholars lament, but also as an introduction to the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas are indeed not isolated and, rather, are and always have been part of larger networks of trade, mobility, and governance.

Starting in 1800, the British Raj in India took up the project of mapping the Indian subcontinent, surveying the extent of their territory, as well as the prospects for what lay beyond its periphery. In 1852, the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India measured the height of the world’s tallest mountain at 8,848 meters and named it Mount Everest after Sir George Everest, who headed the Survey from the 1820s to the 1840s. Capturing the range of motivations driving early British colonial explorations, Ortner writes, “British activity in the Himalayas always consisted of that particular combination of economic, political, scientific, Orientalist, and ‘sporting’ interests that was characteristic (in different mixes, in different times and places) of the Raj as a whole” (1999, 28).

Throughout the early twentieth century, exploration of the Himalayan range continued in earnest; however Nepal’s borders remained closed to foreigners during this time. Thus, expeditions, especially British, used Darjeeling as a launching pad for their
military-style exploration missions. Khumbu Sherpas traveled to Darjeeling seeking work on these expeditions and other entrepreneurial endeavors.

With the overthrow of the Rana regime and the return of the Shah monarchy in Nepal, the mid-twentieth century saw the opening of the Hindu Himalayan kingdom to tourists and trekkers. Concomitantly, the occupation of Tibet by China closed Tibet’s border to foreigners, including mountaineers, as well as traders. Thus, as legal trading between Khumbu and Tibet was stifled, the opportunities of the tourism and mountaineering economy came to Khumbu as expeditions shifted their attention to Nepal’s southern approaches to the Himalayan peaks, particularly Mount Everest. It was during this time that Tenzing Norgay and New Zealander Edmund Hillary became the first two men to stand atop Mount Everest—having successfully approached it from the southern side in Khumbu.25

This moment in time, and shift in the geopolitics of High Asia, forever transformed the Khumbu environment and marked a significant moment of negotiation in Sherpa lifeways. Khumbu Sherpas no longer had to travel to Darjeeling in seek of expedition work; rather, expeditions were trekking over two weeks from Kathmandu to Khumbu, and hiring Sherpas for various roles, including sirdars (Nep., expedition logistics managers), porters, cooks, and guides. In addition, with the arrival of expeditions in Khumbu, families rented out their land as camping sites, their homes as lodges, and their livestock as beasts of burden. In doing so, families generated even more income.

25 Debate remains around whether or not Tenzing Norgay and Hillary were truly the first two men to reach the top of Mount Everest. It is unclear if Mallory and Irvine reached the summit before perishing on the mountain in 1924.
Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the mountaineering and trekking industry in Khumbu continued to grow. The early years of Khumbu mountaineering brought an increasing, yet limited, number of dedicated and skilled climbers to the Himalaya and a handful of researchers; however, these numbers dramatically increased with the construction of the airstrip at Lukla. Originally built in 1964 to aid in the delivery of supplies for Sir Edmund Hillary's project of building schoolhouses in Khumbu, the airstrip unintentionally opened a floodgate for tourism in Khumbu (Fisher 1990). Prior to construction of the airstrip at Lukla, travel between Nepal’s capital, and only international airport at Kathmandu, and Nauche took 7-10 days by foot; however, the airstrip at Lukla cut this to a 40-minute flight followed by a 1-2 day hike to Nauche. Thus, from 20 foreign trekkers in 1964, to 3,200 in 1972-3 to more than 30,000 in 2011 (DNPWC), mountaineering and trekking generated increased wealth for some Khumbu Sherpa families. Of further note is that the increase in trekkers, mountaineers, and other foreigners was accompanied by an increase of support staff, including porters, cooks, and guides) in Khumbu. It is generally estimated that, during the early days of Khumbu trekking and mountaineering, 1.7 to 3 Nepali support staff accompanied each visitor (Brower 1991).

The main trekking route to Everest Base Camp (EBC) follows the Dudh Kosi river through Pharak to Nauche then to Tengboche and Pangboche. Just past Pangboche, the route shifts north to follow the Khumbu glacier to the base of Mount Everest. Laying along the eastern side of Khumbu, and bypassing the western and central villages of Thame Og, Khumjung, and Khunde, the financial benefits of renting out one’s land and home were
reaped by those families living along this trekking route. Over time, families with land along this main trekking route have invested the income generated by tourism into expanding their homes into lodges, in some cases luxury lodges complete with en suite bathrooms and showers, teahouses, shops, and internet cafes. For many families living off the main trekking route, access to the growing tourism industry in Khumbu was limited to working on expeditions and renting their herds as pack animals to carry expedition gear along the route (though this was complicated by land owners along the trekking route who would only allow their own herds and those of their family members to graze on their land). By the late twentieth century, the uneven access to the various forms of wealth-generation available as part of the tourism economy in Khumbu exacerbated a growing economic disparity between those Khumbu Sherpas living along the EBC trekking route and those living off the route—a disparity that can be traced to Khumbu Sherpas' involvement in trans-Himalayan trade for at least two centuries (Ortner 1989b, 1999; Spoon 2008).

Along with social transformations fueled by the growth of the tourism and the mountaineering economy in Khumbu, the mass of mountaineers and trekkers, and their Nepali support staff, to the region has also transformed the environment in new ways. Most significant in the early days of Khumbu trekking and mountaineering was the amount of firewood cut and gathered for cooking and heating by expeditions and trekking groups. This unsustainable demand was only partially mitigated as Sherpa families began opening up their homes as teahouses and lodges. Sagarmatha National Park was established in 1976 in part to address the environmental concerns associated with the rise of trekking (and, as I
will demonstrate in Chapter 3, as a state revenue claim on the growth of tourism in the region). Restrictions on the collection of firewood were among the first of the new park’s regulations. Today, trekking groups and expeditions rarely use firewood for cooking; rather, most cooking is done in lodges over propane flown in from Kathmandu or electric burners. The concern over wood cutting and fodder collection has shifted from over-harvesting to a general complaint by Khumbu Sherpas that it is too highly regulated and restricted to one period of 15-days each year during which they are allowed to cut firewood.26

In addition to environmental transformation, some evidence points to transformations in Khumbu Sherpas’ attitudes toward the environment, as well as environmental knowledge. Informants state that their most pressing environmental concern is rubbish. The increase in wealth within the Khumbu Sherpa community has increased consumption of consumer goods and packaged foods—on the one hand a sign of wealth; on the other hand, much of the packaged food stuffs in household kitchens is left behind or sold by climbing and trekking expeditions, which creates increased waste, including plastic bottles and wrappings. In addition, trekkers produce waste in the form of plastic water bottles, candy wrappers, batteries, etc. Finally, Sherpas complain that non-Khumbu Sherpa porters and other tourism support staff litter the trails with snack wrappers and cigarette butts. To address these concerns and concerns over pollution at Everest Base Camp, Khumbu Sherpas formed the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee

26 In 2013, the national park allowed a second period of collection because the electricity was turned off between May and September for the villages of Nauche and Thame Og in order to upgrade a local hydroelectric dam. The additional collection period was provided as compensation and to collect alternative fuel during this time.
(SPCC) in 1993. Today, SPCC works in each of the six villages to collect household waste, organize village and trail cleanups, seek innovative ways to deal with Khumbu’s garbage, and manage permits and cleanups at EBC during the climbing season.

Further, a noticeable shift has occurred in the ways in which many Khumbu Sherpas speak about both time and place in Khumbu. For instance, Ang Norbu, a Nauche elder, measures the summer monsoon in a series of stages (Figure 8). Yet, Ang Norbu’s marking of time during the monsoon is rare among Khumbu Sherpas today. Most informants differentiate time between the “off-season” and “the season” relative to the trekking season. Likewise, many informants differentiate locations in Khumbu relative to the EBC trekking route. I highlight these transformations, not to lament change, but rather to highlight transformations. My efforts above acknowledge recent transformations in social structures and environmental attitudes as part of ongoing social adaptation, negotiation, and reconfiguration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section of time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Notable activities or warnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tukha</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>Start of the monsoon; water is poison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>15 days</td>
<td>Water is like medicine; time for bathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbar</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phak</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>Celebrate Phakne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbar</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>Sometimes very good weather during this time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whashok</td>
<td>15 days</td>
<td>The Himalayan blue poppies bloom. Naks eat these and produce good butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbar</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoon</td>
<td>21 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma Ripsha</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>Time for washing; water is like medicine, but crops can die if rained on during this time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Ang Norbu’s measuring the time during the monsoon (Field notes 2013).
This narrative of Sherpa history, despite being contested and highly simplified, demonstrates that Sherpas were neither isolated nor insulated in a remote region of the Himalaya. Rather, Khumbu Sherpas’ history of migration, regional trade, and relations with foreign trekkers and mountaineers situates them within much broader networks. The disparity in wealth between families living on and off the trekking route has also led to a disparity in the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas engage in global networks. That is, some Khumbu are highly mobile on an international scale. In many cases, Khumbu Sherpas spend only 2-3 months (usually the Spring trekking season) in Khumbu and the remainder of the year in Kathmandu or living abroad in Japan, Europe, or North America. In time, scholars have come to recognize some of the larger networks and forces in which Khumbu Sherpas are, and always have been, engaged; yet, the narrative of Khumbu Sherpas as a once isolated, disconnected, self-sustaining, and as a traditional group of people persists.

None of this discussion is to say that Sherpas themselves have not been complicit in the very constructions that fix a Sherpa identity to Khumbu. Aside from literature produced by Sherpa academics and monastic leaders describing a traditional Sherpa culture embedded in the Khumbu landscape, Sherpas themselves, and especially those working in the tourism and trekking industry, construct an essentialized Sherpa identity that has come to serve a global imaginary about the people living in Khumbu (Adams 1996; Ortner 1999). Evidence of such constructions are apparent in Tengboche’s Mani Rimdu festival, which is now performed in the height of the autumn trekking season, rather than late spring/early summer when it is performed in two of Khumbu’s other monasteries, so that tourists can witness ‘traditional’ Sherpa culture (Figure 9). Similarly, the climbing pujas performed at
Everest Base Camp (Ortner 1999) and the cultural shows presented in several villages for trekkers wishing to view traditional Sherpa culture perpetuate the traditional Tibetan Buddhist Sherpa narrative. I was struck by the range of this imaginary as a global narrative as I found myself typing field notes in Nauche on my computer powered by a ‘Sherpa’ model solar battery converter and wearing a Sherpa™ brand hat and insulation layer—none of which were obtained in Nepal. Moreover, upon returning to the U.S., I received an offer for a GlobeSherpa™ mobile phone plan. Indeed, on a global stage, the Sherpa narrative has been co-opted to represent ruggedness and durability in harsh conditions, and further serves to fix Sherpas in place and time.

Figure 9. A Mani Rimdu performer turns his camera on the tourists during a comedic interlude. Photograph by the author.
While it is seemingly contradictory to suggest a global imaginary, or global brand—as a deterritorialized signifier, can work to fix identity in place, in this case the deterritorialized signifier of ‘Sherpa’ is specifically meant to evoke persistence, durability, reliability, and strength in the extreme conditions on Mount Everest—that is, a set of desirable qualities linked to a specific place. For example, the Sherpa Adventure Gear website states that the company and its products are inspired by the following:

Today, every climber in his heart is grateful for having a Sherpa companion on the treacherous slopes of the Himalayas. For it is the Sherpa who makes the route, carries the load and lays the rope all the way to the top and back. They risk their lives for a pittance and smile through the life-threatening ordeals on the flanks of Everest and surrounding peaks. ([http://www.sherpaadventuregear.com/about/we-are-sherpa/](http://www.sherpaadventuregear.com/about/we-are-sherpa/))

This Sherpa Adventure Gear advertising connects the Sherpa products with the imaginary of a Sherpa—a reliable, pleasant, hard-working and strong, and brave “companion”.

Problematically, the narrative of the traditional Sherpa has led to the lament of loss of traditional Sherpa culture both within and outside of Khumbu Sherpa society. Von Furer-Haimendorf (1984) offers an unsympathetic account of the ‘corruption’ of Khumbu Sherpa society in the face of great change and the coming of modernity. Likewise, Adams (1996) argues that Khumbu Sherpas have sacrificed themselves in an effort to remake themselves into what they think Westerners want them to be. More broadly, the Beyul Campaign itself may be understood as a lament for the loss of traditional Sherpa culture. The focus on change in Khumbu and in Sherpa society seems inevitable—as indeed, among peoples everywhere, change is constant and always has been. Yet, the narrative of Sherpa corruption denies Sherpas’ agency in those transformations (Obadia 2008). Ortner (1999), however, contests the narrative of Sherpa cultural corruption by suggesting that the
cultural politics of Sherpas engagements with Western mountaineers, which she sees as paralleling Khumbu Sherpas’ interactions with Tibetan Buddhism, is better thought of as “remaking” or “reconfiguration,” rather than corruption or loss. Nonetheless, the narrative of a traditional Sherpa against which to measure change misrepresents Sherpa history and the historical, political, and spatial conjunctures shaping Khumbu Sherpa society today. That is, the narrative fixes Khumbu Sherpas into a specific place and mythic time, and in doing so, depicts Khumbu Sherpas mobility outside of Khumbu as out of place, and contemporary adaptation and socio-political negotiations as inauthentic (Nadasdy 2005).

The tension of this narrative, and its strength and persistence, became apparent as I sat with Tengboche Rinpoche for interviews in 2010 and 2013. On both occasions, the Rinpoche briefly answered three of my open-ended interview questions, but dodged my attempt to engage him in more sustained conversation. He then quickly turned his attention to my research assistants—both in their early 20s—and explained to them that they were at a crossroad and needed to decide if they were going to stay in Khumbu and follow traditional Sherpa lifeways of herding and trading, or if they were going to choose “Western” lifeways. To drive the point home, the Rinpoche explained that if the young Sherpas chose the latter, as others he named had done, they would “no longer be Sherpa” (Interview 2013).

Conclusion

Early ethnographies of Khumbu Sherpas have had several effects. First, they have fixed Sherpas in time by constructing a traditional Sherpa narrative. That is to say, the
narrative constructed both by researchers and Sherpas themselves establishes a set of traits, beliefs, and practices defining a Sherpa identity. Moreover, these tropes define an essentialized and traditional Sherpa culture against which all other transformations are measured. Second, early ethnographic projects fixed Sherpas to the Khumbu landscape, suggesting that they are out of place anywhere else, and that anyone else is out of place in Khumbu, restricting understandings of Sherpas as mobile and migratory. I use the word restrict because, indeed ethnographers have long acknowledged the trading networks with which Khumbu Sherpas engage and that Sherpas migrated from Tibet to Khumbu; however, such accounts limit the extent to which trading, and other migratory activities, shape Sherpa lifeways. In doing so, these works undertheorize the ways in which Sherpas and broader regional and global networks with which they are in dialogue are mutually constituted. Recalling Appadurai (1988), the trope of Sherpa adaptation to the harsh Himalaya through animal husbandry, subsistence agriculture, and a unique niche in the regional salt/grain trade, “is actually also the language of incarceration” (37).

Moreover, these works contribute to constructions of a traditional Sherpa necessary for mobilizations of Khumbu as a beyul. That is, in order to mobilize Khumbu as a sacred landscape in environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political discourses, Khumbu Sherpas, their beliefs, and practices must also be understood as ahistorical and apolitical. In this way, mobilizations of Beyul Khumbu both rely on and perpetuate the narrative of the traditional Sherpa.

Inspired by Ortner, I extend her project over the remaining chapters in two ways: (1) I demonstrate the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the Nepali state,
which I understand as historically, socially, and spatially contingent positionings, shape the production of Khumbu as a state and capitalist space; and (2) I demonstrate that the cultural politics of Khumbu Sherpa engagements with Tibetan Buddhism and animistic and shamanistic lay traditions—what I refer to as the cultural politics of religion—play out, in part, in spatial practices and the production of Khumbu as both an animate territory and sacred landscape.
Chapter 3: Khumbu Sherpas and the state

Timeline of Khumbu Sherpa and state relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>Gorkha acquisition of much of eastern Nepal, including SoluKhumbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Kot Massacre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1950</td>
<td>Rana Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Muluki Ain civil code imposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Indian Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Collapse of the Rana regime; return of the Shah monarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-1960</td>
<td>First constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-1990</td>
<td>Second constitution; Panchayat Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>First known summit of Mount Everest by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Founding of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Janandolean I; Third constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2005</td>
<td>Nepalese Civil War/People's War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Implementation of Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Janandolean II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Interim constitution; monarchy abolished; Nepal declared a secular, democratic state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the legacy of ethnographic work in the Himalaya and specifically in Khumbu inadvertently worked to construct Khumbu Sherpas as apolitical, timeless, and fixed in place, thus essentializing relations between Sherpas and the Khumbu environment and constructing an imaginary of a ‘traditional’ Sherpa, which became a yardstick against which to measure change in Khumbu and among Khumbu Sherpas. Following Sara Shneiderman’s (2010) assertion that Himalayan ethnography has largely ignored Nepali’s highland peoples’ relationships with the Nepali state, I demonstrated that early ethnographic projects in Khumbu largely ignored the role of the
state, which has informed a legacy of undertheorizing the dialogue between Sherpas living in Khumbu and the Nepali state. The undertheorization of state dynamics with Khumbu Sherpas restricts our understanding of Khumbu Sherpas’ contemporary positioning vis-à-vis the Nepali state.

In what follows I trace Khumbu Sherpa relations with the state over the past 240 years. I primarily follow Sherry Ortner’s (1989b, 1999) political economic analysis of the foundings of Khumbu’s Nyingma monasteries and Stan Stevens’ (1993) investigations of human-environment relations in Khumbu to lay out this history. My analysis continues where they leave off, however, and traces Khumbu Sherpa relations with the Nepali state into the democratic transition era. Based on Khumbu Sherpa relations with the state I examine the ways in which Khumbu is produced as both a state and capitalist space, as well as the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas’ positionings vis-à-vis the state and international community are spatially contingent. Five aspects of space and spatiality shape Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the Nepali state: (1) Khumbu’s location at the base of Mount Everest and difficult accessibility from other parts of Nepal, as well as on a main trading route between Tibet and India; (2) the shift in migration and movement of people as a result of the closing of Tibet’s border with Nepal and the concomitant opening of Nepal’s borders in the mid-twentieth century; (3) the rise of mountaineering as a result of colonial interest in territorial expansion; (4) rise of tourism resulting from increased accessibility after the construction of an airport at Lukla; and (5) the formation of Sagarmatha National Park, which constructed Khumbu as a state space, conservation space, and capitalist space.
**Early state formation**

From the early sixteenth century and continuing for the first 200 years of Sherpa settlement in Khumbu, Sherpas, like other ethnic groups settling in the mountains, remained autonomous, but not isolated, from broader political forces, as they carved their homeland out of the rugged Himalayan landscape by combining agriculture, pastoralism, and, especially, trade over the Nangpa pass (Brower 1991). Trade between the Tibetan plateau and the lower hills, as well as the exchange of monks and monastic teachers between Khumbu and proximate monasteries on the Tibetan plateau situated Sherpas within regional networks (Ortner 1989b). During this time and until the mid-eighteenth century, the Himalayan expanse was a patchwork of independent, ethnically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups and kingdoms. Like the first Sherpa migrants to Khumbu, many of these groups sought refuge among the Himalayan mountains and hills from persecution in central Asia or from the Mughals on the Indian plain (Brower 1991).

Oral traditions among Khumbu Sherpas explain that SoluKhumbu came under the control of a local Sen King, Makwan Sher, in the early eighteenth century; however, evidence suggests this was a weak control with little consequence for Khumbu Sherpas (Ortner 1989b). In 1743, however, following state- and empire-building trends throughout Asia at the time, Prithvi Narayan Shah, ruler of Gorkha—a Himalayan kingdom approximately 80 kilometers west of Kathmandu—began his conquest of the surrounding independent kingdoms, seizing the three Malla-ruled kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769. Following his conquest of the Kathmandu valley, Prithvi Narayan Shah continued to expand his empire through treaties and military strategy. Along with much of what is now
eastern Nepal, SoluKhumbu was likely acquired by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1772 as part of his diplomatic seizure of the Sen kingdom, as well as other surrounding kingdoms (Ortner 1989b). Subsequent Shah rulers, as incarnations of the Hindu deity Lord Vishnu, continued expanding the Gorkha Empire into current-day Sikkim to the east and present-day India to the west.

As the Gorkha Empire grew, Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors ‘granted’ acquired land, along with its inhabitants, to military officials, royal family members and other elites, as well as religious officials and institutions. Ignoring indigenous and commonly held land claims, such grants required residents pay taxes to the grantee, turning peasant cultivators into tenants. Jagir (Nep.) land was granted, especially to military officials, in place of salary for the duration of the official’s appointment, while a similar though more prestigious birta (Nep.) land grant continued in perpetuity. Finally, gutha (Nep.) land grants were made to religious institutions and officials in order to support religious activities. This system continued to exploit and disenfranchise conquered peoples of land and resources, resulting in economic marginalization, until it was abolished in 1959. At that time, an estimated 17% of Nepal’s forestland was under private control through the land grant system (Stevens 1993). In areas deemed not suitable for jagir, birta, or gutha grants, either because of difficult access or local resistance and hostilities, a state designation of kipat (Nep.) recognized indigenous and local control of land, which served to territorialize those lands through indirect control (Burghart 1984; Diemberger 1997).

Likely the result of the difficulty in reaching the upper regions of SoluKhumbu, Khumbu Sherpas experienced little exploitation as a result of land grants; however, the
Gorkhas, and later the Rana regime, still held interest in Khumbu, likely resulting from its location on key trade routes with Tibet as well as its tax revenue potential from trade (Ortner 1989b). A series of letters sent under the Gorkha (Shah family) Monarch’s royal seal confirming ownership and establishing tax and labor obligations are the first evidence of state claims to SoluKhumbu. A letter dated 1786 acknowledges Sherpa ancestors purchased their land holdings from Sunuwars and Kiratis²⁷, stating,

... We hereby reconfirm these purchases. Use these lands with full assurance and maintain them properly. Pay taxes and provide labor services (Regmi 1975, 123).

Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1975) suggests this letter establishes SoluKhumbu as kapat land, but that the term kapat was not yet in use at the time of its writing. As such, this letter is best understood as a political technology of state formation, or an instrument of territorialization. By “reconfirming” ownership and granting use of Khumbu land to Sherpas, the Gorkha king assumed ultimate domain of SoluKhumbu, including the right to grant use and acknowledge property (Regmi 1975). Doing so territorialized SoluKhumbu into the Gorkha Empire—the nascent Nepali state.

Similarly, a letter dated 1810 suggests the presence of state officials in Khumbu, including a hierarchy of tax collectors. Local tax collectors (Sh. pembu; Nep. dware) were appointed from among elite Sherpas, while a non-Sherpa state official was assigned to coordinate and monitor pembu (Sh. gembu; Nep. amali) (Regmi 1979; Ortner 1989b). An 1828 letter details taxes to be collected on lands in Khumbu as well as dictating that all trade from mid-April through mid-November in Khumbu must be conducted in the market

²⁷ While this may have happened in the southern regions of Solu, it is debatable if land was purchased in Khumbu, as it is also debatable as to whether or not there had been inhabitants prior to Sherpa arrival (Brower 1991; Byers 2005).
and under the supervision of both a *pembu* and the *gembu* (Regmi 1975). Ortner (1989b) suggests that the requirement to conduct all trade during the agricultural season through the Nauche market likely provided the opportunity to collect taxes on the transactions. Such taxation and trade regulations served to further territorialize Khumbu within the Gorkha Empire.

Ortner (1989b) interprets the arrival of a *gembu* in Khumbu as indicative of a number of changes both within Sherpa society and in relations with the state. To begin, Ortner interprets the state’s appointment of a *gembu* as an indication of an abundance of local elite tax collectors, lucrative positions indicative of increased wealth, especially among Sherpa traders in Khumbu. Ortner suggests a combination of factors likely leading to the growth of trade in Khumbu. While a surge of migrants from Tibet in the 1700s certainly contributed to increased trade, for Ortner the increase in wealth may be the direct result of an excess of sons left landless by Sherpa inheritance structures. Ortner explains that Khumbu Sherpa families divide their land holdings equally among sons, but that such divisions create increasingly smaller land holdings that, in time, are unable to support a family. As a result, Sherpa families seek alternative ways to avoid the division of the family land holdings or generate additional income to support their own families. Such strategies include sending a son to join the monastic community as a monk, and thus forfeiting his inheritance, and fraternal polyandry (marrying brothers to one woman) in order to combine the land holdings in support of a single family, though this is less common today than a generation ago. Similarly, becoming a full-time trader provides a means to support a family either by generating income to purchase necessary goods or to purchase additional
land. Unlike trade routes located more proximate and accessible to state control in Kathmandu, Khumbu Sherpas’ monopoly on trade passing through the region increased the wealth and status of some Sherpa men, whose families, over several generations, have been able to parlay that wealth into lucrative business opportunities and ultimately tourism, thus laying the groundwork for Khumbu Sherpas’ unique positioning among Nepal’s indigenous peoples today.28

Concomitant to the growth of the Gorkha Empire, wealth among Khumbu Sherpa traders continued to grow under the Shah monarch. Yet, despite tax impositions and occasional collection of resources, Khumbu’s geographic isolation buffered Khumbu Sherpas from the reach of the nascent state thus allowing them to remain relatively autonomous for at least another century (Brower 1996; Ortner 1999; Sherpa 2008).

Against dominant narratives of Nepali history depicting Shah expansionism as a process of unification, John Whelpton (2005) suggests that it may be better understood as the start of the process of “Hinduization” in Nepal (a project taken on in earnest by the subsequent Rana regime), which has led to the legacy of cultural and structural discrimination, exclusion, and disenfranchisement arguably at the root of Nepal’s indigenous political and identity movements today. Indeed, Shah expansionism did not result in national unity; however, the conquests of the Gorkha state did establish the political authority of the caste hill Hindu elites, who continue to dominate Nepal’s government today (Hangen and Lawoti 2013). Frederick Gaige (1975) suggests that “Nepalization” would better describe this process; however, the term Nepali as an indicator

28 For other Khumbu Sherpas, trade relations with the British in Darjeeling served a similar purpose.
of a unified nationalism was not used until the early twentieth century when the Shamsher Ranas attempted to construct a singular Nepali identity in order to legitimize their rule (Whelpton 2005).

Shah kings tended to die young, leaving regents to rule in the place of infant and child successors. In-fighting among the regents left power vacuums, which were filled over time by the Rana line—a powerful aristocratic family that had grown to perpetually occupy the position of Prime Minister (Parajulee 2000). As the power of the monarch diminished, the power of the Rana prime ministers increased.

Concomitantly, throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and under the control of the British government by that time, the British East India Company's economic influence in the Himalaya steadily increased. The British had long been interested in securing a trans-Himalayan trade route, and were especially concerned with Gorkha expansion both east and west, thus potentially monopolizing all trade routes with Tibet. Following a brief war between Nepal and the British from 1814-16, the British wrested control of Sikkim from Nepal and returned it to the rule of a local king, who became a British dependent (Ortner 1989b). Disinterested in direct control of Nepal, likely because of its difficult terrain, the British opted to allow the Shah monarchy to continue internal rule in exchange for an annual recruitment of Gorkha solders and control of Nepal’s external affairs (Ortner 1989b). Driven in part by disagreements between the Shah monarch and the Ranas over the ongoing role of the British in Nepal, the 1846 Kot Massacre left much of the nobility dead, and ended with Jana Bahadur Rana claiming the title of Maharaja, though retaining the Shah monarch as a powerless figurehead (Ortner
Thus ended the House of Gorkha’s political power and began the 105-year Rana rule of Nepal. Until this point, it is clear to see the ways in which Khumbu’s position on the main trading route between Tibet and areas south of the Himalaya combined with the difficulty in accessing Khumbu shaped Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the nascent Nepali state.

*The Rana era*

With Rana control came British dependency for Nepal. Nepal’s foreign affairs continued to be managed through Great Britain, but the Ranas closed Nepal’s borders, which reinforced Nepal’s isolation (Ortner 1989b). Internally, the Ranas increased the central government’s ability to collect taxes, as well as exploit labor and resources, in order to support unparalleled excess and extravagant lifestyles. Indeed, many have demonstrated that the Ranas were solely concerned with increasing and collecting taxes in order to fuel their own wealth. Economic exploitation of non-CHHE, including indigenous peoples, in the form of tax and labor obligations drove the division between Nepal’s elites and disenfranchised further apart. As Kathryn March (2011, personal communication) has pointed out, “Rana luxury [was literally] carried on others’ backs,” and led to dramatic social division between those who “carried”—as in carrying loads of other peoples’ goods and property—and those who did not (Pigg 1992). This was the case especially for peoples living in and around the Kathmandu Valley, like Tamangs (Holmberg, March, and Tamang 1999; Holmberg 2006).
Unlike the Shah monarchy, the Rana regime could not claim divine mandate to rule. The Ranas, therefore, sought legitimacy by situating themselves as the ruling family of a singular, unified, and constructed Nepali nation-state (Whelpton 2005). Whelpton (2005) suggests this is the likely reason for officially naming the country “Nepal” and the official language “Nepali,” rather than “Gorkha” and “Gorkhali.” Despite these gestures, one of the main challenges faced by the Ranas at the time, and one that persists today, is the legacy of conquest that both divides and ties the country together. Recalling that Nepal is comprised of a patchwork of conquered kingdoms, the nascent state includes a range of diverse languages, religions, and ethnicities. As a result, the imposition of a singular Nepali identity—regardless of definition—is an exclusionary practice that is often pointed to as a factor leading to democratic revolution in Nepal.

As one of the first overt acts of “Hinduization,” or “Nepalization” in Nepal, Jana Bahadur Rana institutionalized a Hindu caste system in the form of the 1854 *Muluki Ain* civil code, which served to project a singular Hindu Nepali nationalism by placing all peoples in Nepal within a Hindu worldview and further secured the dominance of the CHHE (Hangen 2007; Hangen and Lawoti 2013). Under this civil code, “tribal natives,” including Tibeto-Burman groups like Sherpas, were divided into pure and impure castes based on alcohol consumption, and further divided into enslaveable and non-enslaveable groups. Sherpas were classified as impure, enslaveable, non-Hindus and as such were among the lowest in Nepal’s social hierarchy (Ortner 1999; Spoon 2008).

In addition to institutionalizing a Hindu caste system throughout Nepal, Richard Burghart (1984) argues the 1854 *Muluki Ain* civil code further worked to construct Nepal
as a unified territory by reconceptualizing the realm’s ethnic peoples from “territorial bodies (Nep. des)” to “social bodies (Nep. ḫāt)” [sic]. For Burghart, the Shah monarchs conceptualized the Gorkha Empire as a collection of countries (Nep. des) within their realm and possession whereas the Rana project of nation-state building required a unified social body. The *Muluki Ain* civil code, therefore, referred to Nepal’s ethnic groups as *jaat* (typically translated as *caste*), while continuing to use *des* to refer to territories or countries outside of Nepal. For example, the Newar people of *Nepal des* (at the time, Nepal referred only to the Kathmandu Valley) became the Newar *jaat* under the civil code. Burghart explains, “the intracultural rewording of ethnic countries as species served the interests of the state by eliminating the territorial basis of the one immutable territorial unit whose legitimacy was not determined by state intervention” (1984, 117). By disrupting the connection between peoples and territory embodied by the term *des*, the *Muluki Ain* civil code set the stage for the Rana regime to reconstruct the Gorkha Empire as a unified *des*—Nepal. The Nepali caste system is now unlawful, yet the discriminatory social practices, institutionalized legacies of exclusion, and lack of government recognition of ethnic groups’ connections to territory remain.

In the early 1900s, the Rana project of constructing a singular Nepali nationalism and state took on new meaning as a reaction to social and democratic movements elsewhere, including decolonization on the African continent and independence movements in India. As Nepali temporary workers returned from India and Gorkha soldiers returned from serving in the British army during World Wars I and II, they introduced the rising tide of liberal ideals and democracy. Such contact with social
movements outside Nepal inspired similar movements in Nepal; however, the Ranas were quick to extinguish such movements, thus forcing them underground (Parajulee 2000). Following World War II, anti-Rana movements became emboldened by Asian and African colonies’ demands for independence from colonial rule. In 1948, the Nepali National Congress (NC) was formed in Calcutta, India. This assembly of Nepali elites and intellectuals, who had fled Nepal under Rana rule, demanded the end of Rana rule and the return of King Tribhuvan, the Shah king. At the same time, India’s newly independent government did not support autocratic Rana rule in Nepal and pressured the Ranas to liberalize. In an effort to retain Rana rule at a time when democratic waves were sweeping through much of Asia, Padma Shamsher drafted Nepal’s first constitution and held the first elections in Kathmandu in 1948 in order to demonstrate the liberalization of the Rana regime. Yet, this constitution was never enforced as Padma Shamsher resigned later that same year.

Following Padma Shamsher, ‘hard-liner’ Mohan Shamsher became the last of the Rana rulers. Mohan Shamsher, like many of the Rana leaders before him, ignored the external and internal pressures calling for change. Under Mohan Shamsher, King Tribhuvan escaped to India with the support of the newly independent Indian government. King Tribhuvan’s exile to India further fueled the anti-Rana movement.

In addition to the external pressure to liberalize, internally the period of Rana rule, like the Shah monarchy, was plagued by infighting and intrigue as each successive Maharaja and prime minister worked to buttress and consolidate his power and authority.
Finally, the regime collapsed in 1950 following the withdrawal of the British from India and with it the withdrawal of British support for the Ranas.

*Meanwhile, in Khumbu (and Darjeeling)…*

During the Rana era, economic opportunities in Darjeeling, India provided increased wealth for some Khumbu Sherpas, as well as yet another release valve for the pressures of inheritance for Sherpa families. Following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16, the British established a ‘hill’ station at Darjeeling. Following further British intrusion, Sikkim’s relations with the British deteriorated and British troops conquered the region, making it an Indian state by 1865. The British then went about constructing roads and railways, which stretched to the main trade roads on the Indian plain and across the Himalayan passes to Tibet.

The massive infrastructure projects in Sikkim provided several opportunities for Khumbu Sherpas to increase their wealth. First, Khumbu Sherpas with the financial and social means—typically traders—traveled to Darjeeling where they set themselves up as labor contractors supplying workforces for construction projects and similar entrepreneurial ventures. Likewise, those Sherpas with limited or no capital traveled to Darjeeling for wage labor and small economic ventures such as setting up tea stands or driving rickshaws. Others were able to expand their wealth through increased trade relations at the time. That is, much of the labor force for British projects in Darjeeling came from the Terai region of southern Nepal—an end point for Sherpa traders bringing horses and salt from Tibet. Ortner (1989b) suggests some Terai workers from this region may
have been able to send wages home from work in Darjeeling, and these wages were used to purchase Sherpa trade goods.

Finally, while British explorations in the Himalaya, fueled by colonial ambitions, had been ongoing for some time, the early twentieth century brought the first mountaineering expeditions. Such expeditions used Darjeeling as a launching pad for their military-style exploration missions. Sherpa men and women, along with people from many of Nepal’s indigenous groups, traveled to Darjeeling seeking work on these expeditions. Early travel journals and reports from these expeditions specifically laud the skill of Sherpas from SoluKhumbu and it was not long before SoluKhumbu Sherpas were the only porters and workers hired for expeditions (Ortner 1989b, 1999). Ortner suggests the wages for such expedition work were significantly higher than other wage labor work, and likely generated disposable income for even less wealthy Khumbu families.

Overall, at a time when exploitative Rana excess was resulting in social, economic, and environmental marginalization for many non-CHHE groups in Nepal, favorable relations between the Rana regime and the British, as well as increased British presence in the region, led to increased wealth among many Khumbu Sherpa families. This is not, however, to say Khumbu Sherpas were completely exempt from the exploitation of the Rana regime. Despite some tax and labor exemptions, Khumbu Sherpas indeed experienced increased taxes and hardship, yet, for many, there were internal and external economic opportunities that resulted in great wealth (Ortner 1989). Ortner (1989) goes on to show that Khumbu’s distance from the state and the government’s desire to maintain good relations with Sherpas in order to secure the Khumbu trade routes to Tibet meant that they were not as
heavily burdened by tax and labor obligations as other groups closer to the government’s seat in Kathmandu. Indeed, Ortner asserts “Sherpas gave up very little of their collective product to the state” (1989b, 154). Nor were Khumbu Sherpas ever dominated and forced to give up part of their labor or products to another ethnic group, as was the case for Limbus.

Thus, some Khumbu Sherpas were able to significantly increase their wealth through favorable trade conditions—conditions made possible both by the British Raj and the Nepali state’s granting of trading rights across the Nangpa pass to Tibet. For Ortner, attention to the political economic relations between Khumbu Sherpas, the Nepali state, and the British Raj at this time explains the increase in wealth among some Khumbu Sherpas, which Ortner shows led to the founding of the first monastery in Khumbu in 1916. This event is not inconsequential to this research project as whole—as it was with the founding of this monastery that the Nyingma ideological understanding of Khumbu as a beyul was likely introduced in the region; however, my interest in this history lies elsewhere.

This history demonstrates the significance of spatially contingent conjunctures in Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the Nepali state. Khumbu’s situation on one of the main trans-Himalayan trade routes allowed for Khumbu Sherpas to centrally embed themselves in regional trade circuits. Further, some Khumbu Sherpas were able to migrate to Darjeeling where they could invest their wealth in endeavors associated with the expansion of the British Empire. Yet, this alone did not ensure their fortune; rather, the inaccessibility of Khumbu—both in terms of distance from the seat of state authority and
the challenges of difficult terrain and climatic conditions, including the heavy summer monsoon and cold winter temperatures—deterred direct claims by the state on either trade or land. Thus, the spatially contingent conjuncture of Khumbu’s location and inaccessibility allowed for some Khumbu Sherpas to increase their household wealth through trade, while also buffering many more households from the Shah and Rara era land grants, which spurred at least two centuries of exploitation and marginalization for many other ethnic groups in Nepal. That is, it was not simply increased wealth, but also the absence of direct control and exploitation of household and community resources that shaped some Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the state.

I have followed Ortner’s argument to here in order to untangle the factors shaping Khumbu Sherpas’ positionings vis-à-vis the state through the mid-twentieth century. In what follows I continue to consider the historical, political, and spatial forces coming together to shape Khumbu Sherpas’ contemporary relations with the Nepali state, as well as the production of Khumbu as a state space and capitalist space.

*An experiment in Democracy and the Panchayat era*

With the collapse of the Rana regime, the Shah monarchy returned to power in 1950. The restored Shah monarchy opened Nepal’s doors to the rest of the world, the consequences of which are central to this discussion. In the decade following the return of the Shah lineage, an interim government was formed as a coalition between the Palace, the Nepali Congress, and members of the fallen Rana regime, yet headed by the King. From the start, this coalition was marked by disputes and fighting. As a result, less than a year later,
the King disbanded the coalition government and replaced it with an advisory council, a weaker structure that served to consolidate the King’s authority. Concomitantly, political parties—most formed underground during the Rana era and emboldened by the success of democratic movements in India and Pakistan—began emerging and demanding elections for a constitutional assembly to draft a constitution. In 1955 King Tribhuvan passed away and his son, King Mahendra, ascended the throne. King Mahendra inherited the growing struggle between the monarchy and the Nepali Congress. While these two had once worked together to overthrow the Ranas, they now found themselves at odds with each other and without a common enemy. In 1958 and under growing internal and external pressure from democracy movements, King Mahendra announced elections for a constitutional assembly; however, in the final announcement the King changed the elections to parliamentary elections, rather than constitutional assembly elections. As a “gift to Nepal,” the King prepared a constitution, rather than a constitutional assembly (Parajulee 2000). Therefore, according to the 1959 constitution, while the Parliament was democratically elected, the sovereign retained ultimate authority. Indeed, King Mahendra retained the authority to summon and disband parliament, dismiss the Prime Minister, and suspend the constitution.

Nonetheless, the Nepali Congress party made a strong showing in the 1959 parliamentary elections giving a clear mandate to the party, thereby escalating the party’s tensions with the King. Indeed, the Nepali Congress sought to limit the power of the sovereign, while the King worked to retain it. Despite this, the new parliament, headed by the Nepali Congress party, enacted liberal land and taxation reforms, as well as democratic
local governance structures. Yet, these reforms were not smoothly executed, especially in rural areas of Nepal where the legacies of both Shah and Rana land grants persisted. As a result, uprisings in Nepal’s rural areas gave King Mahendra an excuse to exercise his emergency authority, thereby seizing power, dismissing parliament, and dissolving the government on December 15, 1960. Within weeks of this royal coup, the King also banned all political parties in Nepal (Burghart 1994; Parajulee 2000).

In 1962, King Mahendra introduced a new constitution under which the King retained all sovereign power, as well as all legislative, executive, and judicial power (Hutt 1994). The new constitution banned all political parties, but instituted the party-less Panchayat system of “democratic” governance. The Panchayat system was a three-tiered system comprised of elected village committees, which then elected district committees, who then nominated members to a national committee. In addition to the nominated representatives in the national committee, seats were reserved for representatives of five class organizations: the peasantry, women, workers, youth, and ex-servicemen.

King Mahendra justified this new constitution by stating that democracy was clearly not a good fit for Nepal—as evidenced by the uprisings in the rural areas; however, the Panchayat system better reflected “Nepalism” (Parajulee 2000). With this proclamation, King Mahendra at once declared that the Panchayat system was nationalistic and independent of India’s democratic influence. The project of Nepali nation building continued through this era as demonstrated by the popular slogan “one language, one dress, one country” (Nep. ek bhasa, ek bhesh, ek desh) and a nationalized, Nepali-language school curriculum that excluded indigenous people’s histories (Hangen 2007). Thus, with
the 1962 constitution, Nepal began a 38-year era as a constitutional monarchy under the Panchayat system.

*Forest nationalization*

Opening Nepal’s border in 1950 ushered in what is now a culture of international development intervention in Nepal. In line with post-WWII modernization development discourse (Rostow 1960) at the time, foreign aid poured into Nepal to fuel infrastructure growth and spur industrialization, a process necessarily exploitative of resources (Pigg 1992; Guthman 1997). In 1957 the Private Forest Nationalization Act placed all of Nepal’s forests, including those granted away under the Rana regime, under state control, yet recognized established control of cultivated *kipat* lands. While some have recognized this as an act of concern for Nepal’s diminishing forests, others have argued this act undermined indigenous management systems (Brower 1991).

In addition to being understood as a perhaps misguided attempt at conservation, management, or stewardship of forests by the monarchy (Guthman 1997), the Private Forest Nationalization Act must also be understood as a reversal of Rana excess and an assertion of Shah rule and state-building. Nonetheless, the first wave of development, especially forestry and hydro-power, was aimed at resource extraction either for trade or internal infrastructure development. Subsequent aid regimes have followed global development trends by adopting first a Basic Needs approach to development, during which time local peoples, values, and institutions were recognized in development agendas,
and undergoing a shift to a neoliberal era of development spurred by World Bank structural adjustment programs (Guthman 1997).

The Shah dynasty’s return to power in Nepal had varying effects in Khumbu. To start, because only about two percent of Khumbu was forested and the majority of land is above timberline (Stevens 1993) the Private Forest Nationalization Act had few resources in Khumbu upon which an effect could be had. Nonetheless, those few forest resources were and are vital to Sherpa livelihoods (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993). Stevens (1993) outlines a complex and multi-faceted system of forest management among Sherpas, centered in many villages on the elected or appointed Shinggi nawa (Sh. forest guardian).

In pulling apart this intricate management system, Stevens found that the Shinggi nawa forest management system is carried out differently in each Khumbu village and as a result was affected differently by the Private Forest Nationalization Act. Stevens observes that, despite early reports of widespread abandonment of local forest management (c.f. Furer-Haimendorf 1964; Thompson and Warburton 1985), not all aspects of the Sherpa forest management system were undermined and not in all locales. He explains,

[Sherpas...] testify that increased tree felling took place as a result [of undermined local management] in some forest and woodland areas (particularly near the villages of Nauje and Khumjung) and note that the impact of this was visible on the landscape. They disagree, however, that villagers lost all control over the forests they had previously administered or that widespread deforestation took place throughout the region. Instead they testify that in much of the region they continued to maintain local forest management despite the nationalization of forests. They speak of a far longer, and still continuing, process of conflict and negotiation between local residents and government officials over the management of forests rather than of a simple, region wide collapse in the 1950s of Sherpa efforts to maintain their regulation of protected forests. (Stevens 1993, 297)
Nonetheless, narratives of widespread abuse of nationalized forests and abandonment of local forest management systems abounded in Nepal. As I describe below, this narrative, in part, served to justify the formation of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park.

**Rise of mountaineering and the formation of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park**

The concurrent opening of Nepal’s borders and closing of Tibet’s borders in 1959, the result of changing Tibet-China relations at the time, offered Khumbu Sherpas new opportunities and livelihoods, while stifling Sherpa trade relations with Tibet, and reshaped their relations with the Nepali state (von Furer-Haimendorf 1975; Fisher 1990, 1991; Brower 1991; Stevens 1993; Ortner 1999; Spoon 2008). During this time the first foreign mountaineers trekked through Khumbu as they approached Mount Everest from its southern slopes, rather than the northern approach through Tibet. Given their reputation as being excellent high-altitude workers SoluKhumbu Sherpas had already developed in Darjeeling, foreign mountaineers were quick to hire Sherpas on their way to Mount Everest and its surrounding peaks. The first recorded foreigners to Khumbu were two British explorers, Charles Houston and William Tilman, who led a team to the summit of *Kala Patar*. Shortly thereafter, a Swiss team was the first to attempt to summit Mount Everest from the Nepal side, though this attempt was not successful. In 1953, Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary completed the first known ascent of the world’s tallest peak—an event still commemorated with 60th anniversary posters in many Khumbu lodges. Thus began the rise of mountaineering and tourism in Khumbu, a rise accompanied by a significant shift in Sherpa economic and social relations.
In the nearly two decades following Tenzing Norgay’s and Hillary’s ascent, tourism increased dramatically in Khumbu. The opening of the airstrip at Lukla in 1964 certainly facilitated the significant increase of tourists. Khumbu Sherpa traders and those who had been positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities in Darjeeling were best positioned to benefit from the growing tourism industry in Khumbu because they had the capital to invest in increasing their yak and zopkio (yak-cow crossbreed) herds to use as pack animals or the construction of lodges and teahouses. Those villages and households along the main trekking route to Mount Everest also found themselves well positioned to benefit economically from the increased trekkers by providing food, shelter, and yards for camping and grazing. Sherpas living off the main trekking route were able to access the tourism economy by working as porters and guides, but were not able to generate the same level of revenue as those families owning lodges, teahouses, and property along the trekking route (Spoon 2011). The ability to invest in the rising tourism economy as well as physical proximity to the main trekking route generated significant wealth for many Sherpas, yet those off the main trekking route or without capital to invest were left behind, thus creating a growing socio-economic gap among Khumbu Sherpa families and villages (Stevens 1993; Spoon 2008).

In addition to accessing wealth-generating activities, Khumbu Sherpas with access to the growing tourism industry were also able to develop various forms of relationships with foreign tourists and mountaineers. The quintessential example of this is Sir Edmund Hillary’s project to build schools in Khumbu following his ascent of Mount Everest. The Himalayan Trust—established by Hillary—has since provided scholarships for Khumbu
school children and has been involved in numerous development projects throughout the
region. Likewise, Anthony Freake, known locally as ‘Papa Tony,’ has coordinated and
sponsored numerous projects in Phortse, including a water supply system and construction
of a new gonde, health post, a house for local teachers, and a community center, after
visiting the village and developing relationships with residents in 1989. While these two
sets of relationships are well known throughout Khumbu, more intimate relationships
between individuals or families have in many cases led to sponsorship for travel, education,
and business abroad for some Khumbu Sherpas. As a result, and several generations later,
Khumbu Sherpas’ relationships with foreigners have propelled them into international
networks of travel, education, and business, while at the same time prompted the
development of infrastructure sponsored by foreign donors and organizations, including
schools, health posts and a dental clinic, hydro-electric facilities, water treatment and
distribution systems, the construction and renovations of gondes, and so on.

Establishment of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park

By the early 1970s state officials and development advisors had grown concerned
about deforestation and overgrazing resulting from Khumbu’s changing economy and the
rise in tourism. That is, increased tourism led to increased firewood use as the result of
more people to cook for and keep warm. In addition, the establishment of a local hat bazaar
(Nep. market) at Nauche brought food and goods to Khumbu, thus alleviating the need for
Sherpa families to migrate to the warmer southern areas of Nepal during the winter
months. The interruption of seasonal migration patterns increased demand on local forests
as families required additional firewood for cooking and heating during the winter (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993).

At the urging of Nepal’s United Nations Food and Agriculture Office (FAO) Conservation Officer, a Nepali Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) ecologist briefly visited Khumbu in 1972, followed by a park planning team from New Zealand in 1974. Based on their assessments, combined with misplaced concerns over assumed abandonment of local forest management systems and Himalayan soil degradation, the New Zealand government proposed to assist the government of Nepal in the early management and training of officials to establish a national park in Khumbu (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993). Thus, Khumbu was gazetted as Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park in 1976 and named an UNESCO World Heritage Site based on a natural designation in 1979.

Unlike previous models of national parks that evicted indigenous and local peoples both in and outside of Nepal (Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002; West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006), Sagarmatha National Park was envisioned as a new form of conservation area, a national park with people, where concerns for the environment were equally as important as local community welfare (Stevens 1993). Even though villages and herding settlements were excluded from the national park, Stevens reports park planners worked to involve Khumbu Sherpas in the park planning process by holding community

---

29 Erik Eckholm would go on to crystallize concerns over soil and land degradation in Nepal in Losing Ground (1976). The Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation, which holds overpopulation and destructive upland subsistence practices responsible for the “export” of soil from the Himalaya to Bangladesh, where it causes massive flooding, was largely debunked in the 1980s (Thompson and Warburton 1985; Byers 1987; Hamilton 1987; Ives and Messerli 1989; Metz 1991).
meetings and convening a local advisory committee. Nonetheless, Sherpas were suspicious of the park. Some were concerned about evictions like those experienced by residents of Nepal’s Chitwan and Rara National Parks; others were concerned new park regulations would disrupt livelihoods by limiting grazing and forest harvests (Brower 1991; Stevens 1993). As a result of these concerns and lack of communication between park planners and local communities, many families over-harvested firewood and other forest products just prior to the establishment of the national park.

While early park administrators proved to be lenient about allowing some traditional management activities, like grazing, on parklands, they were far more stringent about forest use regulation (Stevens 1993). Regulations restricting tree-cutting within park forests, forbidding the cutting of live tree limbs, and severely restricting the gathering of dead leaves and trees were met with resentment and resistance. Adjustments in the initial regulations eased tensions and demonstrated park administrators’ willingness to work with Khumbu Sherpas in co-managing the new park.

Since the founding of Sagarmatha National Park, four Khumbu Sherpa park wardens have served among numerous Nepali wardens. Early Sherpa wardens were particularly keen to improve relations between Khumbu Sherpas and the national park. To this end, in 1983 the late Mingma Norbu Sherpa instituted a renewed form of the Shinggi nawa forest management system. Whereas the previous version of this system was differently administered in each village and settlement and had slightly different forms, the renewed version called for two appointed forest guardians in each village and settlement to monitor forest use and collect fines for violations. The new Shinggi nawa were paid by the national
Following this lead and with a goal of building community support for the national park, Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, Mingma Norbu Sherpa’s successor, redirected the collected fines for forest use violations back to the villages for village development projects. Further, in 1986 and 1987, Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa appointed two monks from Thame monastery to serve as Shinggi nawa for the villages of Thame, Thameteng, and Thamo, as well as the nearby settlements.

Several scholars argue that the formation of the national park was based on faulty and narrow evidence of the need for conservation intervention. Brower (1991) observes the reports prepared by the FOA Wildlife Conservation officer and DNPWC ecologist outlining the deteriorating environmental conditions in Khumbu justifying protection were based on limited, and misinterpreted, evidence gathered during brief field visits. Likewise, Stevens (1993) suggests that misinformed reports of the abandonment of the Shingwa nawa forest management system served to justify state intervention.

For James Fisher (1990), the formation of Sagarmatha National Park, spurred by “a torrent of tourists,” was the last step in the nationalization of Khumbu into the Nepali state. In the context of Nepal’s concern over the extraction of resources to fuel development at the time, the formation of Sagarmatha National Park may also be viewed as the latest technology by which the state regulated Khumbu Sherpa livelihoods in order to increase revenue. Historically, forest, water, and labor resources elsewhere were extracted directly by the state, but, as discussed above, difficulty in accessing Khumbu’s limited natural resources, has largely buffered the region from such exploitation; however, earlier regulation and taxes on trade replaced direct appropriation. With the decline of Khumbu’s
trade activity and the rise of a new resource—tourism and mountaineering—the state shifted its extractive activity from taxation on trade to both increasing and capturing tourism and mountaineering revenue through required permits. A state sponsored 1977 report, *Khumbu Region Tourism Study*, betrays this by laying out the benefits to the state, in largely economic terms, of implementing a tourism infrastructure improvement plan in the national park. Thus, the formation of the national park at once sought to attract tourists and increase foreign exchange for the state, while also seeking to regulate and mitigate environmental degradation resulting from that increased tourism (Brower 1991).

The Forest Nationalization Act, the closing of the trade route and border with Tibet, the proximity of Mount Everest, the rise of tourism, and ultimately the establishment of Sagarmatha National Park constitute a complex of historically and spatially contingent forces coming together to shape Khumbu Sherpas’ relationships with the Nepali state. As I show below, the tourism and mountaineering economy in Khumbu today is the source of significant wealth for many Khumbu Sherpas; yet, the growth of that economy was enabled, in large part, by Khumbu’s location at the base of Mount Everest, combined with the closing of the borders with Tibet and opening of Nepal’s borders—which pushed mountaineers, and later tourists, to approach the mountain through Khumbu. Moreover, the production of Sagarmatha National Park as a state and conservation space was based, in part, on misinformed narratives of forest mismanagement following the Forest Nationalization Act. Nonetheless, I conceptualize both as state claims to space that, together with the spatial factors pushing early mountaineers into Khumbu, came together to shift Khumbu Sherpa livelihoods and social structures in spatial ways.
The end of the Panchayat era and the rise of ethnopoltics in Nepal

In the late 1970s and under the rule of Mahendra’s son, King Birendra, the Panchayat system came under fire from both within and outside of Nepal. Ramjee Parajulee (2000) points to the Western media’s sympathy for the democratic movement in Nepal, US President Carter’s call for attention to human rights issues and protection for those fighting for democracy, and the 1979 overthrow of the Iranian monarchy as external factors fueling the call to end the Panchayat system. Internally, Parajulee points to concern for India’s growing strength—having annexed Sikkim in 1974, and concern over the increasing strength of anti-Panchayat movements as prompting the Palace to buttress the Panchayat system. Further, Michael Hoftun (1994) points to the significance of “communalism” at this point in Nepal’s democratic transition. Inspired by similar communal movements just across the Nepal-India border, ethnic and religious groups, starting with the Madhesis in the southern Tarai region, began forming illegal and anti-Panchayat political parties. In 1980, King Birendra narrowly passed a referendum upholding the Panchayat system, which likely passed as a result of palace coercion in many of the rural areas (Parajulee 2000).

The referendum’s narrow margin of victory both weakened the Panchayat system considerably and emboldened the anti-Panchayat movement, which continued to gather force, albeit secretly, over the next decade, and came to challenge the Panchayat system again in 1990 (Parajulee 2000). In addition, at this time, India had imposed a trade embargo on Nepal, resulting from disagreements between the countries over trade treaties.
Whelpton (1994) and Hoftun (1994) point to this as the main factor creating an environment ripe for revolution. Both Hoftun (1994) and Whelpton (1994), however, emphasize the significance of global democratic discourse at this time as well. Indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, student protests in Tiananmen Square as well as the fall of the Berlin Wall highlighted the spread of democratic discourse.

In February 1990 the Movement to Restore Democracy (MRD)—comprised of the Nepali Congress and several radical left political parties (in a brief flash of cooperation)—initiated a series of strikes, protests, and increasingly violent acts to demand the end of the Panchayat system. The Panchayat regime fought the movement through propaganda depicting a lack of popular support; arrests of the movement leaders; and “divide and conquer” tactics whereby the Palace released opposition leaders who they thought would oppose the coalition of the movement parties (Parajulee 2000). Despite these efforts, the MRD persisted in their demands. In a seemingly sudden move, in early April 1990 King Birendra dissolved the Panchayat system and later lifted the political party ban.

In the wake of the MRD—known as Janandolean I, the first People’s Movement—a coalition was formed to draft a new constitution; however, this coalition quickly deteriorated and, once again, the King drafted the constitution along with a council of advisors. The 1990 constitution established a constitutional monarchy led by a house of representatives with proportional representation of all 75 districts (Whelpton 1994). The new constitution included a multi-party system, granted some fundamental freedoms and rights, placed sovereignty with the people, and identified Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual state; however, it also granted emergency powers to the King. More
problematically, the new constitution continued the legacy of cultural marginalization and
disenfranchisement of non-CHHE in Nepal by retaining Nepal’s identity as a Hindu
kingdom, reiterating the prohibition on the slaughtering of cows (which are sacred for Hindu people), supporting the loss of *kipat* lands by taxing undocumented *kipat* land,
identifying Nepal as a Hindu state, and declaring Nepali the language of the nation-state,
and formally relegating ethnic languages to a secondary position (Whelpton 2005; Sherpa 2009; Hangen and Lawoti 2013). Further, the constitution banned political parties based on religion, community, caste, tribe, or region, which Krishna Bhattachan (2013) argues was aimed at eliminating ethnopolitically-based parties and activities. Yet, this ban served to further fuel the nascent people’s movements.

*Democratic transition in Khumbu*

The 1990 democratic people’s movement, *janandolean I*, resulted in the end of the Panchayat era of governance in Khumbu. As democratic Village Development Committees replaced the Panchayat committees and a new national park warden took office, Khumbu Sherpas seized the moment to articulate their grievances against park and state regulations, which had been eroding local control of and access to forest resources since as early as the 1960s with implementation of forest nationalization (Stevens 1993). Negotiations between park administrators and Sherpa residents resulted in increased local management of forests and the formation of a forest management committee that included village representatives (Stevens 1993).
In the decade that followed, Sherpas continued to negotiate and rework their co-management relationship with national park administration. Most notably, Khumbu Sherpas proposed the Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone, which was implemented by 2003. The buffer zone added 275 square kilometers to the protected area, including Pharak—the region between Khumbu and the airport at Lukla—and more than 100 enclaves, including villages, settlements, and herding areas, originally excluded from the park (Spoon 2008). The buffer zone is split into three regions—the settlements of the Namche Buffer Zone and the Khumbi Yullha Buffer Zone, as well as the entirety of the Chaurikarkha Buffer Zone. The buffer zone is managed by a three-tier system involving individual household representatives at the Buffer Zone User Group level, elected representatives at the Buffer Zone User Committee level, the park warden, and a representative from the District Development Committee at the Buffer Zone Management Committee level. In Khumbu, there are two buffer zones—Namche and Khumbi Yullha. Depending on the interests and concerns of User Groups, Buffer Zone Committees and the Management Committee focus on development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. Notably, 50% of the proceeds from Sagarmatha National Park entrance and permit fees go to the buffer zones (DNPWC 2005). Also notable, is that several informants complained that the national park had not delivered the buffer zone’s share of the entrance fee proceeds in the past three years. Nonetheless, by establishing the buffer zone, Khumbu Sherpas renegotiated their relations and repositioned themselves in relation to Sagarmatha National Park, and by extension the state.
While it is tempting to conceptualize the formation of Sagarmatha National Park as an assertion of state power through territory formation, such a reading would tend toward a narrative of Khumbu Sherpa disenfranchisement and exploitation by a dominating state. In doing so, such an analysis would obscure the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas have renegotiated, most notably in the formation of the buffer zone, their relations with the state in order to position themselves to benefit from the increase in tourism. As central actors in tourists’ experiences in Khumbu, whether as lodge and restaurant hosts, shopkeepers, guides, or tour company operators, Khumbu Sherpas are a critical component of the tourist experience, and thus are vital to maintaining high revenues for the state. Thus, it is in both parties’ best interests to negotiate mutually satisfactory co-management plans. The formation of the buffer zone in 2003 and the latest plan calling for half the park entrance fee proceeds to be given to the buffer zone (DNPWC 2005) is one example of how Khumbu Sherpas, unlike most other peoples in Nepal, have been positioned to continually renegotiate their relations with the state. The return of the Shinga nawa system is another example. Here Khumbu Sherpas have reworked a traditional forest management system into a cooperative strategy for forest management with the national park. Today, the national park administration is a limited presence and has nominal authority in Khumbu. Informants report that other than collecting trekking fees and granting wood collection permits, the national park administration does very little in Khumbu. As a result, Sagarmatha National Park is a weak claim to state authority in Khumbu. Instead, I call attention to the ways in which Sagarmatha National Park produced a capitalist space, and
as I will explore further in Chapter 5, for some Khumbu Sherpas, spurred a capitalist subject formation.

**Conclusion**

By tracing Khumbu Sherpas’ historical relations with the Gorkha monarchy and the Nepali state, as well as the rise of tourism and mountaineering, the formation of Sagarmatha National Park, and their relations with foreign sponsors, I have shown that historical, political, and spatial forces have come together at specific conjunctures in order to differently position Khumbu Sherpas in relation to the Nepali state. During the Gorkha monarchy, Khumbu's remote location, location of a main trans-Himalayan trade route, and difficult accessibility came together with Gorkha territoriality to position Khumbu Sherpas in a lucrative trade monopoly, which allowed many families the means to turn that capital into business ventures in Darjeeling in the early twentieth century. Spatial, historical, and political factors conspired again with the closing of the Tibet border, the opening of Nepal’s border, and mountaineers’ interests in Mount Everest and the surrounding Himalayan peaks. Once again, Khumbu Sherpas were positioned to benefit. Finally, the declaration of Sagarmatha National Park—formed as a result of the location of its namesake—prompted the production of a capitalist space, more than a state territory claim. Taken together, these conjunctures have and continue to buffer Khumbu Sherpas from the marginalization, exploitation, and discrimination driving other ethnic groups in Nepal to take up and mobilize in Nepal’s indigenous political movements. Further, relations with foreign
mountaineers and tourists have positioned many Khumbu Sherpas in global networks, thus bypassing the state.
Chapter 4: Territory and the cultural politics of religion: Khumbu’s animate territory

Introduction: Nauche’s Dumje

In mid-June 2013, the Spring trekking and climbing season in Khumbu had come to an end, the constant stream of trekkers and porters in and out of Nauche had diminished to a trickle, and the skies were calm after two months of the consistent chop of helicopters passing overhead shuttling climbers and injured or sick trekkers between higher elevations and Lukla or Kathmandu (at the height of climbing season in 2010 I counted 24 round-trip helicopter flights passing over Nauche in a single day). Nauche’s lodge owners and shopkeepers were taking a much-needed break, and the summer monsoon rains were still making their way across the Indian plains. That morning, dressed in a new angi (Sh., traditional Sherpa dress), I followed Ang Norbu and Tashi Dolma, who had graciously hosted me in Nauche for several years, up the long, steep, stone stairs to Tashi Dolma’s sister’s lodge, which was perched along the upper trail circling the village. We carried with us 35 kilograms of rice, two boxes of red wine, a large bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label whiskey, one case of Everest beer, several boxes of tea, and homemade chang—rice beer that Tashi Dolma had prepared over the course of the past several days. As we approached the lodge, one of Tashi Dolma’s nephews ran up to greet us and relieve us of the heavier items. Just outside the front door, several young men, including Tashi Dolma’s son, Lhakpa Zangbu, sat behind a folding card table and recorded the items we brought in a ledger. After Tashi Dolma carefully checked that each item had been properly recorded, we proceeded to the top story of the three story guesthouse to join a party already in progress.
Throughout Nauche that morning, families joined similar parties in seven other households, bringing with them similar items, and marking the kick-off of the annual *Dumje*—a festival some informants describe as a celebration for *Guru Rinpoche*, while others claim it to be a celebration for *Lama Sangwa Dorje*, the founder of Pangboche *gonde* and a folk hero among Khumbu Sherpas (Ortner 1989). Still others admit to not really knowing the purpose of *Dumje*.

Currently, *Dumje* is celebrated for several days in each of Khumbu’s main villages; however, *Dumje* celebrations vary in length and extravagance between villages. Each year, for Nauche’s *Dumje*, eight households are selected to serve as *lawas*, or sponsors. The *lawas*’ social and financial responsibilities in Nauche are extensive—many compare it to hosting an extravagant wedding. Among other things, *lawa* families must make significant financial offerings to the monastic community and feed the entire village for one day of *Dumje*, including delivering a bottle of *chang* to each household in the village. *Lawa* family members living abroad travel to Khumbu from as far as North America and Europe to assist family members in their social obligations at *Dumje*. Over the years, and like in other Khumbu villages, social support and exchange groups have formed in Nauche to assist each other in meeting the obligations of *Dumje*. As a form of moral economic relations, *lawa* families record the support they are given by others in their network, usually in the form of food stuffs and alcohol, and return that support, plus one additional item, when it is the giver’s turn to serve as *lawa*.

The party we joined on the top floor of Nauche’s highest guesthouse was celebrating our hosts’ efforts as *lawas* that year. The guests were all the members of the particular
social exchange network the lawas were part of, and the items each guest brought were the reciprocated items provided to each family in the past—plus one item. In the days leading up to the party Tashi Dolma worked from a list taped to her refrigerator that detailed the items that had been provided to her family when they served as lawas in 2010. In addition to providing items to her sister’s family, Tashi Dolma owed items to two other families who were serving as lawas this year. The items provided to each of the lawa families would be used in the coming days to feed any guests coming into the house, as offerings to Tengboche Rinpoche and the monastery, and to feed all the residents of Nauche on the family’s appointed day. What was not consumed in the coming days would be used to replenish the families’ stocks and liqueur cabinets.

Over the next two and half hours guests trickled in, butter tea was offered in abundance, and the pile of whiskey bottles draped in khatas (Sh., white blessing scarves) grew on a corner table. Over my carefully managed cup of butter tea (full enough to not require a top-off, sipped enough to not offend my host), I struck up a conversation with Mingma, a young Sherpa woman who had moved to Nauche several years ago after marrying a Nauche man. After I asked her to explain how the support networks worked, she expressed that the obligations were becoming too much because with each exchange one must give something more than they had previously received. Yet, Mingma also went on to explain that once one’s obligation to a family was met, one can terminate the relationship. She assured me that this was not awkward and typically handled in a straightforward and matter of fact fashion. Mingma went on to explain that our hosts were new lawas this year. That is, they had broken from their own families’ support networks and
started giving as an independent family about nine years ago, shortly after they started living together as a married couple. It was now their turn to receive all those items in kind. She noted, however, that they would still need to invest quite a bit of their own money into their obligations because their support network, as a relatively new network, was small—only 25 families or so. In comparison, when Mingma’s family served as lawas just a couple years previously, they collected in kind support from nearly 75 families—a demonstration of the longevity of their commitment to several support networks. Several months later Lhakpa Zangbu shared with me that several young men in the village and he had been talking about ways to reduce the excessive social and financial obligations and expectations associated with Dumje in Nauche. It is important to note that the extravagance of donations and parties in Nauche exceeds that in other villages; however, the financial responsibilities associated with serving as a Dumje lawa are still quite burdensome on families in other villages.

By early afternoon, two village men who were former monks performed a blessing *puja* and our hosts distributed plates overflowing with almond crackers from Korea, granola and yogurt snack bars from Germany, Indonesian chocolate wafers, and Kirkland brand peanut butter cups, as well as nuts, cake, and dried fruit. While much of this likely came from Kathmandu and from trekking groups leaving behind their foodstuffs after their treks, friends traveling abroad also brought much of it to the family (just as I had done in 2010 for Tashi Dolma’s family). As guests sifted through their ‘goody plates,’ and commented on the difficulty in obtaining certain items, it became clear that the

---

30 Many young married couples do not live together for the first several years of marriage while the young husband establishes a family home, often a lodge now, of his own.
international assortment of candies and snacks was a demonstration of the international and cosmopolitan connections of the family. Following the distribution of the ‘goody plates,’ our hosts passed out reusable green shopping bags (plastic bags are banned in Kathmandu and rarely used in Khumbu) to transport our leftovers, and we settled into what turned into a long evening of cards and drinking.

The next afternoon village residents gathered at the Nauche gonde in anticipation of Tengboche Rinpoche’s arrival. The women were dressed in their nicest angis—many bought or made new for the occasion—and adorned with their finest jewelry including expensive dzi stones, coral and turquoise, and gold necklaces, many with treasured dablam (Sh., jewel boxes) hanging in the center. Likewise, the gathered men wore chubas (Sh. traditional men’s robes) and phingsha (Sh., felt, wide-brimmed hats). Early that morning the lawa men and several other young Nauche men trekked four hours to the monastery at Tengboche to accompany the Rinpoche back to Nauche, carrying him most of the way. As the Rinpoche approached, we self-organized into two lines on either side of the trail, first by gender, then by a combination of social status and age. Of the men not traveling with the Rinpoche, prominent lodge owners, arranged in descending order by age, the chairperson of the buffer zone, and then shopkeepers stood closest to the gonde entrance. Following this, the women’s ordering reflected the status of their husbands, except for widowed women, who retained the status their husbands had occupied. Finally, unmarried women and children stood furthest. As was typical in such cases, a widowed Nauche woman who I had come to know took me by the arm and awkwardly placed me next to her among the elder women. The Rinpoche’s procession was led by eight young Nauche boys carrying
Buddhist prayer flags, 16 monks from Tengboche, the lawa men, the group of other Nauche men who had carried the Rinpoche from Tengboche, and a group of twenty locally-stationed Nepali police officers and army personal dressed in track suits. As the Rinpoche passed we offered katas to welcome him to Nauche.

The gathered crowd proceeded into the gonde where the Rinpoche settled onto a platform padded with pillows in front of an altar adorned with torma (Sh., ritual figures made of dough and decorated with colored butter) representing a host of local deities and deities from the Buddhist pantheon, water bowls, butter lamps, and numerous plates of food offerings, including the candies and snacks Tashi Dolma’s sister had given us the day before. The monks took their seats on padded mats on the floor on either side of the Rinpoche. Nauche’s senior and elder men arranged themselves by social status on benches in front of one side of monks (again with prominent lodge owners in the front, followed by businessmen, and the Buffer Zone and VDC Chairmen in a special chair directly next to the Rinpoche), while the former monks in the village, including my host, took seats immediately in front of the other monks. Moving clockwise around the open-air gonde courtyard, the elder women arranged themselves on benches on one side and the young women, including those recently married, and children lined the next wall. Finally, Nauche’s young and recently married men arranged themselves along the last wall. My research assistant had seated me with the young women directly across from the Rinpoche, but by the second day several of the elder village women pointedly reseated me in the back row among the elder women. Clearly, as an unmarried woman in her mid-30s, I was a bit of a conundrum—too old to sit among the young women, yet not married (or divorced or widowed) and
therefore could not be placed among the elder women in the village.

After settling in and a brief puja, a procession of young village men paraded into the gonde carrying large bags of salt, tsampa (barley flour), and rice, as well as bricks of Tibetan tea, incense, containers of Countrytime™ Lemonade drink mix and oats, and more plates of candies, crackers, and assorted snack items. The first of the eight lawa families approached the Rinpoche to offer the paraded items along with a monetary offering, ranging from NPR 50,000 to NPR 200,000 ($500 US to $2,000 US at the time) in exchange for blessings from the Rinpoche. Following this, every extended family member of the lawa family approached the Rinpoche for a blessing.

The second lawa family repeated the same process, making similar offerings. After these formalities, the atmosphere in the gonde relaxed substantially. That day's lawa families distributed plates mounded high with cooked rice to the elder men and women, then distributed sheep stew curry and cooked rice with yogurt to everyone else. Despite my resistance, the elder women seated near me spooned cooked rice from their plates into my sheep stew curry, insisting that foreigners liked it better with rice. As the day's gonde festivities came to an end, the lawa families distributed dry rice in cloth bags to everyone gathered. The procedures for the day, including the presentations of offerings and blessings, the distribution of cooked and uncooked rice, and the meal of sheep stew curry and yogurt with rice continued for each of the next three days—though the attendance gradually diminished with each day.

On the second morning of Dumje, the village men (in some villages women participate as well) along with five monks from Tengboche, but not the Rinpoche, gathered
to perform a lhapsang (Sh.; Wyl. lha bsang, fumigation and prayer offerings) and serkem (Sh.; Wyl. gser skyems, a libation ritual offering of prayers and chang) at the village shrine (Sh. lhapso) to Khumbi yullha, which sits at the base of two large rocks perched above the village. Accompanying the lhapso above Nauche, the image of Khumbi yullha is painted on one of two large rocks said to have fallen from Khumbila. Guru Rinpoche is painted on the second rock; however, his image is obscured by dense forest. The gathered men arranged themselves in the same way we had for the arrival of Tengboche Rinpoche the day before—by an unspoken combination of age and social status—in order to welcome a masked Khumbi yullha. Like the day before, Khumbi yullha received similar offerings to what had been offering to Tengboche Rinpoche, including alcohol, incense, rice, tsampa, and tea. Typically, following this ritual puja, the participants sing, dance, and spread tsampa in the form of a beard on each other’s faces to suggest longevity. The party then returns to the Nauche gonde, where the village women join in the merriment. This year, however, a prominent lodge owner suddenly collapsed and subsequently passed away during the lhapsang puja for Khumbi yullha. This sad occurrence halted the ritual while the community began to grieve. The ritual offerings to Khumbi yullha were continued later in the day among a small group of community members, and with none of the festivities that would have otherwise accompanied the day.

Following the offerings and blessings of the last two lawa families on the final day of Dumje, the crowd at the Nauche gonde increased significantly as visiting monks performed a brief series of cham (Sh., masked ritual dances depicting various localized deities and spirits). While the masked dances at Mani Rimdu go on for nearly 14 hours, the cham
dances at Dumje are significantly abbreviated and last only one hour. The cham consisted of a series of masked dancers either making offerings to Khumbi yullha or receiving offerings, as local gods. During the final cham, a masked dancer, Gama Kaka, appears and absorbs all the demons and bad deeds of the villages. Gama Kaka is then led to the outskirts of the village by a group of monks where the evil spirits are banished. The lama at Nauche admitted that it is increasingly difficult to locate a person to dress as Gama Kaka because the role is thought to bring bad luck.

Following the cham, several men placed a large copper cauldron in the center of the courtyard and filled it with wood. Several monks lit the fire, while Tengboche Rinpoche read prayers aloud invoking both local deities and deities from the Buddhist pantheon. Finally, the Rinpoche took hold of a large, long-handled copper ladle and held it out for one of the lawa to fill with rum, which he then dumped onto the fire, causing the fire to flare up. He repeated this several times, while continuing to read prayers and circling the fire. Ang Norbu later explained that the flare up of the fire is of great concern to all Nauche residents because if the fire does not adequately flare up the village will not have good fortune in the upcoming year. Fortunately, Ang Norbu reported, this year’s fire flared sufficiently and everyone appeared satisfied that good fortune would come to Nauche this year.

The four days of Nauche’s Dumje festival highlight several questions about the ways in which Nauche Sherpas negotiate their relationships with Khumbu’s Nyingma Buddhist monastic community and those with place-based deities, especially Khumbi yullha, and demons. That is, why is it that Tengboche Rinpoche does not attend the puja offerings for Khumbi yullha? Why are both Khumbi yullha and Tengboche Rinpoche welcomed into their
respective ritual spaces in the same way? Moreover, while many Khumbu Sherpas describe Dumje as more an opportunity to gather with family and friends and some bemoan the festival as an often-competitive display of wealth and excess, rather than as ritually significant, all informants agree on the importance of the day dedicated to appeasing and providing offerings to Khumbi yullha and requesting his continued protection for the village. Tengboche Rinpoche was clearly treated with great reverence and his blessings were sought, yet why was Khumbi yullha's assurance of protection and good fortune for the village seemingly valued even more?

This negotiation illuminates a cultural politics of religion in Khumbu in which the monastic and lay communities struggle and negotiate over the authority to direct the symbolic and material practices constituting Sherpa lifeworlds. Over the next two chapters, I demonstrate the ways in which the ongoing reconfiguration of relations between Khumbu Sherpa laic and Buddhist monastic communities play out in ideological and symbolic constructions of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha's territory—a landscape protected and animated by place-based spirits and deities—and Beyul Khumbu. To do this, I explore Sherpa understandings of Khumbu as a Sherwayul, a Sherpa country, and the everyday practices and rituals associated with localized place-based spirits and deities. I show that such everyday practices and rituals construct, maintain, and reinforce a territorial consciousness among Khumbu Sherpas, based primarily on relations with Khumbi yullha, Khumbu's territory deity. That is, informants are far more concerned with everyday practices associated with the local mountain deity, Khumbi yullha, and, to a lesser extent, household water and land spirits, rather than the beyul, which lacks reference in everyday
practices and landscape features. Yet, these chapters also demonstrate that it is more than material everyday practices at work in shaping territory in Khumbu. In what follows I show that constructions of Khumbu as a sacred landscape, religious landscape, and animate territory, are fraught with the very same cultural political struggles over religion in Khumbu demonstrated in Nauche’s *Dumje* festival.

It is important to note that the *beyul* concept is not necessarily at odds with Sherpa relationships with *Khumbi yullha*. Indeed, over time Khumbu’s monastic authority has gained traction and legitimation by co-opting *Khumbi yullha* into Buddhist geographies, ‘taming’ him as the protector of Beyul Khumbu, and assigning him a place in the Buddhist pantheon of deities. While separating a construction of Sherpa territory from that constructed by the monastic community suggests a problematically simplified dichotomy between shamanistic and animistic practices, on the one hand, and Buddhist monasticism, on the other, I find it analytically useful in tracing the ways in which power works through multiple territory constructions and claims to authority in Khumbu.

In the following section I work through contemporary debates and discussions around *territory* in order to support an alternative understanding of territory by both challenging notions of territory as bounded fixed units of measurement and unmooring territory from the exclusive domain of the state. Then I will explore the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas performatively construct territory through everyday practices and rituals associated with *Khumbi yullha*. Following this, in Chapter 5, I turn my attention to the cultural politics of religion in Khumbu and Buddhist monastic claims to territory. Finally, I will return to a discussion of the spatiality of the cultural politics of religion in Khumbu,
and what attention to contemporary spatial practices reveals today about the relations
between the laic and monastic communities in Khumbu.

Claiming territory: Power, performances, and alternatives

Until recently, political geographers and international relations scholars have
conceptualized sovereign national territory as the basic unit of the international state
system and, as others have pointed out, in doing so have limited the analytical usefulness of
the term (Lefebvre 1991; Agnew 1994; Passi 1999; Wainwright 2008; Elden 2013b;
Murphy 2013). Traditional understandings of territory from these disciplines have broadly
constructed it as a juridico-political category of place associated with governance of
societal and economic functions, as well as natural resource management and control,
within the bounded territorial state. For John Agnew (1994), these premises lead into a
“territorial trap” that problematically grants territory ontological status as a fixed and
bounded container. Yet, territory is not fixed, nor bounded; rather it is historically
constructed, politically situated and contested, porous, flexible, and emergent (Lefebvre
1991; Agnew 1994; Passi 1999; Elden 2010a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b; Baletti 2012; Bryan
2012; Agnew and Oslender 2013; Yeh 2013).

Constructions of territory as fixed and bounded render the concept itself ahistorical
by eliding the historical processes and conditions shaping ideas of territory, and apolitical
by ignoring the social processes productive of territory and territorial claims (Elden 2010a,
trace traditional fixed and bounded conceptualizations of territory to sixteenth and
seventeenth century Western Europe when the notion of the territorial state emerged out of understandings of mutual recognition of exclusive sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs between states. As a result, territory has been treated as a political-economic construction associated with land and property or as a political-strategic relationship (Elden 2013b).

Similarly, Agnew and Oslender (2013) work to politicize territory by calling attention to the practices of territorality, which they define as “the use and control of territory for political, social, and economic ends” (123). Like Agnew and Oslender, Stuart Elden (2010a) illuminates the ways in which territory actually works to classify, communicate, and control space. Such practices take material form through mapping, zoning, granting titles and deeds, as well as ideological form through discourses of nationalism delivered through media, education, and policy (Passi 1999). Such practices work to governmentalize space by creating relationships between subjects and the state, thereby constructing hegemonic notions of territory (Scott 1998; Li 2007; Yeh 2013). Viewing territory in this way, as the space of the nation-state produced through practices of territorality, partially decolonizes fixed and bounded understandings of the term (Wainwright 2008; also see Thongchai 1994; Bryan 2012; Yeh 2013).

Attention to the calculative political practices and technologies constructing notions of territory have gone far in dismantling conceptions of territory as bounded, fixed space. Yet, as Belatti (2012) observes, such interrogations persist in linking territory to the state. As a result, territory persists as a narrow and privileged subsection of place reserved for specific and exclusive use in the context of the state (Cresswell 2004). Building from recent
literature, and in the process of interrogating territory itself, scholars are constructing a more robust theorization of the concept, the work it is doing as a process, and the ways in which alternative territories can be more broadly defined outside of an association with the state (i.e. Escobar 2001; Echeverri 2005; Moore 2005; Baletti 2012; Bryan 2012).

To illustrate the ways in which scholars are rethinking territory in terms of process, I turn to the body of literature exploring decolonized notions of territory and processes of territoriality in Latin America. Joe Bryan (2012) insists that territory may be understood as a political technology whereby calculative practices create a jurisdictional space, or legal space, linking space and rights. For Bryan, it is this understanding of territory that has allowed for and shapes contemporary indigenous and Afro-descendent territorial and autonomy claims in Latin America. Bryan argues that using this form of jurisdictional territory in international legal forums, including the UNDRIP and ILO 169, encourages, and arguably restricts, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendent groups in Latin America to adopt the same jurisdictional-based definition of territory in order to articulate their claims within those international legal frameworks. The irony in this use is that while indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants mobilize territory as a legal space through which they claim a complex and variable set of rights ranging from resource access and governance to self-rule and autonomy, such claims are implicated in processes of state territorialization because they reinforce the state as granter and guarantor of rights (Offen 2003; Hale 2011; Baletti 2012; Ballvé 2012; Bryan 2012). In addition, scholarly attention to participatory mapping practices and associated territorial claims is limited in South Asia and the Himalaya, compared to Latin America.

31 Contemporary conflicts over territory and indigenous rights in Latin America have fueled much of the current debate about and rethinking of the term territory (i.e. Offen 2003; Hale 2011; Baletti 2012; Ballvé 2012; Bryan 2012). In addition, scholarly attention to participatory mapping practices and associated territorial claims is limited in South Asia and the Himalaya, compared to Latin America.
Bryan 2012; Agnew and Oslender 2013). Following Bryan, this calls attention to the ways in which “power works through territory.” A similar process is not happening among Khumbu Sherpas vis-à-vis the Nepali state; nevertheless, my research shows the ways in which power works through non-state constructions of territory.

Decoupling conceptualizations of territory from the exclusive domain of the state allows for broader constructions of territory that may include human and nonhuman relations, human-environmental relations, and relations between individuals and other social institutions. Agnew (2013) points to these broader possibilities by arguing that territory indicates a “type of spatial arrangement through which power is deployed and experienced but which is not limited to the state as such” (2). A broader conceptualization of territory opens a space for appreciating multiple, overlapping, and conflicting territories, alternative social orderings, multiple ontologies, and draws attention to the myriad ways in which power operates and orders outside of state relations.

*Non-state constructions of territory*

Rethinking territory moves focus away from the boundaries of a fixed territory to the myriad relations constructing territories. That is, to think through alternative constructions of territory requires recognizing multiple ontologies (Blaser 2014) and conceptualizing multiple, overlapping, dialectic, and conflicting territories (Echeverri 2005; Baletti 2012; Bryan 2012). To illustrate, Juan Álvaro Echeverri (2005) makes a useful distinction between political-juridico territory and indigenous territory by arguing indigenous territory “is defined not primarily by its borders and limits but by geographical
marks which represent the bond between a group of humans, landscape, and history” (232). Such a relational approach to territory suggests territory be understood more broadly as “culturally-inflected understandings of space” (Bryan 2012, 219). However, such distinctions lack attention to the ways in which power operates through alternative, non-state constructions of territory.

Literature exploring such alternative constructions of territory is limited, yet growing; geographers, anthropologists, and indigenous studies scholars have produced rich work supporting a relational approach to territory and calling attention to the practices and performances comprising processes of territory emergence (Escobar 2001, 2008; Agnew and Oslender 2013). The Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) and the Biodiversity Conservation Project presents one of richest examples of indigenous territory construction. Though arguably problematic in terms of analytic usefulness (Bryan 2012), Arturo Escobar (2008) explores the ways in which indigenous peoples in the Colombian Pacific region, or Pacífico biogeográfico, have constructed a region-territory of ethnic groups, life corridors, and, more recently, spaces of life linking processes involving biodiversity sustainability with socio-cultural livelihood practices in place in order to claim territorial rights. Similarly, in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, Marisol de la Cadena (2010) considers the ways in which indigenous practices and other-than-human forces—that is earth-beings, animals, plants, and landscapes—that are productive of indigenous peoples’ lifeworlds, including understandings of territory, are appearing in the political realm, where they have otherwise been absent. As examples, de la Cadena points to landscape invocations and libations prior to political meetings in Bolivia, the inclusion of indigenous
conceptions of ‘nature’ in the Ecuadorian constitution, and resistance to the construction of a mine in Peru tied to fear of a mountain deity’s wrath. Finally, since 2002 Nepal’s Tamang ethnic group has been mobilizing a construction of a distinct Tamang territory, based in part on its association with a local yullha, a territory deity, to claim territorial rights, the right to self-determination, and rights to control of resources, including environmental conservation and development practices.\footnote{I discuss the Tamang case in Chapter 6.} Such constructions link social structures, cultural practices, more-than-human forces, and the biophysical environment in a specific place. In so doing, indigenous peoples present alternative constructions of territory to those constructed through capital-centric thinking and processes, as well as alternative political identities. Yet, to take such constructions of territory seriously requires the recognition of multiple ontologies, and specifically ontologies in which authority may be held by more-than-human forces with the ability to shape lifeworlds (Blaser 2014).

*Everyday practices and performances of territory*

Social forces and everyday practices produce and reproduce space and territory (Sletto 2009; Agnew 2013; Yeh 2013). Alternative constructions of territory as relational spaces illuminate ways in which to understand territory as performed as well as produced and reproduced through everyday practices. Moreover, identities, notions of belonging, and relationships are performed through the acts and practices that order and manage territory as relational (Echeverri 2005; Agnew 2013).
Understandings of what territory is, however, are less important than what territory does (Bryan 2012; Agnew and Oslender 2013; Elden 2013b). That is, territory communicates a sense of place and belonging as well as constituting a set of power-laden social relations, both within and outside of its constructed, flexible, and porous boundaries. Thus territorial performances are a form of both cultural politics and subject formation insofar as they contest, construct, order, maintain, communicate, and renew relationships between people, nonhumans, and place.

Brenda Baletti (2012) calls attention to the ways in which plural processes of claiming physical spaces form plural subjects (578). Baletti conceptualizes “territory-making as a subject-making practice” (578) and argues,

... territory, as the space of human settlement, is produced by the society it contains. Subjects and processes inscribe their spaces with the particular order or social topology embedded in their relationships (Haesbaert and Porto Gonçalves 2006). In other words, a given community (recognizing, of course, the heterogeneity and contradiction, and therefore multiple, potential territorialities present within communities) produces itself as itself in its everyday, territory-making practices (578).

In the remainder of this chapter I turn my attention to the ways in which everyday practices and rituals aimed at maintaining relations between Khumbu Sherpas and various localized spirits and deities construct a Sherpa territory. It is not my purpose to illuminate the ways in which beliefs and practices have changed over time (see Spoon 2008, 2011, 2014); rather, my purpose is to highlight the ways in which power works through constructions of sacred landscapes in the context of cultural political struggles over religion in Khumbu.
Khumbu’s animate territories

A heterogeneous set of water and land spirits, as well as a pantheon of numerous mountain deities, animates the Khumbu landscape. This class of *tsen* (Wyl. *bstan*) spirits and deities are associated to varying degrees with mundane and everyday concerns such as health, prosperity, success, wealth, and social harmony. Numerous everyday practices and ritual performances, including taboos against polluting sites where *tsen* are thought to reside, performing household rituals, as well as seasonal and annual community-wide rituals, maintain beneficial relations with Khumbu’s various spirits and deities and work to produce and reproduce both a Sherpa identity and Khumbu as a Sherpa territory. For instance, it is especially important to request protection from *tsen* when disturbing the ground for building construction or crop cultivation. Thus, it is common for Sherpas to perform a *puja* to appease the land spirits prior to disturbing the land to build a new structure. Similarly, Sherpas perform an annual community invocation of the local spirits and mountain deities for the protection and success of the vulnerable crops throughout the summer growing season. During this ritual, known variously as *Chirim Lhapsang*, *Tengkhor*, or *Orsho* depending on the village, village residents, monks, and monastic officials encircle the cultivated fields carrying various sacred objects, texts, and statues from the local gonde. In some villages, monks and monastic officials lead fumigation and prayer offerings invoking local deities and spirits for crop protection, while in other villages this is led by rotating community members (von Furer-Haimendorf 1964; Stevens 1993; Sherpa 2008).
Lu, tsen, and other land spirits

Female willow planted to the right and male willow to the left
In between, a shrine of Lu is built
Make offerings of incense and milk to appease her . . .

-Sherpa folk song, Wegner 1999

Maintaining relationships of care and protection with various types of land spirits shapes human-environment relations for many Khumbu Sherpas. Especially among older Khumbu Sherpas, lu, serpent spirits that reside in water, trees, and land (Sh.; Wyl. klu), are responsible for the health and wealth of the family and, therefore, require daily attention (Figure 10). Nyima Zangmu, an elder Sherpa woman in Thame captures the significance of lu for some, especially older Sherpas,
The lu is always with us. He is our supporter. When our heart is in sorrow, then he will help us. Wherever we go, he will follow us . . . Nowadays [summer] he comes up, and after he goes down [travels elsewhere]. Wherever the water is, he goes there. Sometimes it comes to our house also, and some stays in the land. Lu is like the dog that follows us. If we put butter in the fire, then the lu is happy. It’s similar to giving food to a dog [then the dog follows and watches after you] . . . The lu is from before [the arrival of monastic Buddhism] and he is with Sherpas.

[Translated]

In addition to pointing out that lu are thought to predate the arrival of monastic Buddhism in Khumbu, Nyima Zangmu’s comment points to the reciprocal and intimate relations between Sherpas and lu. Kind and content lu ensure health and harmony in the family and bring wealth and success, while temperamental or offended lu bring misfortune, discord in the household or village, and especially illness.

Sherpas appease household and village lu through daily offerings of sur, burning butter and incense. While walking through any of the Khumbu villages on any given morning, one can pick up a faint smell of juniper and see the slight trails of smoke coming from household lhasu (Sh., a small stone hearth for burning butter and incense offerings), where especially older women burn a small bundle of juniper along with butter to appease the lu. On ritual days or especially auspicious days, the lhasu offerings are more abundant and the smoke collects as a dense fog hovering in the village.

In addition to daily offerings, Sherpas take great care not to upset lu. Strictly avoided upsetting behaviors include cutting forest near a lu, cleaning raw meat, urinating or defecating near a lu, and burning anything producing an obnoxious odor such as meat, old clothes, and garbage—especially plastic. While lu may be easily upset through these behaviors, they are typically as easily appeased through offerings and pujas; however, in the event of an unusually upset lu causing particularly acute illness, discomfort, or
misfortune, Sherpas may appeal to *Lu Khangyal* (Sh., Reclining Vishnu) in Kathmandu for relief by offering soil from the offending household (Sherpa 2008).

Sites where *lu* are thought to reside are marked by prayer flags hanging from trees surrounding a natural spring, stream, or tree (Figure 11). A *lukhang*, a small shrine, may also be found at these sites. Along with the *Lhasu, tharshing*, prayer flags on bamboo poles, are commonly found outside homes to appease the land spirits and bring success and good fortune. Further, Sherpas hang varying colored clothes at land spirit sites or sites where an activity upsetting a land spirit took place, such as a cut tree near a *lu*. Thus, for some Khumbu Sherpas these ubiquitous and mundane elements of Khumbu’s material landscape indicate the ordering and maintenance of dynamic relations between land spirits, Sherpas, and the Khumbu environment.

Nyima Zangmu’s comment also points to the annual migration of *lu*. For some Sherpas, *lu* travel with the water, and thus travel elsewhere during the dry winter months and return with the spring run-off and summer monsoon seasons. The annual arrival of household *lu* during Losar, the Sherpa New Year in mid-February, is an occasion during which Khumbu Sherpas take great care to not offend the new or returning spirits. Prior to Losar, Sherpa families thoroughly clean their homes and themselves in preparation to welcome the *lu*. Early in the morning on Losar a family member gathers the first water used by the household from a *lu* spring and brings it into the home, where it is used to bathe,

---

33 Informants suggest these colored clothes replace animal sacrifices that were performed in the past to appease upset deities and spirits. They explain that such sacrifices were forbidden under the guidance of a powerful monk many generations ago. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the foundings of monastic Buddhist institutions in Khumbu prompted reforms in popular traditions. It is likely the replacement of animal sacrifices with symbolic cloths were among these.
bringing health and prosperity. The lu water is used in pujas during the day for fortune in the coming year. Following the puja, family members do not clean anything in the home for the day, believing that if they clean, the new lu will be cleaned away.34

Land spirits in a transforming landscape

Late in the summer monsoon I set out with two Sherpa men—a father and son—and a young Rai boy from Khumbu’s neighboring region for a day hike to the high summer pastures at Gajo. The morning hike took us much longer than expected, so we changed our destination and headed to see a Lhawan, a nun living high above the village of Thamo who can read the health of a family, and especially the current temperament of the family lu. After another hour or so of hiking through a densely fogged juniper forest, we emerged in front of a gate behind which was a small house and out building tucked under a large rock outcropping. Once inside, the nun made us much-needed hot coffee and instant noodles; in exchange, we offered her Tibetan fried bread. After visiting and eating, the nun gathered two dice from a small metal box, threw some incense in the stove fire, and rolled the dice three times. She then consulted a pecha and gave the Sherpa men four pujas to perform. The son took extensive notes and directions. He then leaned to me to explain that she was reading the fortune of the family and that it was all good news. Later the same man, contradicting himself, explained that in fact the nun told them that their family lu is slightly upset and needed to be appeased. More curious to me, however, is that in an interview just two months earlier this same young man told me that he and his family do not believe in lu—despite my observations to the contrary (adapted from field notes 2013).

Despite the abundant material evidence of Sherpas’ relations with lu and other land spirits, belief in the lu is not uniform, especially between generations. For some younger Sherpas, and especially for those who attended boarding schools in Kathmandu, I found my Sherpa translator often needing to translate the term lu into nag, the Nepali language.

34 Some informants in Nauche state that women are closer to lu, or that only women worship lu, while men worship Khumbi yullha. While this points to an interesting gendered division in Khumbu’s animate territory, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore this division.
equivalent (deriving from Sk. naga), which I take as an indicator of younger Sherpas’ lack of familiarity with, or even ambivalence toward, localized lu practices.

For those younger Sherpa informants familiar with lu practices, a palpable tension surrounds their knowledge of lu. In fact, most informants immediately jumped to comparisons between receiving medical treatment at the hospital at Khunde versus performing pujas for the lu. For instance, Dawa Yangchen, a middle age Sherpa woman in Khunde, observes lu are only found in older houses, not new homes built by young Sherpas because younger Sherpas do not find it necessary to believe in lu; rather, if they are sick they go to the hospital, where they are attended to by Western trained physicians. Likewise, to demonstrate the inefficacy of the lu and her preference for the medical treatment offered at Khunde Hospital, Pasang Lhamo explained to me that her son’s eyes had turned red and that she was told this was caused by an upset lu. She performed pujas as she was instructed in order to pacify the upset lu, but her son’s condition persisted. The condition cleared after receiving treatment at Khunde Hospital. Likewise, the tension between the lu and the hospital is evident in comments from Phurbu Yeshe, who, upon my asking her to describe the role of lu in Khumbu, immediately stated,

PY Yes, there is lu. We cannot say there is no lu. Whenever we get sickness, we put butter in the fire for the lu. After that we get well, even though we have not gone to hospital. I believe in that, but I also believe in the hospital. To both I believe.

In part, this dismissal of lu-related practices can be traced to school curriculum in Khumbu’s government schools. Dawa Yangchen, a local science teacher distances herself from lu, explaining,

DY I don’t think [lu are important], but old people they believe in lu and they thought that lu is two kinds of lu. One is black lu. Black lu doesn’t help us, but if we have a
white *lu* then it helps of everything. Just I heard this.

When I asked if she taught about *lu* in school, she replied,

DY  Not actually *lu*, but we teach about *dhami* (shaman).35 [We teach] 'Don’t believe about shaman,' because nowadays we have hospitals. In our government book [textbook] there’s written that *dhami* is not a doctor, that shaman is not a doctor, like this.

While she does not teach about the *lu* in school, she does teach her students to visit the western-trained doctor when sick, rather than the local shaman (who is able to communicate with *lu*). Similarly, teachers at the Thame school shared with me they do teach about *lu*, but use *lu* as a tool to teach children not to pollute fresh water springs.

Finally, when I asked Lhakpa Drolma, whose husband is a western-trained doctor in Khunde, about *lu*, she laughed slightly and shared that she is aware of the practices that others perform for *lu*, such as burning butter in the fire, but she does not believe in *lu* and has no interest in them. Like some Sherpas, Lhakpa Drolma, dismisses *lu* and other land spirits as superstitious. Some informants, however, hedge a bit on this claim to say that it does seem that people get sick when they disturb a *lu*. Similarly, as in the vignette above, I noticed several informants who, like Lhakpa Drolma, dismissed *lu* traditions as superstitious, but still engaged in practices to pacify and appease *lu*.

The influence of Sherpas’ engagements with peoples and ideas outside of Khumbu on practices and traditions associated with *lu* is evident beyond the classroom and medical care. Mingma Norbu, an elder man in Khumjung, describes the influence of tourism on *lu* practices,

35 My research assistant provided *shaman* as the translation for *dhami*. Dawa Yangchen used *shaman* from that point forward.
MN The lu comes from the water. Before we did not have the foreigners for help and for wealth we pray to the lu. Nowadays, where there is plenty of the sah trees [juniper] and the big stone at that place, and where the water comes under the grinding house, and under the trees, that is because of the lu. And the water coming, that is all because of the lu . . . It is said that that the lu gave us wealth in the past. In the past there were no tourists here, and for the wealth we used to call the lu. Nowadays, we don’t call to the lu very much anymore. Yes, nowadays only to the Khumbila and Urken Rinpoche we pray . . . The wealth comes because of the tourists. And then when we grow strong we go to Everest and earn a lot.

Mingma Norbu’s comment highlights two important trends reshaping some Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with lu and other land spirits, and as a result reshaping some Sherpas constructions of Khumbu as a Sherpa territory. First, Mingma Norbu suggests tourists, not lu, bring wealth to Khumbu families, which is leading some Sherpas to redirect their attention from appeasing household and village lu to appeasing, often equally finicky, tourists. This has resulted in a transformation of material, everyday practices associated with maintaining beneficial relations with lu and other land spirits through practices associated with human-environment relations to maintaining beneficial relations with foreigners through social relations.

Second, Mingma Norbu suggests Khumbu Sherpas’ everyday religious practices are more focused on Khumbila (short for Khumbi yullha), Khumbu’s protector deity and Urken Rinpoche, a familiar name for Guru Rinpoche, who is thought to have brought Buddhism to Khumbu. Indeed, my observations suggest informants are more concerned with maintaining relations with Khumbi yullha than with either the lu or the monastery (see also Spoon 2014). Before returning to this observation, however, I turn to a discussion of Khumbi yullha.
Khumbu’s mountain deities

Gold patterned Khumbu is the seat of Khumbi Yullha
Offer a ceremonial scarf to pay respect to the Yullha
The deities are pleased with us
Our gathering today is like a life-long meeting
When we depart let us go safely

-Sherpa folk song, Wegner 1999

In addition to lu and other land spirits, Khumbu is also home to numerous mountain deities, which Sherpas, along with Tibetologists and some Bön texts, generally rank highest among the hierarchy of tsen populating the Tibetan culture region (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975; Karmay 1996; Pommaret 1996; Ramble 1996). Lu are generally thought to dwell in the ground, while lha (Sh./Tib., gods), are thought to dwell in heaven, and yullha dwell in between—on top of mountains and in high places. Samten Karmay (1996) suggests that this Tibetan cosmic geography is captured by the expression lha lu nan sum (Wyl. lha klu gnyan gsum), in which nan refers to zhidak (Wyl. gzhi ldag) or yullha. It is important to note that zhidak or yullha should not be understood as interchangeable, and their distinct uses vary geographically. Charles Ramble (1996) observes the categories of zhidak and yullha actually represent distinct political claims. For Ramble, drawing on his work in Lo, Nepal, the change in terms is a result of a powerful lama taming a hostile zhidak and granting him territory to protect, thus making him into a yullha. Charlene Makley (2014), however, demonstrates that in Amdo ‘tamed’ territory deities continue to be referred to as zhidak. Informants in Khumbu distinguish between yullha and zhidak. Unlike Ramble’s observations in Lo, however, informants did not describe Khumbi yullha as a zhidak prior to ‘taming.’ They do, however, describe him as being pesky and mischievous, which are
qualities often attributed to zhidak prior to taming. I will address this conversion in the context of Khumbu in the next chapter.36

Mountain deities throughout the Tibetan culture region are concerned with mundane affairs, such as community well-being and security, prosperity, and wealth (Makley 2014). While neri (Wyl. gnas ri) are mountains housing Buddhist objects or texts and/or the abodes of famous practitioners, such as Mount Kailas (Karmay 1996; See Huber 1999 for discussion of neri), mountain gods, on the other hand, reside in lhari, or god mountains. Lhari are not considered sacred in a monastic Buddhist context because their resident deity is concerned with mundane affairs, as opposed to loftier Buddhist concerns.

Among Khumbu’s lhari, Jomolungma (Mount Everest) is the abode of Jomo Miyo Langsangma, who bestows food and nourishment to those paying her homage. She is understood to be one of five sisters (Sherpa 2005, 2008). The four others include: Tashi Tseringma, the goddess of longevity who resides in neighboring Rolwaling at Mount Gaurishankar; Tekar Dosangma, the goddess of good fortune; Chopen Dinsangma, the goddess of wealth; and Thingi-Shalsangma, the goddess of telepathic power; however the lhari abodes of the final three have yet to be revealed.

In addition to the five sisters, some older Sherpas state that every mountain in Khumbu has a god living in it and that different people pray to different gods. Participants most commonly point to gods living in Tawoche and Lhotse peaks, describing those deities as being important to the people living at the bases of those peaks. Von Fürer-Haimendorf (1964) identifies Tawoche lha tsen as the Nawa clan (Sh. ru) god living in Tawoche, above

---

36 See Karmay (1996) for a detailed discussion of deity classification schemes in Tibetan popular tradition, as well as Bön and Buddhist texts.
Pangboche; and Loudze lha tsen as resident in Lhotse (Sh. Loudze) and worshipped by the Chusherwa clan. Both these clans are second generation clans following the original four clans settling Khumbu (Oppitz 1973). Like elsewhere in the broadly conceived Tibetan culture region, it is likely these early clans established clan-based villages as well as relationships with local mountain deities; however, like elsewhere (Ramble 2008), Sherpas no longer associate these mountain deities with clans, but rather with villages. For example, informants in Pangboche make offerings to Tawoche in exchange for protection, success, and good health. They do not associate Tawoche with a clan; rather, he is associated with the village.

In Khumbu, participants most often refer to the complex of local mountain deities in terms of familial relations or, in a reference to classically conceived territorial claims, as a military hierarchy, in which Khumbi yullha, Khumbu’s protector deity, is the commander.37 For example, Tamosermu, Khumbi yullha’s wife, resides in Thamserku, a prominent peak best viewed from Nauche. Khumbi yullha’s son, Dingri Gangmar, lives in a Tibetan peak, one-day’s walk from the Nangpasa pass and will eventually inherit Khumbi yullha’s work in Khumbu.38 Tawoche, dwelling in the mountain by the same name behind Pangboche, acts as

37 Françoise Pommaret (2004) observes that the titles at the beginning of mountain deities’ names in Bhutan, such as A pa (father) and Jo mo (mother) situate mountain deities and human residents in kinship relations. Karmay (1996), however, argues these appellations index more than kinship relations by also referencing genealogical relations between deities and humans established in origin myths.

38 Hildegard Diemberger (1998) provides a complete discussion of Dingri Gangmar, the territorial deity in Dingri (Wyl. Iha bstan sgang dmar), a Tibetan area north of Khumbu with which Khumbu Sherpas have long been associated both in trade and religious practice. Diemberger explains that Dingri Gangmar is thought to be the illegitimate son of Khumbi yullha, who, out of shame, hid Dingri Gangmar under an upside down red, copper cup resulting in the shape and color of Dingri Gangmar’s mountain abode.
Khumbi yullha’s minister. Khumbi yullha’s gamekeeper, or herdsman, Si chu, lives in Khumbu’s eastern peak of Ama Dablang. It is noteworthy to observe that the peaks described above, including Khumbila and excluding the Tibetan peak, sit directly to the four cardinal directions around the Sherpa villages of Pangboche, where Khumbu’s first gonde sits, and Tengboche, where Khumbu’s first celibate monastery is located. Thus the connections between Khumbi yullha and other prominent mountain deities may be read as a map outlining the area of Khumbi yullha’s control. While these conceptualizations of a military-style, ranked hierarchy of warrior and protector deities and an idealized map of Khumbu’s animate geomancy may be read as technologies of non-state territoriality in Khumbu, in what follows I show that Khumbu Sherpas’ constructions of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha’s territory are far more complicated than this.

Khumbi yullha

On a foggy morning in mid-July, I ducked through the low doorway into Ang Nyimi’s house in Thame. Several households in Thame were holding pujas for Khumbi yullha that morning, as the calendar stated that day was an auspicious day to do so. While it was not the purpose of our visit, Ang Nyimi invited us to sit and observe the puja, which was nearly finished. In addition to Ang Nyimi, six other older men and women sat around a table while one of the men read from a pecha. Ang Nyimi later told me that this man was a former monk and, thus, could read the pecha. The atmosphere was relaxed enough that Ang Nyimi stepped away from the prayers to welcome us and serve us tea. Ang Nyimi’s grown son later came into the room and started a full-voice conversation with us, despite the prayers in the background. When Ang Nyimi’s son learned we were interested in talking about Khumbi yullha and the beyul, he invited us into the next room in the home, which was empty of people, but a full altar with torma, incense, and water offerings sat in front of the window (Figure 12). He explained that his family had specifically commissioned the torma from another villager who knew how to make them for this specific day. He went on to say that while his family performs a puja for Khumbi yullha three or four times a year, only once a year do they commission the torma. (Adapted from field notes 2013).
Among Khumbu’s myriad mountain deities, Sherpas identify *Khumbi yullha* as the most powerful of the *tsen*—a *yullha*, or territory deity (Karmay 1996; Sherpa 2008). *Khumbi yullha*, also named *Khumbila Tsen Gyalpo* and described as the protector god of Khumbu, resides atop a mountain also named *Khumbi yullha* (both are often shortened to Khumbila). Henceforth, I will use *Khumbi yullha* to reference the mountain deity, and Khumbila to reference the mountain itself. Khumbila sits at the center of Khumbu with the
villages of Khunde, Khumjung, and Nauche at its base. *Khumbi yullha* is most often depicted with white hair, wearing a white scarf, and riding a red or brown horse. At his feet are often a yak, sheep, goat, and yeti, who are thought to be his *khor*, or retinue (Sh.; Wyl. ‘khor; literally circle) (Figure 13). Postcard size images of *Khumbi yullha* adorn nearly every household shrine in Khumbu and can be found in the village *gonde* and monasteries. Khumbu Sherpas explain that *Khumbi yullha* is a personal protector and benefactor who protects individual and household health and safety, fulfills desires, and brings wealth. For Khumbu Sherpas, *Khumbi yullha* also acts as a protector deity for each village and Khumbu as a whole. As such, he protects villages from natural disasters while also bestowing general success and wealth on the villages (cf. Makley 2014). A local lama explains, “*Khumbi yullha* helps this place—no landslides, no thieves, no killing each other, no bad disease.” On the other hand, Sherpas also fear *Khumbi yullha*, who may withdraw protection or even cause harm if he is angered.

The area delineated by the mountain deities comprising *Khumbi yullha’s* family and ministers suggests *Khumbi yullha’s* area of control is limited to the villages of Nauche, Khumjung, Khunde, and the surrounding areas. Indeed, the adjacent villages of Khumjung and Khunde, situated directly at the base of Khumbila, are said to form the horse upon which *Khumbi yullha* rides, and are thus favored by *Khumbi yullha*. On the other hand, Phortse is often described by older Sherpas living in other villages as being located on the “wrong side” of *Khumbi yullha* (Brower 1991). Some participants even suggested this was *Khumbi yullha’s* toilet. Such a pejorative description is commonly invoked to signal the misfortune of the residents of Phortse—a village situated high on a ridge between the
popular EBC trekking route and the increasingly popular Gokyo Lakes trekking route, though not actually on either route, and therefore narrowly missing the economic benefits from trekking. However, these negative and derisive descriptions seem to be less common now than they once were (Interviews 2013). The reasons for this are unclear, though perhaps there is a decrease in animosity toward Phortse residents as more Phortse residents access the tourism economy, increasing their family and community wealth, or as a result of a general effort to build more amicable relations between Khumbu villages.

Figure 13. *Khumbi yullha* with his *khor*. Photograph by the author.
Beyond this spiritual and vernacular geography of Khumbi yullha’s territory, the deity’s territory is marked in the physical landscape in several ways. To begin, Lhapso, village shrines, for Khumbi yullha sit above Nauche, Khumjung, and Khunde, as well as next to the gone in Khumjung (Figure 14). In addition, Khumbi yullha’s khor, his retinue of white yak, sheep, goats, and yetis, is another way in which Khumbi yullha’s presence is
manifest in Khumbu’s landscape. They are tasked with watching over Khumbu residents and monitoring behaviors. Finally, Sherpas share a number of myths connecting *Khumbi yullha* to the Khumbu landscape. For instance, several older informants in various contexts related a story meant to explain why there is no salt in Khumbu,

> At one time, a lama met with Khumbi yullha to make plans for a salt factory in Khumbu. These meetings were intended to be secret; however, the lama’s curious wife interrupted one of their meetings and Khumbi yullha disappeared. He never returned to the lama and, thus, a salt factory was never built.

One informant told another version of this story:

> The wife of the lama at Mona went to meet Khumbi yullha in order to make plans for a salt factory in Khumbu. They had decided that Gajo would be the best place. Before their plans were complete, however, the woman noticed smoke coming from her home. Assuming her husband was preparing tea for a guest, and fearful that it may be a female guest, the woman ran home, leaving the plans for a salt factory incomplete. Thus, today there is no naturally occurring salt in the Khumbu landscape. Though, some say salt lines the banks of the stream that runs through Gajo.

Regardless of the version one prefers, this story at once connects *Khumbi yullha* to the Khumbu landscape and also demonstrates his authority over Khumbu and power to shape the landscape, in this case withholding salt.

While *Khumbi yullha* is generally described as Khumbu’s protective territory deity, interviews reveal subtle differences in some Sherpas’ relationships with *Khumbi yullha*. In general, residents from Nauche, Khunde, and Khumjung demonstrate different relationships with *Khumbi yullha* than residents of Khumbu’s other villages. Tenzing Sonam, a middle aged Sherpa man living in Nauche, exemplifies the responses to my

---

39 Including yeti in *Khumbi yullha’s khor* is a point of debate. Informants who discussed *Khumbi yullha’s khor* included yeti, as did one painting of *Khumbi yullha* with his *khor* that I found (see Figure 13). Otherwise, *Khumbi yullha* is more often pictured with only yak, sheep, and goat. Further, I have not yet seen any ritual *torma* forms that include a yeti.
inquiries about *Khumi yullha* in Nauche, Khumjung, and Khunde:

TS  *Khumbila* [*Khumi yullha*] is the protector of Khumbu. We consider him as god also, as protector of Khumbu. And the sustaining of this economy in Khumbu, we believe it is blessed by *Khumbi yullha*. *Khumbila*, you have seen at that place [A rock above Nauche where Nauche men go to perform *pujas* for *Khumi yullha*]—last time we went there carrying this flag. It’s to worship *Khumbila*. We went there to worship *Khumbila* yearly in order to purify this land, in order to purify this Khumbu, and everything that has been, you know. We have been suffering from the problems, from the negative things, from the natural disasters. So we believe that after the blessing of *Khumbila*, we will be relieved from this, all the disaster and things, you know. So, *Khumbila* is a god for us.

In his comments, Tenzing Sonam details both a specific relationship that he maintains with *Khumi yullha* and the broader relations the village maintains as a whole through village rituals. In contrast and as demonstrated in the vignette above, Ang Nyimi and his son in Thame performed *pujas for Khumbu yullha* as a familial and individual protector deity, not as a village protector. Informants in Khumbu's other villages explain they know very little about *Khumbi yullha*, however, most also describe him as “Khumbu’s god” or “Khumbu’s protector.” Thus, while Nauche, Khumjung, and Khunde residents appeared more knowledgeable about *Khumbi yullha* and demonstrate individual, as well as village, relations with the deity, informants throughout Khumbu acknowledge his authority over maintaining both the well-being and economic success of the region.

A rich array of literature, especially in the 1990s, explores the diversity of practices associated with *yullha* through much of the Himalaya, including parts of Nepal and Bhutan, as well as the Tibetan plateau (Karmay 1994, 1996, 2000; Blondeau and Steinkellner 1996; Diemberger 1996; Hazod 1996; Pommaret 1996, 2004; Ramble 1996; Blondeau 1998; Coggins 2014; Makley 2014; Yeh and Coggins 2014). *Yullha* is most often translated as “territory deity” or “deity of the territory,” where *yul* is translated as territory, nation, or
country, and *lha* means god or deity (Tamang 2009).\(^{40}\) *Yullha* traditions are central to Tibetan cultural practices as a secular and unwritten lay tradition, rather than a Buddhist monastic tradition (Karmay 1994, 1996; Pommaret 1996, 2004; Ramble 1996; Schicklgruber 1996; Yeh and Coggins 2014). Karmay (1996) traces the concept of *yullha*, as “deity of the local territory, to early Tibetan clan society in which land (Tib. *yul sa*) was granted to local chiefs by the state—a meaning tied to traditional notions of *territory*.

At the individual and household scale, the most common practice aimed at maintaining relations with *Khumbi yullha* is the performance of *serkem* to *Khumbi yullha*. While some informants report that they perform *serkem* daily, most informants report that they only perform *serkem for Khumbi yullha* three-four times per year, on days designated by the Tibetan calendar. On these special days, households erect new prayer flags, offer *lhapsangs*, ritual incense burning, and perform *serkem* to *Khumbi yullha*—some, like Ang Nyima, even commission *torma*, dough or rice figures used in ritual worship, to be made and hire monks to perform *pujas*.

As in some Khumbu Sherpas homes, Ang Norbu, an elder Sherpa and ex-monk, recites one of two *serkem* daily. Other informants, however, report they do not perform *serkem* daily. After describing *Khumbi yullha’s* kinship relations, including identifying his father is a king and his mother is a *lu*, and physical appearance, the prayer continues on to beseech *Khumbi yullha’s* protection:

40 Ramble (2008) notes the most general use of *yul* as “any definable political territory” (107). Despite its less-common use in Ramble’s research in Te, Nepal—where *yul* refers to a village in contradistinction to a *dzong* (Tib., fortress), Ramble explains that *yul* is most frequently used to refer to a nation or country; however, Blondeau (1996) alerts us to variations in the referent (i.e. village or mountain).
So we are offering for you
Serkim, chang, milk, and yogurt
Brown sugar tsamba offering as sur.
We offer you yak, goat, and sheep
All these forms we offer for you
We also offer you white incense and sandalwood
If we do this for the yullha, then the pollutions will go away.
Offering these nine desirable things
To fulfill the wishes of the country god
You are the Urken Padma's [Guru Rinpoche] follower
We are the holder of the spiritual master
[Urken] Padma's lineage
Remember the previous commitments you have made,
You must uphold and preserve the teaching of Buddha.
To dignify the jewels,
You must spread the teachings of Zokpa Chenpo
I offer all my assets to you
To bring success and fulfill my hopes
Man and pets' diseases go away
We will have a year of good planting and happiness
The Buddha, holding the Buddhadharma
All enemies are close
And are going away
What I am doing is for the success.
This is the short form for the yul lha
Serkim. Composed by Dza Tula pa [date unknown]
[Closing wish]
This passage demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between *Khumbi yullha* and Khumbu Sherpas. By offering all his or her assets (i.e. all possessions), the worshipper binds *Khumbi yullha* to return the favor by granting success, fulfilling one’s hopes, ensuring health, and good crops (cf. Makley 2014).

In addition to the *serkem* above, Ang Norbu shared with me a lesser-known *serkem* that he recites on occasion. This prayer, composed at Rimbuk Gompa in Tibet by an unknown author, begins:

```
།ཆོས་པོངས་གང་རིག་འཁོར་དང་བཅས།
ན་ཡིས་མཆོད་གཏོར་འདི་ཞེས་ལ།
ཅོལ་བའི་འ(ིན་ལས་འ+བ་པར་མཛད་།
ར་དབབགེགས་ཚར་ཅོད་པའི་།
དཾ་ཅན་“ཙམ་འཁོར་དང་བཅས།
ན་ཡིས་ན་ཡིས་མཆོད་གཏོར་འདི་ཞེས་ལ།
བཅོལ་བའི་ཅོལ་བའི་འ(ིན་ལས་འ+བ་པར་མཛད་།
བས་ཡས་ཆེན་པོ་བཀའ་-ང་མ་།
```

For all the protector and guardian gods
The decorations of the torma offering
Are to bring all success
Suddenly the enemies and obstacles are vanquished/destroyed.

All the vow-holders of gods and their followers
The decorations of the torma offering
Are to bring all success

The gods who are the protectors of the Tibet areas
Ten ma chu ni and her followers
The decorations of the torma offering
Are to bring all success

This *serkem* continues on in this way invoking next the protector god of Samye monastery, the five Buddha families, the protector god of the Kagyu sect, the protector gods of all the sacred places, *Miyolangsangma* (the goddess residing in Mount Everest), the protector deities of Khumbu’s local *gondes*, the protector deity of the neighboring valley of Khenbalung, *Sura rakye* (Sh.; Wyl. *Zura rskyä*), and finally the deities of Khumbu and *Khumbi yullha*:
Unlike the first *serkem*, this prayer works to connect *Khumbi yullha* into a network of proximate deities, at once establishing *Khumbi yullha’s* authority in protecting the well-being and success of Khumbu Sherpas and delineating *Khumbi yullha’s* specific territory (Ramble 1996).

In addition to being a powerful individual benefactor, *Khumbi yullha*, for some Khumbu Sherpas born in Khumbu, is also their birth god and thus individual protector deity. Tashi, a Khumbu Sherpa currently living in Kathmandu, explains,

T Sherpas will always have a tie to Khumbu through *Khumbila*. He is their birth god. Wherever they go they will worship him and he will protect them.

Likewise, Nyima Zangmu, an elder Thame woman explains *Khumbi yullha’s* role as a birth-god,

NZ About *Khumbi yullha* . . . The people who are born to this side must pray to this side’s god. The Sherpa people born in Darjeeling, must worship to the god there. Wherever a person is born, he must pray to that place’s god.

[Translated]
As a birth-god, *Khumbi yullha* is responsible for, among other things, protection during travel, which informants explain they request by pausing at either a stream flowing from the slopes of *Khumbila* and/or as they leave Nauche and can view the rock above the village. Indeed, from the courtyard of my house in Nauche, from where I can see the bend in the trail leading people out of Nauche and out of sight, I have watched as tourists pause for one last picture of the village and Khumbu Sherpas pause to glance at the rocks perched above the village with *Khumbi yullha*’s image. Françoise Pommaret (2004) identifies a birth-deity as *kye lha* (Tib.; Wyl. *skyes lha*), but also observes that a person’s *kye lha* and *yullha* are often the same. As a result, however, individual practices and offerings made toward a *yullha* may in fact often be directed toward the *yullha* as an individual’s *kye lha*. For instance, Mingma Tsering, like several other informants, worships *Khumbi yullha* three-four times per year as his birth-god, not as Khumbu’s protector deity. Nonetheless, I suggest that for many participants this distinction is increasingly academic, for reasons I will expand on below.

In addition to being a protective warrior deity and birth deity, *Khumbi yullha* is also known to be a cattle deity—appearing as such in the summer festival of *Yerchang* (Sh.). Historically, this festival was celebrated in the high pastures during the summer herding season. There, Khumbu Sherpas would request *Khumbi yullha*’s protection for their herds by offering *serkem* and *torma* formed into yaks, sheep, and goats (Stevens 1993). L. N. Sherpa (2008), however, observes this festival has largely lost its significance as the importance of herds to many Khumbu Sherpas livelihoods has declined.

*Khumbi yullha*’s role as Khumbu’s protective warrior deity and cattle deity, as well
as for many Khumbu Sherpas as a birth-deity combines with indicators of Khumbi yullha’s active presence in Khumbu’s landscape and his authority over the fortune, success, and health of villages and households to make him an ever-present force shaping many Khumbu Sherpas’ everyday lives. Indeed, Pommaret (2004) observes that a yullha functioning as birth-deity, cattle-deity, and warrior-deity wields nearly unlimited power over everyday life. In return for protection and prosperity, human residents bind Khumbi yullha in a relationship through offerings to maintain the social and physical order of the community, and in doing so enact a moral economy in which individual and household success and fortune is reappropriated to benefit the village as a whole.

Mountain deities are thought to fight evil forces as well as protect the yang, good fortune (Wyl. g.yang), of both villages and households. Makley (2014) explains that, unlike capital, yang is a “naturo-social potentiality or essential force, and that potentiality has long been conceptualized as embedded in the household unit, ideally under the guidance of patriarchs, as the main units of production and reproduction” (2014, 306; also see Da Col 2007). For Sherpas, the yang of the household is constantly at risk of leaking away as the result of upsetting Khumbi yullha. Makley observes it is primarily the male head of a household who is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the household’s relationship with a mountain deity, and thus the security of a household’s yang.

Like households, villages face a similar threat: disharmony within the village or behaviors upsetting a mountain deity may result in the leaking out of yang, and thus potential harm to the village. At an annual ritual maintaining relations with a yullha in Amdo, Karmay (1994) observes, male Sharwa hike to the top of the yullha’s mountain
abode where they plant arrows in a cairn to symbolize submission to the deity, offer, a
libation ritual, scatter lungta (Tib. wind-horses—small sheets of paper with horses printed
on them), and call to the yullha to request personal protection and grant wishes. For the
Sharwa, their local yullha is the “giver of glory, honour, fame, prosperity, power, and
progeny” (Karmay 1994, 117). Karmay highlights the significance of this ritual in
reproducing a social ordering:

Participation in such a ritual therefore implies total integration into the community: this in turn implies inherited social and political obligation, moral and individual
responsibility, and an affirmation of communal and national solidarity in the face of
external aggression. By the same token, internal conflict and disunity engender the
withdrawal of the divinity’s favour which will affect the power and prosperity of the

Following Christian Schicklgruber (1996), social order among communities with
strong connections to a local yullha is often expressed and maintained vis-à-vis the deity.
As Karmay observes, participation in community worship of a yullha binds social relations.
Moreover, fear of disturbing or upsetting a local yullha drives residents to maintain
harmonious relations. That is, residents work to maintain social order so as not to upset
the yullha. This simultaneously points to the power of the yullha to grant protection,
success, and prosperity, as well as to cause destruction and illness.

In Khumbu, beyond maintaining relations with Khumbi yullha at the personal and
household scale, the regular performance of village-wide rituals, such as those performed
during Dumje, are necessary for maintaining the protection and good-fortune, yang, of the

41 While Karmay does not link the Sharwa in Amdo with the Sherpa in Khumbu, it is
possible today’s Khumbu Sherpas and Amdo’s Sharwa share ancestors, as well as
sediments of shared rituals and traditions surrounding the yullha. This example is included
not because of the possible connection; rather, this example is representative of similarly
described mountain cult rituals elsewhere.
village. In the days following the sudden death of the Nauche man during the 2013 Dumje puja for Khumbi yullha, a group of Nauche elders grew increasingly concerned that the death during the ritual caused pollution (Sh. tip), and as a result Khumbi yullha’s protection was not ensured and the village may suffer from misfortune. In order to recapture the yang that may have leaked from the pollution, Nauche Sherpas performed a Yanggu (Sh.). In general, a yanggu is performed when people are unhappy, unhealthy, or when there is fear of pollution. This ritual may be performed at the household or village scale. Similar to the offerings made during Dumje, the Nauche yanggu consisted of offerings of serkem and lhapsang at the rock above Nauche; however, this time, Khumbi yullha did not appear and the festive dancing, singing, drinking, and smearing of tsampa was kept at a minimum. Beyond demonstrating the significant power Khumbi yullha has over Sherpas lives, the performance of this yanggu in particular, as a response to concerns over a potentially polluted and strained relationship with Khumbi yullha, indicates that, for many Sherpas, relations with Khumbi yullha are actively lived and performed.

Conclusion

The set of everyday practices and ritual performances associated with Khumbi yullha, and to a lesser extent with lu and Khumbu’s other land spirits, constitutes a set of technologies governing Khumbu Sherpas’ social and human-environment relations, and demonstrates the authority Khumbi yullha holds in shaping Khumbu Sherpa lifeworlds. As such, this set of everyday practices and ritual performances associated with Khumbi yullha constitute a form of government and its role in the Khumbu landscape a non-state
territorial claim. That is, Sherpas are not concerned with property rights claims, but rather with the protection of life and community, and the production and reproduction of a Khumbu Sherpa identity.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of my central concerns with the narrative of the ‘traditional Sherpa’ is that early ethnographies narrated Sherpas as Buddhists, with little to no regard for localized practices (i.e. von Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Ortner 1978, 1989b; Bjønness 1983; Paul 1989; Fisher 1990). As a result, the complexity of Sherpa religiosity, central to my investigation in this dissertation, has been largely overlooked. In part, I have shown here what everyday Sherpa religion looks like outside of the monastic community. Moreover, and central to my point in this dissertation, is that Sherpas’ relations with Khumbi yullha, as well as other place-based deities and spirits are productive of space—an animate landscape and a Sherpa territory where Khumbu Sherpas’ recognize the authority of Khumbi yullha in ensuring well-being and success. Yet, this space, very much overlaps with the space produced by the Buddhist monastic community in the form of the beyul. In the next chapter, I will explore the overlap and negotiation of these two spaces.
Chapter 5: Territory and the cultural politics of religion: The Buddhist *beyul*

Introduction

_In the past, many gods and spirits roamed the world without homes and responsibilities. A Buddhist lama (others assert it was the Tibetan king) in Tibet decided to build a monastery, Samyé Monastery; however, the gods and spirits were opposed to this and dismantled each day’s work during the night. Knowing Guru Rinpoche, a powerful Buddhist teacher, was more powerful than the troublesome local gods, the lama asked Guru Rinpoche to come from India, where he had been giving blessings and receiving education. Guru Rinpoche traveled from India to Tibet, through the Himalaya. Along his journey, he gave each local god a home and responsibilities, including Khumbi yullha, whom he made responsible for Khumbu’s protection. Upon arriving in Tibet, Guru Rinpoche instructed the lama to continue building the monastery, assuring him the gods, now committed to protecting Buddhist teachings and peoples, would allow the construction to continue, even ordering the formerly pesky gods to assist in the process. However, Khumbi yullha became quite lazy, tired, and angry while building the monastery. As punishment, Guru Rinpoche made the dirt in Khumbi yullha’s land different from the dirt in other Himalayan landscapes and no longer waterproof (Interviews 2009-2010, 2013)._

The story of Khumbi yullha’s conversion from a localized, pesky, and, as some describe, wrathful deity to a protector of Buddhism and Buddhist peoples is not uncommon. Further, in similar yullha conversion stories, Guru Rinpoche is sometimes said to have converted the area into a _beyul_ and tasked the _yullha_ to protect the new _beyul_ (Pommaret 1996). Yet, there is more to this story than the seemingly simple origin of a territory deity; as this chapter will demonstrate, the story of Khumbi yullha’s conversion is

---

42 While the reference to Khumbu’s dirt not being waterproof was nearly ubiquitous, only one informant explained this detail. Tenzing reports that dirt on the Tibetan plateau is spread on roofs and dried because it is waterproof, but that Khumbu’s soil is not waterproof and, therefore, cannot be used in this way. Instead, and until recently, the roofs of Sherpa homes were constructed from overlapping slate pieces. Today, the majority of homes in Khumbu are covered by corrugated aluminum roofing.
also a political territorial claim by the Buddhist monastic community.

This chapter continues to explore the cultural politics of religion in Khumbu. I begin by exploring the rise of the Buddhist monastic community in Khumbu and the ways in which the monastic community claimed authority in Khumbu *through* territory. I then consider the ways in which the Sherpa religion is being renegotiated in the context of Khumbu as an increasingly capitalist tourist space. In this chapter, I show what attention to how two forms of space are constructed, performed, and negotiated in Khumbu—the space of the *beyul* and that of *Khumbi yulha’s* territory—reveals about the cultural politics shaping Khumbu Sherpa religiosity.

**Narrating Khumbu Sherpa religion**

The relationship between institutional, monastic Buddhist practices and popular lay practices and traditions in Khumbu appears, at times, ambiguous, and has often been depicted as such in academic literature. As I described in Chapter 2, scholars have sought appropriate ways to explain what they saw as the coming together of Hindu and Tibetan cultural practices in some parts of the Himalaya, Buddhist and Shamanic traditions in others, through theorizations of the Indo-Tibetan Interface (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1975; Mumford 1989), images of Himalayan religion as a zipper (Fisher 1990), and ecological and buffer zone models (cf. Shneiderman 2010). Indeed the legacy of these models shapes the narrative of religion in Khumbu today, which is generally described, following Ortner, as a mixture of Bön and Buddhist beliefs and practices. Ortner (1989b) differentiates these two as ‘high’ and ‘low’ Buddhism. That is, lay, popular, ‘folk’ Tibetan Buddhist practices in
contradistinction to the ‘high’ Buddhist practices necessary to advance practitioners along the Buddhist path. While I find Ortner’s distinction between high and low Buddhism analytically useful in tracing two of the influences constructing Khumbu Sherpas religious practices, as well as highlighting the power differentials between monastic practices and what others describe as everyday, popular, or lay, tradition, I do not follow Ortner in describing Sherpa practices, performances, and rituals as ‘low’ Buddhism for three reasons. First, I find the reference pejorative and dismissive. Second, to classify localized traditions, practices, and beliefs as Buddhist privileges, and perpetuates, an erasure of the epistemologically violent history between Bön and Buddhist practices and beliefs. Finally, like Hart’s (2004) critique of the “impact model” of globalization, I conceptualize the relations between the monastic community, as representative of Buddhism, and the Sherpa lay and popular practices, as oriented toward localized place-based deities and spirits, as relational, mutually constructed, and in constant reconfiguration.

The first Nyingma Buddhist monastery in Khumbu was established only 100 year ago (Ortner 1989b), and Khumbu Sherpas have been maintaining relations with Khumbu’s animate territory—that is, the spirits and deities residing in Khumbu’s rivers, trees, rocks, and mountains—for far longer. The everyday practices and rituals in many Sherpa households, detailed in the previous chapter, demonstrate a much closer affinity to Bön, the pre-Buddhist religious tradition of the current Tibetan ethnic region, and reveal a complicated religious history informed in part, by Bön and Nyingma Buddhist traditions. Bön is best characterized as an animistic and shamanistic tradition thought to have declined in Tibet in the eighth century as the Buddhist tradition emerged. The
establishment of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, Samyé monastery, with patronage from the Buddhist King Trisong Detsen, in roughly 779 AD marked a moment of violent reconfiguration of the relations between Buddhism and Bön in Tibet (Dowman 1997). At that time, Bön practitioners were persecuted and exiled; however, Bön beliefs were so entrenched in Tibetan popular religion that they could not be completely eradicated and were surreptitiously incorporated into Buddhist practices (Karmay 1998). Bön practice reemerged in Tibet in approximately the eleventh century with a closer affiliation to Buddhist practice and within the Buddhist framework, especially among the Nyingma sect.

As the first and oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma traditions were positioned to incorporate Bön practices to a greater extent than the later Buddhist sects. Karmay (1998) suggests that the debate over which tradition informed the other, Nyingma influencing Bön practice or vice versa, may simply be academic; these two traditions are intertwined and inseparable in their later permutations. Karmay further argues that the presence of Bön traditions led to the rejection of Nyingma beliefs by orthodox Buddhist sects, who viewed Bön’s integration as a pollution of the Buddhist doctrine. In the sixteenth century, a second wave of persecution against Bönpos, fueled by the theocratic Gelug sect, demonstrated continuing tensions between the traditions (Dowman 1997). Drawing from this context many Khumbu Sherpas today explain that their ancestors fled from Kham, traveling nearly 1300 miles, and crossed into the Himalayan region of Khumbu, seeking refuge and security.

Approximately 250 years prior to the founding of Khumbu’s first Nyingma monastic institution at Tengboche, Lama Sangwe Dorje established Khumbu’s first community *gondo*
was at Pangboche in 1667. Later gonde were founded at Thame and Khumjung. Today, Nauche, Khunde, Thamo, Thameteng, and, most recently, Phortse all have village gonde. The early gonde did not support communities of monks nor were they educational institutions like the Buddhist monastic institutions of Tibet at the time. Instead, they were simple structures containing altars housing the gods, making them available and accessible for worship (Ortner 1989b). Community members with some training, either formal or familial, served early Khumbu settlers’ ritual needs and later cared for the gonde. Community lamas, often married, performed protection rituals for people, crops, and land, which, in some cases, drew on monastic Buddhism. In addition, lhawa (Sh.; also referred to as dhami in Sherpa; village shamans or mediums with the ability to communicate with place-based spirits and deities) performed rituals to banish evil spirits.

In 1916, Tengboche monastery was founded with financial support from, among others, a Solu Sherpa whose fortune had grown as the result of capitalizing on Khumbu’s salt and grain trade. Tengboche monastery legitimated Khumbu as a Nyingma Buddhist community by demonstrating sufficient community resources and patronage for the Buddhist tradition to support a full-time monastic community. In 1952, Thame gonde converted to Khumbu’s second full-time celibate monastic community.43

---

43 Community support for such an institution is significant. A full-time monastic community requires not only financial support for constructing the monastery structures, commissioning paintings and statues, and securing numerous volumes of sacred texts from Tibet, but also meeting the daily financial needs, including food and tea, for each resident monk, a responsibility typically met by monks’ families. In addition, each member of the monastic community is no longer a productive agent in providing resources for their families. Therefore, the founding of Khumbu’s first monastic communities demonstrates prosperity in Khumbu sufficient to support the founding and maintenance of full-time monastic communities and sacrifice the labor lost to such communities (Ortner 1989b).
The foundings of Tengboche and Thame monasteries marked the beginning of an ongoing power struggle between lay Sherpas’ concerns with protection rituals and exorcisms focused on local deities and demons and the concerns of the monastic institutions oriented toward ‘higher’ Buddhist practices and the universal Buddhist pantheon (Ortner 1989b). Ortner (1989b, 1999) suggests that with the foundings of the celibate monastic institutions, social and monastic forces in Khumbu attempted to eliminate popular, ‘lower’ ritual practices. The primary complaints against the community, married lamas and shamans, as representatives of Sherpa popular religion, focused on violence and sex. Ortner describes (1999) how the celibate monastic community viewed exorcism rituals to cure illness as violent acts against both demons and others. Such violent acts are violations of the Buddhist teachings as a result of the harm caused to others and the pollution (Sh. tip) generated within the person inflicting the harm. Further, the celibate monastic institutions objected to married monks’ engagement in sex; however, the objection is not to the act of sexual intercourse, but rather to the consequence of intercourse: family. Ortner (1999) suggests that the agricultural labor associated with sustaining a family leads to killing bugs and worms, a violation of Buddhist teachings, while social obligations associated with a family distract from Buddhist practice. As a result, Sherpa popular religion led by married lamas and shamans was accorded a ‘low’ status by the celibate monastic institutions practicing ‘high’ Buddhism. Ortner (1989a) observes that

---

44 Charlene Makley (2014) describes a similar tension, which has always existed between monastic and lay traditions in Amdo, in which monastic leaders deride lay mediums, shamans, for propagating low religion and ‘baser desires’.
this extended to the repositioning of Guru Rinpoche as a secondary figure in gon
d paintings in structures constructed after the monastery foundings.

Ortner (1999) demonstrated that, by the end of the twentieth century, the outcome of
the campaign to elevate Sherpa popular religion was most evident in Dumje. Upon
assuming authority over the festivals, the celibate monastic institutions eliminated all
depictions of sex and violence. Ortner contrasts her observations with previously observed
Dumje where celibate monastic authority was intentionally excluded. While efforts to
reform some aspects of the Dumje festival were successful, overall the campaign to reform
Sherpas’ popular traditions was unsuccessful. Thus, Ortner argues that Sherpas
reconfigured higher Buddhist practice to integrate popular religious traditions, merging
Khumbu’s disconnected monastic world with the realities of Sherpa popular tradition. This
negotiation can be seen in the Nauche Dumje described in the previous chapter. While
Tengboche Rinpoche oversees most of the ritual activities, receives donations on behalf of
the monastic community, and performs the exorcism that banishes place-based evil spirits
from the village, he is not present at the puja for Khumbi yullha. Rather, Khumbi yullha
holds authority during this puja. As demonstrated in Dumje, Buddhist monasticism has not
dominated localized place-based religion in Khumbu, but rather the two are in constant
renegotiation, constituting a cultural politics of Khumbu Sherpa religion.

Sitting with Tenzing, a Nauche elder I had interviewed several years earlier about his
understandings of the beyul concept, I asked him to explain the differences between dhami
[shamans] and monks:

T  That’s different. That is absolutely different, but monks also not that much live with
the shamans. And the monastery and monks those only thinking ‘what have the
Buddhas told’? They follow by the Buddha’s rule, but local area we must follow everybody, any kind [of deity and spirit], we have to follow for the Buddhas, we have to follow by the shamans, we have to do everything.

LS In your opinion would you say that the Shamans are more familiar with the gods that live locally?

T Yes, the shamans see gods, but we are not shaman, we do not see the gods. That one is really complicated. The monks, they say no gods, but there are some gods, but no demons, no ghosts. But inside the book [Buddhist texts] they have. When the offering time comes they have even one small tree, they also have one god [make an offering to a local spirit]. Only small farm, they also have water god [the monastery makes an offering to the local water spirit living on their agricultural land]. Where the small stone, they also have own god. When the offering time comes, they will make offering.

Tenzing’s comments usefully captures the boundaries Khumbu Sherpas construct between lay practices oriented toward localized deities and spirits, and at times involving shamans, and the monastic community. Yet, Tenzing’s description of the localized water and tree spirits at the monastery illustrates the ways in which lay practices are remaking monastic practices, while his reference to following the Buddha demonstrates the reverse. It is important here to see the ways in which Sherpas actively renegotiate an ongoing politics of religion, rather than what have otherwise been described as dominating relations.

Claiming territory through the beyul

As described above, Khumbu’s religious cultural landscape underwent a dramatic shift with the founding of Khumbu’s two celibate monastic communities (Tengboche monastery was founded in 1916 and Thame gonde was converted in 1952), introducing full-time monastic Buddhist practice. As has been observed elsewhere (Pommaret 1996, 2004; Ramble 1996, 2008; Makley 2014), the meeting of localized practices associated with deities, especially yullha, and the Buddhist pantheon of universal deities results in an
intense cultural politics that reconfigures both. The story of how Khumbi yullha came to be Khumbu's territory deity, opening this chapter, illustrates this reconfiguration.

Older Sherpas in Khumbu generally agree that Khumbi yullha was once an ineffective and even pesky deity, but that upon traveling through Khumbu on his way to Tibet, Guru Rinpoche 'tamed' Khumbi yullha and gave him the Khumbu region to watch over and protect. Ramble (1996) explains that such a conversion story is quite common as Buddhist monastic authorities founded new communities and, more broadly, as Buddhist monasticism spread throughout the Tibetan cultural region, claiming to ‘convert’ deities and territories along the way (e.g. Gyatso 1987; Ramble 2008; Makley 2014). Likewise, Pommaret (2004) observes that a yullha may be said to submit himself to a monastic leader by offering his territory and people, and in doing so legitimates monastic authority over the territory (54). Similarly, Karmay (1996) explains, prior to the rise of Buddhism, a conqueror would have had to “propitiate” the yullha of an annexed territory in order to maintain control of the new area. In another example, Ortner (1989b) retells the story of Zatul Rinpoche’s arrival and ‘taming’ of the site for Tengboche monastery. The story tells that as the Rinpoche, a Tibetan incarnate lama who had prompted the building of Tengboche monastery and who traveled to Khumbu to perform the monastery’s consecration, approached the site, a snake identified as a lu crossed his path. Recognizing the need to ‘subdue’ the lu, the lama performed a form of magic and the lu retreated, allowing the caravan to proceed. Like other taming and conversion stories, this tale becomes part of a struggle over religion in which monastic Buddhism seeks legitimation by claiming authority over both place and place-based spirits and deities, and in doing so is
complicit in the construction of territory from a dominating authority.

Khumbu's Buddhist monastic institution claims territorial authority in two ways. First, the identification of Khumbu as among the 108 beyul hidden by Guru Rinpoche for the protection of Nyingma Buddhists represents a technology of territoriosity. Through claims of protection and security in the beyul, the Nyingma Buddhist monastic community claims authority over Khumbu's territory, thus rendering it a Nyingma Buddhist territory. That is, the beyul concept originates from the Nyingma Buddhist institutional authority, which Ramble (2008) eloquently describes as a blanket draped across much of the Himalaya.

Second, and connecting the cultural politics of religion with considerations of the ways in which power works through territory, Beyul Khumbu can be seen as a territory produced as part of the rise of Buddhist monasticism as Khumbu's Buddhist monastic institutions attempted to redirect the symbolic form of religion, while obscuring the cultural struggles of its production. The claim of Khumbu being a beyul was not only an assertion of authority over territory in Khumbu, it is through the claim of the beyul that the Buddhist monastic authority asserted its authority. By ‘taming’ Khungi yullha, and ‘granting’ him authority over Khumbu, the Buddhist monastic institution is claiming the ability to determine authority in Khumbu—itself a claim of authority.

Yet, the construction of Beyul Khumbu by the Nyingma monastic institution is not the only way in which to understand the beyul concept as a territorial claim; the Beyul Campaign itself is an effort to construct territory, and in doing so is itself a claim of authority. Efforts to mobilize Beyul Khumbu in The Mountain Institute’s’ environmental conservation agenda and as the basis of an ICCA claim by outside academics, global
development actors, Khumbu Sherpa social and intellectual elites, as well as Nyingma monastic leaders originate from socially and politically privileged positions. In near opposition to constructions of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha's territory, constructions of Khumbu as a beyul, as an idealized space produced from and symbolic of a Nyingma Buddhist ideology may best be understood as a space produced from the authority of development actors, and even a claim to territory (cf. Coggins 2014). By mobilizing Khumbu as a sacred landscape, development actors and programs are claiming the authority to determine how that space best fits into their agendas. The production of the beyul space defines a fixed area—the physical space of the beyul, describes a problem—lack of knowledge about the beyul as an indicator of a loss of Sherpa culture, defines the threat it poses—lack of conservation concern for the environment of the beyul, and proposes an intervention—increase knowledge about the beyul concept. Paige West usefully asserts that by making such spaces one “can then describe and solve the problem they pose” (120).

Overall, the primacy of Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with Khumbi yullha presents a challenge to the Nyingma institution’s claim. Similarly, in Bhutan, Pommaret (2004) observes the strong sense of identity constructed around a yullha and its territory presents a challenge to emerging understandings of a singular Bhutanese nationhood. That is, despite the long-term existence of the Bhutanese state, its centralized and imposed power is in conflict with many people’s primary identity with territory and a yullha. Likewise, Khumbu Sherpas identify first and foremost with Khumbi yullha, and this identification challenges territorial claims from the Buddhist monastic institution. The territories of the beyul and Khumbi yullha’s territory are constructions of space explicitly produced from
cultural political struggles of religious ideologies in Khumbu.

The beyul and everyday life

Unlike the generally agreed upon significance of Khumbi yullha in everyday life among informants, knowledge of the beyul is uneven, at best (Sherpa 2005; Spoon and Sherpa 2008; Skog 2010; Spoon 2011). My previous research demonstrates that older Sherpas and those socially proximate to Khumbu’s monastic institutions generally are more knowledgeable about the beyul concept than younger Sherpas and those without a social connection to the monastic community—that is a relative who is a monk or nun. Those informants aware of the beyul concept often describe the beyul as Guru Rinpoche’s—or familiarly Urgyen Rinpoche’s—beyul and explain that within the beyul there is no hunger, no war, no killing, no communicable disease, and all living beings’ needs are met; however, none of the informants detail any practices or rituals associated with the maintenance or worship of the beyul. As an example, Pemba Norbu, a late forties male in Khumjung with some monastic training explains,

P [Sherpas] [believing] with Buddhism would not get ill or sick, no hunger. If we are born in the beyul it will be like this. In the Khumbu even though nothing is grown, we do not have to suffer from hunger. We can say we are luck-filled.

Likewise, Phurbu Yeshe, a Phortse woman in her forties, explains:

PY Beyul is the place where the great lamas do meditation because beyul is a great place. Everything is available here, even though the land structure is not good.

Yet, many Khumbu Sherpas simply state that they know nothing about the beyul and refer me to the monastic communities and Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, who spear-headed The Mountain Institute project, as experts on this topic. Others suggest that it might be related
to Buddhism, notions of cleanliness, and that it protected Sherpas from the Maoists during Nepal’s recent civil conflict.\footnote{While, indeed, Khumbu remained relatively peaceful during the violent Maoist insurgency, contrary to many Sherpas’ claims, Maoist cadres were present in Khumbu.}

Indeed, for some, Khumbu’s status as a \textit{beyul} is in question. Tenzing Sonam’s comments highlight the confusion and questions around understandings of Khumbu as a \textit{beyul},

\begin{description}
\item[TS] Even I am confused about what is \textit{beyul} and I’ve watched on YouTube: ‘What is \textit{beyul}? \textit{Beyul} is a place, it’s a sacred place. \textit{Beyul} is a place, it’s a holy place. \textit{Beyul} is a place, it’s a neat and clean place. \textit{Beyul} is a place, it’s a hidden place’ [repeating the opening lines of a YouTube film] Ah. It used to be. As far I know, it used to be a \textit{beyul}, but as you can see it’s not a \textit{beyul}. We cannot say it’s a \textit{beyul}. It used to be a \textit{beyul}, but since there are lots of people here, lots of villages here, we cannot say it’s a \textit{beyul}. \textit{Beyul}, in fact, I heard, as far as I know it’s a hidden village, but I think it used to be. Some of our people who has a good knowledge about this Khumbu, they researched, they studied regarding this \textit{beyul}. After their study the result came and I think \textit{beyul} is a hidden place. Maybe, maybe I’m not sure because \textit{be-yul}. \textit{Yul} is a place, I don’t know. I don’t have much knowledge about that.

Nonetheless, for a few informants understandings of Khumbu as a \textit{beyul} and belief in \textit{Khumbi yullha} are held simultaneously. For Ang Tsering, an elder Sherpa in Khumjung,

\begin{description}
\item[AT] The \textit{beyul} is all around this mountain and main is Khumbila. Main we pray for is Khumbila.
\end{description}

Likewise, Tenzing Sonam, explains,

\begin{description}
\item[TS] The people wants, what you say, happiness, the people wants, what you say, sustaining of the economy, the people wants a good family with good money. So, they believe in this blessing of \textit{beyul}, Khumbila it’s the same thing. But, Khumbila is a god, \textit{beyul} is a sacred place. \textit{Yul} and god is different. By the bless of god it became, what you say, a peaceful place. It’s believed like that, you know. \textit{Beyul} and \textit{Khumbila} they are basic necessity by mentality. Though I haven’t seen \textit{Khumbila}, I haven’t felt like I’m in a \textit{beyul} area because too many people. Too many people. Too many people means too many tourists, too many tourists means too many people, obviously.
\end{description}
These statements make clear that, first, understandings of Khumbu as a beyul are uneven, while the significance of Khumbi yullha as a protector and territory deity is unchallenged. Second, Khumbu Sherpas perform—that is, produce and reproduce—territory through everyday ritual practices worshipping Khumbi yullha, not the beyul.

**Renegotiating the cultural politics of religion**

Today it appears Khumbu Sherpas are currently in the process of another surge of renegotiating relations with the Buddhist monastic community, which is reworking Khumbu Sherpas’ spatial practices and performances. Buddhist monasticism appears to be on the decline, and practices oriented toward maintaining relations with Khumbi yullha, in particular, appear to be strengthening. Ortner (1999) observed that Buddhist monasticism in Khumbu appeared to have been “sidelined” by the late 1990s. Today, Khumbu's monastic institution retains authority over some village rituals. Monks are requested from the monastery for significant household rituals, such as at the death of a family member. The monastic authority is, however, not involved in civic administration in Khumbu. I suggest that informants' indifference toward mobilizations of the beyul concept combined with their identification of Khumbu as Khumbi yullha's territory supports Ortner's earlier observation. In addition, starting in 2005 residents in the villages of Khunde and Khumjung began performing new territory-making rituals to Khumbi yullha to request success in business ventures (Spoon 2014). A new platform built, in part, for these rituals marks Khumbi yullha's territory.

I suggest, following Makley (2014), that such a shift may be entwined with the rise
of the tourism industry and increased market integration in Khumbu, itself a result of Khumbu’s proximity to Mount Everest. Makley argues, “mountain deity practices have always played out in tensions between collective ideals and the competing interests of households and individuals” (243). That is, recalling Khumbi yullha is generally responsible for the success, wealth, and health of both the individual household and the community, ritual offerings to Khumbi yullha reconfigure household and community aspirations in such a way as to reconcile apparent contradictions between individual and village-wide success. Makley explains,

> The communal rites could thus be seen as attempts to constitute a moral frame for household accumulation. They [work] to instantiate the basic parameters of a Tibetan village moral economy: wealth and fortune gained by households under the proper guidance of patriarchs are the legitimate product of ongoing reciprocal relations with the village-wide protector deity. The socio-ritual propriety of household members and their patriarchs is supposed to benefit all under the deity’s jurisdiction, in large part because their mutually constituted fortune is both displayed and shared at such feasts hosting the deity (2014, 243–4).

Thus, the individual success and increased fortune of individual households is reframed through mountain deity rituals as the product of favorable and obligatory relations between the village as a whole and the deity. As a result, individual fortune and wealth is recast as village wealth.

In the context of Khumbu’s growing tourism economy, the disparity between wealth and poverty is ever increasing. Efforts to reconcile individualistic capitalist subject formation with communal village ideals may indeed be at the heart of new practices and increasing practices oriented toward Khumbi yullha. Thus, as some Khumbu Sherpas negotiate capitalism through relations with Khumbi yullha—as benefactor of success in business ventures and safety on expeditions, Khumbi yullha’s territory takes on new
prominence while claims of Khumbu as a *beyul*, and the associated authority of the
monastic institution, have been made secondary. This, in turn, highlights the rupture in
essentialized narratives of Khumbu Sherpas as Nyingma Buddhists, and illuminates the
cultural political struggles between monastic Buddhism and laic religiosity in defining
Sherpa identity. Indeed, while many informants stated they had heard that Khumbu was a
*beyul*, but knew little about it, several others, including a head lama and Tenzing Sonam
(quoted above), stated the *beyul* has been destroyed by tourism.

**Conclusion: Territorial consciousness and everyday practices**

In the last two chapters I have shown that the everyday practices constructing space
in Khumbu and performing Khumbu’s religious territories are embroiled in a cultural
politics of religion. This contest plays out spatially as reconfigurations of Khumbu’s
ideological landscapes are co-produced with territorial claims. The spatiality of the politics
of religion in Khumbu is best understood as a spatial conjuncture, a coming together of
spatial practices and constructions of territory, which must be taken seriously in examining
processes of articulation.

Overall, interviews and observations demonstrate the centrality of *Khumbi yullha* in
ordering and maintaining Sherpa social relations as well as relations with the Khumbu
landscape. These bonds, performed and maintained through everyday practices and rituals,
construct Sherpas’ lifeworlds and, as such construct an indigenous territory. Following
Baletti (2012), Sherpas’ everyday practices and rituals concerned with the protection of life
in Khumbu constitute territorial practices in which Sherpas produce and reproduce
themselves as well as claim Khumbu as a Sherpa territory.

Examining the field of traditions and practices associated with *Khumbi yullha* and the *beyul* suggests several ways in which to understand different territory constructions in Khumbu. The evidence presented here demonstrates that Khumbu Sherpas construct, maintain and reproduce a Sherpa territory, as a material, lived space, through everyday practices and individual, household, and community rituals associated with *Khumbi yullha*, and to a lesser degree other localized spirits and deities. On the other hand, the *beyul* concept is not a part of Sherpas’ everyday material and spatial practices, and thus, territorial consciousness.

Yet, this discussion calls for a further point of inquiry: While Khumbu Sherpas are not mobilizing the *beyul* concept to support a statehood or province claim in Nepal’s indigenous political movements, they are also not drawing on *Khumbi yullha* in order to support such a territorial claim. This is especially curious given that Nepal’s Tamang community has conspicuously mobilized a territorial claim based on their localized *yullha* (Tamang 2009). More broadly, this prompts the question: Why are Khumbu Sherpas not engaging in Nepal’s indigenous political movements at a time when much is at stake? To explore this question, in the next chapter I will trace Khumbu Sherpa relations with Nepal’s contemporary *adivasi janajati* movement.
Chapter 6: Khumbu Sherpas and the adivasi janajati movement

Introduction

In 1995, Maoist insurgents launched attacks on police posts and private homes throughout Nepal's rural western districts of Rolpa and Rukum. In doing so they declared a “People's War.” While some accounts define the Maoist insurgents as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)—led by Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai (both of whom would later serve as prime ministers) (Parajulee 2000), Gidwani and Paudel (2013) more usefully generalize “Maoist” as “heterogeneous peasant uprisings” (262) in the mid-1990s, but warn that the single term belies the diverse local histories and experiences of peoples involved in the movement. While little attention was initially given to this movement, the violence escalated and spread throughout the country over a period of ten years. While there are as many factors contributing to the People’s War as there are voices to contribute to the list, Parajulee (2000) points to the “crisis at the top” by focusing on the challenges of democratic consolidation as the leading factor in the uprising. Parajulee identifies the political instability, lack of leadership, government inefficiency, violence, fractured political parties, a failing economy, and ambiguity over the role of the monarch following the 1990 constitution as obstacles to democratic consolidation, which in turn led to the Maoists’ declaration of revolution.

46 Prachanda is the nom de guerre of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chairman of the Unified Communist Part of Nepal (Maoist), leader of the Maoist insurgents in Nepal’s People’s War, and Prime Minister of Nepal from 2008 to 2009.
From a Gramscian perspective and approaching the People’s War as a “crisis of hegemony” spurred in part by a “crisis in the base,” Gidwani and Paudel (2013) observe that the Maoists initially, yet unsuccessfully, sought to mobilize Nepal’s proletariat based on a shared history of oppression under the politically dominant CHHE. Yet, they soon realized that gender, caste, ethnic, regional, religious, and linguistic concerns preceded class issues and changed tactics. While this move appears to have co-opted the *adivasi janajati* agenda—a simultaneous indigenous peoples’ movement centered on ethnic, religious, and linguistic activism (Lawoti 2003), the Maoists were able to bring the concerns of the *adivasi janajati* movement to the national stage in a way that the *adivasi janajati* movement had not yet been able to achieve. Shneiderman (2009) argues that the *adivasi janajati* movement problematically reified movement actors as local actors, rather than national actors, whereas the Maoist movement recast *adivasi janajati* actors on a national stage. Thus, rights to self-determination and equality based on gender, ethnicity, and territoriality moved to the forefront of the peoples’ movement (Bhattachan 2013).

While rural Nepal faced the realities of the People’s War, prime ministers and government coalitions changed nearly annually throughout the 1990s. Thapa (2005) observes that this instability led to setbacks in Nepal’s democratic process. The largest step back, however, was yet to come. On the evening of June 1, 2001, nearly the entire royal family was assassinated while at a family gathering. Though conspiracy theories are rampant in Nepal, the ‘official’ account (around which there is much debate) points to the crown prince as the lone assassin, who took his own life during the massacre. Following the massacre, the slain king’s brother—one of the only royal family members not to be in
attendance that evening—ascended the throne. King Gyanendra began a prolonged royal coup culminating in 2005 with his seizure of government and military power; however, the Nepali people were quick to respond. Janandolean II—the second People’s Movement—reclaimed power in 2006, forcing the king to resign. In 2008 an interim constitution abolished the monarchy and declared Nepal a secular democratic republic.

Thus, following more than twenty years of growing identity-based social movements for democratic reforms, a prolonged civil war, and finally democratic elections in 2008, the world’s last Hindu kingdom became The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Replacing the deposed Shah monarch, a coalition government and constituent assembly were charged with drafting a new constitution for the nascent democracy. As of December 2014 the new permanent constitution was yet to be written. Visions for a ‘New Nepal’ rework more than two centuries of exclusionary political domination by high caste Hindu elites from the hill regions to reinvent Nepal as a multi-ethnic inclusionary democracy (Hangen 2007). Yet, Nepal’s democratic transition has been protracted, and at times wrought by violence, as subsequent constituent assemblies, presidents, prime ministers, and coalition governments have struggled with exactly what democracy looks like in the socially and geographically diverse country. Among the most contentious issues hindering the constitution writing process since its initiation is the specific form of federalism—the division of Nepal into provinces with decentralized governance—to be codified in the permanent constitution and the rights to be granted to Nepal’s 59 officially-recognized indigenous groups and other socially marginalized people. Susan Hangen and Mahendra Lawoti (2013) explain the tension permeating these debates,
Many people have perceived that ethnic conflict in Nepal will lead to social fragmentation and conflict, and a decline in a shared national identity. However, ethnic movements are attempting to create new ideas of “Nepaliness” nationalism, in place of the hierarchical “Nepaliness” that existed for two and half centuries and was achieved by imposing a common culture (8-9).

Thus, while some political parties have advocated for the creation of single-identity ethnically based provinces, others support multiethnic provinces. In May 2012, after failing to meet its fourth and final deadline to fulfill its charge of drafting a permanent constitution, Nepal’s constituent assembly was dismissed and new elections were held in November 2013 to form a second constituent assembly.47

For many of Nepal’s 59 officially recognized indigenous nationalities, as well as Nepal’s other marginalized identity groups, the stakes are quite high in the democratic transition process. Access to and control over natural resources, control of development, and access to institutional structures of governance accompany demands for mother tongue education, recognition of territory and traditional land claims, and full citizenship rights. Yet, Khumbu Sherpas—arguably the most well-known and recognized of Nepal’s indigenous groups in the global arena—remain curiously absent from Nepal’s identity movements and indigenous mobilizations. At a time when the stakes are so high for Nepal’s indigenous peoples, how do we make sense of this silence? That is, in a context of debates over how best to divide Nepal into federal provinces with decentralized control, which may

47 As of December 2014, the current constituent assembly, following several prominent political parties and advocate groups, shifted support from single-identity ethnically based provinces to multi-identity geographically based provinces. This shift has certainly changed the dialogue over indigenous rights in Nepal since the time the data presented here was collected. While this diminishes the immediate relevance of some of the data presented here, my overall argument about Khumbu Sherpa engagements in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement remains unaffected.
threaten Sherpa claims on the Khumbu landscape and resources, especially tourism, and thus Sherpa livelihoods, why do Khumbu Sherpas remain disengaged from this movement? Moreover, despite internal cultural politics (as discussed in the previous chapters), while other indigenous groups in Nepal are mobilizing traditional territorial claims, including notions of ancestral and sacred territories based on local *yullha*, why are Khumbu Sherpas not doing the same?

This chapter builds on Chapter 3, in which I showed that historically, politically, and spatially contingent forces have come together at specific conjunctures to position Khumbu Sherpas in relation to both the state and global community in such a way that Khumbu Sherpas, as a whole, have not experienced the pervasive and diverse forms of social and institutional disenfranchisement, exploitation, and marginalization that most other ethnic groups in Nepal have experienced in the past 250 years. Indeed, it is such experiences driving many of Nepal’s other indigenous and marginalized identity groups to mobilize and take up an *adivasi janajati* identity in contemporary identity movements. In this chapter, I show why Khumbu Sherpas, by and large, have not been driven to take up an *adivasi janajati* positioning, a highly politicized identity claim, and thus have not mobilized themselves or constructions of Khumbu as a sacred landscape.48

---

48 It is tempting to see the brief attempt to mobilize Khumbu as an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area based on both the *beyul* concept and *Khumbi yullha* as an exception; however, the KCCA was not intended as a mechanism for either the demand of territory or political rights.
Adivasi janajati movement and indigeneity in Nepal

Much has been written about the rise of identity and ethnic politics in Nepal (Parajulee 2000; Hangen 2007, 2009; Bhattachan 2013; Lawoti and Hangen 2013). Most observers agree that at the heart of identity movements is the historical, social, and institutionalized legacy of exploitation, marginalization, and discrimination of Nepal's diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups by ‘high’ caste hill Hindu elites (CHHE), primarily Bahun, or Brahmin, and Chhettri castes, who have dominated Nepal’s political structures since the mid-eighteenth century (Lawoti and Hangen 2013). In addition to the adivasi janajati movement, Hangen and Lawoti (2013) distinguish the following three identity movements fuelling the rise of ethno-politics in Nepal: The Madhesi movement (a linguistic, caste, and regional movement originating in the Terai region of southern Nepal), the Dalit movement (a ‘low’ caste Hindu movement), and Muslim activism (representing religious minorities). While these movements are certainly entwined by similar goals, they are distinguished by distinct historically, socially, and geographically situated grievances. It is outside the scope of this project to consider each of these movements in depth; rather, I focus here on the absence of Khumbu Sherpas in the adivasi janajati movement—a movement largely driven by Nepal’s historically marginalized hill and mountain peoples. Following Shneiderman (2009), my focus on Khumbu Sherpas’ historically and geographically situated experiences vis-à-vis the adivasi janajati movement is not meant to reify the experiences of other indigenous peoples in Nepal. Further, recall Sherpas are located throughout Nepal, but here I discuss only Khumbu Sherpas.
The *adivasi janajati* movement emerged post-1990 following the demands for a democratic constitution, but was rooted in events earlier than that. Following the Shah monarch’s brief experiment with democracy from 1951-60, a political space opened in which marginalized groups could begin developing and mobilizing their distinct cultural and social identities toward securing political rights (Hangen and Lawoti 2013). At the time, however, political parties and overt ethnic challenges to the state were curtailed, so groups worked to critique the CHHE-dominated state through cultural preservation efforts. The lifting of the ban on political parties in the 1990 constitution paved the way for Nepal’s indigenous groups to organize and politicize their demands. By the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, the interests of many factions of the *adivasi janajati* movement, still nascent and segregated, overlapped with, and some have argued were co-opted by (Lawoti 2003), the Maoist movement; yet, as I mentioned above, this intersection served the interests of both movements. Nonetheless, in Nepal’s current democratic transition, the *adivasi janajati* movement has taken on a new role in advocating for indigenous rights in the new constitution.

articulated positioning. That is, recalling Stuart Hall’s “theory of articulation,” discussed in Chapter 1, understanding indigenous identity as an articulated positioning is attentive to the ways in which historical, political, and spatial conjunctures enable the uptake of an indigenous identity, which itself often reconfigures relations between dominant and marginalized groups. Conceptualized in this way, constructions and uptakes of indigeneity are neither essential, nor ‘invented traditions;’ rather, they are limited by historically, socially, and geographically contingent conjunctures.

Indigeneity, as a globally mobile concept, like sacred landscapes, can be traced to the 1957 International Labour Organization’s Convention 107 on “Indigenous and Tribal Populations,” which rendered indigenous peoples legible in international law by categorizing culturally and geographically diverse groups of people as “indigenous” (Bryan 2009). Subsequently, the definitions of indigenous and the rights guaranteed to indigenous communities were expanded through the adoption of ILO 169 and UNDRIP. From this framework of international law, a global indigenous political movement has emerged through which communities articulate their identities to support a variety of claims, including rights to access and control of resources, territorial claims, and inclusion or exclusion from the state (Conklin and Graham 1995; Tsing 1999; Li 2000; Karlsson 2003; Allison 2004; Jackson and Warren 2005; Yeh 2007; Lucero 2008; Bryan 2009; Fabricant and Gustafson 2011). Thus, indigeneity as a positioned identity, and like sacred landscapes, is forged from processes of articulation between the global indigenous rights movement and localized activist agendas.
Today, in Nepal, the terms *adivasi janajati*, taken together, are synonymous with *indigenous*, yet both terms are contentious and wrought with ambiguity. *Adivasi* is generally thought to refer to the original people to inhabit a place, whereas *janajati* translates to “peoples’ caste,” taken to mean “ethnic peoples,” with pejorative and derogatory connotations for some. While in some cases ethnic groups in Nepal may claim both these meanings, in many other situations, they cannot. The joining of the two terms in this way emerged beginning in the 1990s, following *Janandolean I*—the first people’s movement and uprising, as some of Nepal’s marginalized peoples began mobilizing to demand greater social and political inclusion. With the growth of Nepal's people’s identity movement, so did use of the term *adivasi janajati*. In 2002, the government of Nepal officially recognized and defined *adivasi janajati* as “a tribe or community as mentioned in the schedule having its own mother language and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history” (Hangen 2007, 21, citing National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities 2003, 7).

Today, *adivasi janajati* is widely recognized in Nepal as itself a “meaningful and legitimate pan-ethnic identity” (Hangen 2007, 18). Today, the *adivasi janajati*, originally forged in struggle and movement, is a highly politicized identity in Nepal and thus associated with a situated history of marginalization, disenfranchisement, exploitation, and discrimination.

At the fore of the *adivasi janajati* movement is the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), an umbrella organization for the 59-offically recognized indigenous groups and several more not yet officially recognized groups comprising Nepal’s *adivasi*
The *janajati* movement, including Sherpa. According to Nepal’s 2011 census, indigenous peoples comprise 35.81% of Nepal’s total population (Bhattachan 2014). The census distributed Nepal’s population among 125 caste and ethnic groups, including 63 indigenous groups. Indigenous rights organizations argue that Nepal’s *adivasi janajati* population is closer to 50% of the total population when properly counted (Bhattachan 2014). NEFIN, currently led by a non-Khumbu Sherpa man, has grown into the dominant voice representing the movement. NEFIN works to connect the global indigenous rights movement to Nepal’s local movements by assisting Nepal’s *adivasi janajati* to articulate their identities in terms of, and make claims that draw on, global indigenous political discourses, as well as the rights guaranteed to indigenous peoples under ILO 169 and the UNDRIP. It is important to note that Nepal supported the adoption of UNDRIP and ratified ILO 169 in 2007. Despite this, however, indigenous rights advocates and scholars widely agree the Government of Nepal has yet to honor the guarantees of the convention (Bhattachan 2014).

In the era of democratic transition, the two most prominent and highly mobilized *adivasi janajati* groups are the Limbus and Tamangs. Like Sherpas, Limbus and Tamangs are hill and mountain peoples with Tibeto-Burmese ancestry. I offer historical summaries of Limbu and Tamang mobilization as comparisons to the lack of mobilization among

---

49 Recall from the Introduction, Khumbu Sherpas comprise only a portion of a larger Sherpa identity group in Nepal.

50 In early November 2014, former NEFIN leaders along with indigenous movement and party leaders founded a new organization, the Indigenous People’s National Movement of Nepal, as a seeming challenge to NEFIN, which some see as overly entwined with international agendas. The durability of this new organization is unclear at the time of writing this dissertation.
Khumbu Sherpas. On March 23, 2008, the *Pallo Kirat Limbuwan* National Forum, a Limbu organization, declared Limbuwan, the Limbu ancestral homeland, an independent state. Prior to annexation to Nepal in the late eighteenth century, Limbu people were spread over ten kingdoms from the Arun River, east of Khumbu, to Sikkim. The Limbuwan movement stakes its claim to an autonomous state in the close relations between Limbu people, their ancestral identity as Kirats, and their ancestral territory.\(^{51}\) Mahendra Lawoti (2013) explains,

> As indigenous people who are primarily traditional cultivators and nature worshippers, the Limbu identity, lifestyle and well-being is closely associated with their native land. The group has recent memories of autonomy. Till the mid-1960s, *Kipat* [a state designation to indicate land that traditionally belonged to and, following conquest, was ‘granted’ to the Tibeto-Burmo indigenous people] existed, based on which they governed communal land, collected taxes and administered justice in Limbuwan. *Kipat* helped them maintain close association with land, perhaps much more than other indigenous groups. The Limbus are also perhaps the most territorially concentrated among larger ethnic and caste groups in Nepal (213).

In his comparative analysis of Limbu mobilization within Nepal’s broader *adivasi janajati* movement, Lawoti suggests that Limbus have mobilized to a greater extent and earlier than other indigenous peoples in Nepal as a result of higher literacy rates and political awareness, territorial concentration, a collective recent social memory of autonomy, a strong group identity, and a history of group movement.

---

\(^{51}\) Kirats have a place in Nepal’s dominant historical narrative and were charged with land administration in Eastern Nepal during Nepal’s early history. Mukta Tamang (2009) points out, however, that like other indigenous groups carving out a place for themselves in the “new” Nepal, Limbu, Rai, and Sunuwar peoples have appropriated a Kirat identity in order to historicize their territory claim.
Similarly, in 2002 members of Nepal’s Tamang group declared “their right to self-determination and customary rights and responsibilities over their territory, ownership of its resources, environmental conservation and development” (Tamang 2009, 207, citing Nepal Tamang Ghedung 1998). For Tamang people, Tamsaling, or Tamang territory, is associated with a local yullha and thus evokes Tamang spiritual relations between land, deities, and peoples (Tamang 2009). In his analysis of the movement for Tamsaling, Mukta Tamang points to the development of “territorial consciousness” through a reading of local histories and a re-reading of dominant national histories as the driving force behind Tamang mobilization. That is, the symbol of Tamsaling, as a Tamang homeland protected by a local yullha, stands as a symbol for the Tamang movement as well as a mechanism through which to claim rights. Tamang (2009) explains,

The territory of Tamsaling here is employed by the Tamang movement not only to articulate a political demand for relative autonomy and compensation for historical injustices within Nepal, but also to build a global network of people forming a virtual Tamsaling. The movement in this essence has enabled the Tamangs from Nepal to establish relationships with the global community and to draw on it as a resource (283).

The Tamang movement, thus, mobilizes a Tamang territorial consciousness—one forged in movement and rooted in the same relations with a yullha as Khumbu Sherpas—as both a symbol unifying a dispersed population and the basis of a set of political claims under international law. As identity movements in Nepal shift toward concerns over the constitution process and debates over federalism, I propose both territorial consciousness and a specific politicized indigenous identity—an adivasi janajati identity—are requisite for mobilization.
**Adivasi janajati identity among Khumbu Sherpas**

As described above, the decade preceding Nepal’s transition to a democratic republic was filled with uncertainty, terror, and violence throughout much of rural Nepal as Maoist insurgents sought to cripple and seize the CHHE-dominated state. While Khumbu residents largely avoided the same violence experienced elsewhere, Maoist cadres did appear in Khumbu in 2006-2007. Spoon (2008) reports that Party members held informational meetings in Nauche and Khumjung, organized revolutionary dance performances to communicate their political positions, and collected mandatory ‘donations’ from tourists and residents along the trail between Lukla and Nauche. Informants in Thame Og also reported that Maoist Party members cut trees from the forests above Thamo without compensation. While some informants explained that the beyul protected them from the Maoists and that the conflicts and fighting associated with the People’s War occurred elsewhere in Nepal, others explained that even the Maoist insurgents understood that violence in Khumbu would have long-term effects on tourism in the region and the revenue from tourism and mountaineering to the state. In the end, the Maoist Party would need that revenue when they finally came to power, thus disrupting it at the time was unwise (Interviews 2013).

From the early stages of Nepal’s democratic transition through today, Khumbu Sherpas continue to find themselves differently positioned than other adivasi janajati groups vis-à-vis the state. In 1989, Ortner described,  

... overall, the Sherpas appear to have had a relatively high standard of living compared with many other (non-high-caste) groups in Nepal. This is certainly the case in modern times, and seems to have been true in the past as well. By this I mean that every Sherpa family owns its own land, everyone survives at least at the
subsistence level, and the vast majority do better than that. In modern times, it is unheard of for Sherpas to serve as tenants or sharecroppers for other Sherpas, and it is very rare for Sherpas to do wage work for other Sherpas ... it appears that the situation was not nearly as bad [in Khumbu] as in some other parts of Nepal (154).

This reminds us that Khumbu Sherpas’ current positioning in Nepal cannot be solely attributed to the economic boom of tourism and must be understood in a longer history of historical, political, and spatial forces converging in specific contingent conjunctures.

Recalling the history of state relations detailed in Chapter 2, Khumbu Sherpas were granted kipat land under the Shah king and into the Rana regime, while other conquered land was seized and granted away, and resources were extracted from other groups under the same authorities. Khumbu Sherpas were granted a monopoly on trade passing through the region allowing some Khumbu Sherpas to accumulate impressive wealth, while first the monarchy and then Rana regime exploited other peoples for labor and levied excessive taxes. In the past century, some Khumbu Sherpas have been able to build on the wealth accumulated through trade by investing in economic ventures first in Darjeeling and then in Khumbu. Understood this way, the rise of mountaineering and tourism—initially spurred by the closing of the Tibetan border and concomitant opening of Nepal’s borders—and the formation of the national park become a conjuncture of historical, political, and spatial forces that positioned Khumbu Sherpas outside the exploitative and marginalizing experiences leading other identity-based groups to take up an adivasi janajati identity in Nepal. Thus, while many of Nepal’s other marginalized peoples have struggled with a legacy of economic and political disenfranchisement, marginalization, and discrimination, Khumbu Sherpa’s situation going into the era of the democracy and indigenous peoples’ movements was quite different than that of other groups in Nepal.
While non-Khumbu Sherpas in Nepal are prominent voices in the *adivasi janajati* movement and advocate for various configurations of a Sherpa province in Nepal’s new constitution, Khumbu Sherpas have been largely absent from these movements and debates. Among those informants who expressed any interest in the outcome of the constitution writing process or current political debates, support both for Khumbu Sherpa uptake as *adivasi janajati* and proposals for a Sherpa province in Nepal’s new constitution was mixed. Ang Nyimi, a male in his forties from Thame Og, supports a Sherpa province because he feels it will “bring development” in Khumbu. Expressing the opinion that the Nepali government is not doing enough to develop infrastructure in Khumbu, Ang Nyimi thinks localized government will be able to build a road to Khumbu, better maintain barren lands by establishing tree plantations in order to minimize flooding, and construct and repair bridges. Ang Nyimi also explains he feels Khumbu Sherpas contribute much to the state government in the form of tourism revenue, but that it is Khumbu Sherpas who are doing much of the work to support tourism. Thus, he supports the formation of a Sherpa province in order to keep more tourism revenue locally. Like others, however, Ang Nyimi worries single-identity ethnic provinces will create conflict between provinces and peoples.

Similarly, Pasang Dolma, a woman in her fifties from Thame Og, supports a Sherpa province for many of the same reasons as Ang Nyimi, but wonders if it is possible. Like several other informants, Pasang Dolma expresses her opinion that Khumbu Sherpas are not educated for politics. That is, while many Khumbu Sherpas have been well educated in Kathmandu and abroad, they have pursued educational opportunities in business and
tourism, not oriented towards politics. Thus, Pasang Dolma worries Khumbu Sherpas are not prepared to participate in government and province administration.

Despite Sherpa inclusion as one of Nepal’s 59 officially recognized adivasi janajati groups, informants demonstrated mixed opinions about the uptake of an adivasi janajati identity. Some informants expressed no opinion when asked if Khumbu Sherpas should be considered adivasi janajati, others explained that they were confused by the way the two terms are used in Nepal today and thus didn’t know if Khumbu Sherpas should be considered indigenous. Ang Phurba, a man in his thirties from Pangboche, captures a common position among informants. He explains,

LS  Do you think Khumbu Sherpas should be considered adivasi janajati?
AP  [It is] not necessary for the Sherpa people.
LS  Why?
AP  I think we do a lot of praying for the Khumbu, you know. We grow here only potatoes and barley, only two things in here, but every people they have a lot of rice for two, three years for food.

Ang Purba’s comment captures the way in which some informants distance themselves from state politics and Nepal’s identity movements by pointing out that their relationships with Khumbu’s animate landscape provide all they need; thus they are neither disenfranchised nor driven to mobilize. Similarly, after assisting me through months of interviews and many discussions about ILO 169 and UNDRIP, one of my research assistants stated,

RA  The statement made by the UN [UNDRIP] for the Sherpa province, it’s wrong. We don’t take Khumbi yullha and Tawoche [another mountain deity in Khumbu] and other gods for making the state. It’s because we pray, worship the god of Khumbu for our benefit. So we don’t have to go down to the lowland to buy our food. If we pray we pray that all the cultivation is good, and even the natural disaster and disease does not affect us.
Like Ang Phurba, and my research assistant quoted above, Nyima Gyelzen, a western-educated man in his fifties from Thame Og and Kathmandu, explains that many Khumbu Sherpas see nothing at stake for themselves in the indigenous rights or political movements in Nepal. While Nyima Gyelzen did not agree to have our conversation recorded, the following excerpt from my interview notes captures his position,

Nyima Gyelzen explained that ethnic politics has not reached Khumbu yet. In the past, older people were trained to think of themselves as lesser—subjugated to the Hindu caste system. Nyima Gyelzen argues Sherpa have come out of that. He argues younger Sherpas are being treated the same as others in Nepal and thus have not had to confront ethnic politics. There is a “cocoon” around Khumbu Sherpas that is insulating them from ethnic politics (Field notes 2013).

For Nyima Gyelzen, today’s younger generation of Khumbu Sherpas have “come out” of the habit of thinking of themselves as subjugated to the Hindu caste system. He went on to identify the “cocoon” as the tourism economy, which unlike previous generations of Khumbu Sherpas, buffers young Sherpas from experiencing discrimination and marginalization in Nepal. Thus, Nyima Gyelzen thinks that Khumbu Sherpas may still experience Nepal’s ethnic political struggles in the future, but for now the “cocoon” of tourism holds such politics at bay.

Yet, Tenzing Sonam, a male in his thirties in Nauche, expresses a much stronger, but uncommon opinion,

**LS** Do you think that it’s important for Sherpas to be considered adivasi janajati?
**TS** 100%. At this point, the system is blind [to] our indigenous society. In the ILO 169, International Labour Organization 169, it has clearly mentioned that the local forest, river, land, will be used by the local indigenous society by themselves. I read that one at one point. ILO 169... so in South Asia not all the country has sign that protocol, but Nepal has signed that. So if you want to go by the law, this government we are forcing ‘please follow the law.’ You also human being, please, you have already signed the ILO 169. Means why do we need Sagarmatha National Park? Let us run by ourselves. We know how to handle the jungle. So indigenous rights are
there. Sherpa has been considered... I’ve been studying this indigenous law all the time. Nowadays we can download this from everywhere so there are about like more than 50 indigenous people... legally registered as indigenous people of Nepal in Nepalese law. So ILO 169 has been signed by the government but it has not been implemented so far.

**LS** Why do you think ILO 169 has not been implemented?

**TS** Because, the government wants to rule. The government wants to rule in a way that, so that, the indigenous society let it be there. There are three system in Nepal... In these three system there are no [rights] of indigenous people, especially in Nepal. If you go to any government institution, you will never see a Rai, Tamang, Limbu, Sherpa never because they’re never given such [job]. If you go to Sagarmatha National Park [administration] also. We take some Brahmin from the upper caste. If you go to army they also. If you go to police, they also. If you go to district headquarter, all captured by them [controlled by CHHE]. So this is how [the CHHE] rule the country, by not letting the indigenous [into government positions]. One kro 50 lakhs [15,000,000] indigenous [people] in Nepal. So where are they? We are porters, porters, the Rai is porters. The Tamangs never given opportunity. The Limbus. That’s why we are migrating everywhere, Saudi Arabia, America, Canada, wherever we go you will find.

... Why [forming a Sherpa] state is important, I know. The rest of [my friends and Khumbu Sherpa community members], I don’t know why they’re not paying interest. At the information meetings they’re always chatting on Facebook regarding the birthday cake and regarding the foods and I am wasting time [trying to talk to them about it].

Unlike nearly all the other informants in this research, Tenzing Sonam positions Khumbu Sherpas in the *adivasi janajati* movement. He is well versed in both the international and Nepal’s indigenous rights movements. He has read ILO 169, points to an ongoing tension created by Nepal’s having ratified the convention but not yet implemented it, and identifies the fact that implementation of ILO 169 would eliminate the need for the national park, and in doing so open the opportunity for Khumbu Sherpa autonomy. Tenzing Sonam goes on to explain that indigenous peoples are not hired into government positions; rather, state official positions, including positions in the army, police, and even localized positions in the district headquarters and Sagarmatha National Park administration are held by high caste
Hindu elites. For Tenzing Sonam this is one of the ways the Nepali state maintains its authority and disenfranchises indigenous people in Nepal. Yet, Tenzing Sonam voices frustration with his friends and neighbors for not taking an interest in the meetings to disseminate information about federalism plans and for dismissing and ignoring his concern for indigenous rights and the rights guaranteed Sherpas under international agreements. While Tenzing Sonam’s statement demonstrates a keen awareness of the contours of the *adivasi janajati* movement and what is at stake in an *adivasi janajati* positioning in Nepal, it is important to note that his comments stood out as an anomaly among informants.

To make sense of why informants hold mixed positions and, by and large, do not uptake an *adivasi janajati* identity requires following Sherpa relations with the Nepali state and the international community I traced in Chapter 3 through today. Tracing these relations demonstrated that, unlike many of Nepal’s other indigenous and marginalized groups, Khumbu Sherpas have not been disenfranchised by the Nepali state; rather, the historical, political, and spatial conjunctures of Khumbu’s location, the closing of the Tibetan border, the rise of mountaineering and tourism, and the formation of Sagarmatha National Park have both positioned and allowed Khumbu Sherpas to advantageously position themselves in relation to the state and international fields of power. As a result, Khumbu Sherpas today are able to jump the scale of the state and have little at stake in the new constitution and, therefore, little drive to mobilize.
The “cocoon” of tourism

Nearly all Khumbu Sherpa families are involved in the tourism industry in at least one way or another. Indeed, the allure of the tourism industry contributes to Khumbu Sherpa’s positioning outside of the *adivasi janajati* movement. When asked why Khumbu Sherpas are not well represented in government, political parties, and the *adivasi janajati* movement, informants often explained that tourism and trekking jobs are more appealing than government positions. That is, while government positions are highly sought after as lucrative jobs in Nepal, few Khumbu Sherpas seek government jobs because the income potential in tourism and trekking is greater. Tenzing Sonam from Nauche explains,

TZ  [Khumbu Sherpas are] not so interested [in government and politics] because we totally rely on tourist business. Because tourists come here, spends money at my house means why should I go to government institution … We cannot sustain with the salary 10,000 NPR a month [government salary], especially in this region. We are used to earn money 20,000-30,000 NPR a day. We are used to … we have a habit, good habit. Here we earn 15,000-20,000 a day, up there [high-altitudes] they earn 1-2 *lakhs* a day [100,000-200,000 NPR]. So which one you want to choose? So Khumbu Sherpas have very little interest in government organization because government organization has very little salary at the beginning point—it’s only 10,000-15,000 a month. Which you want to choose 15,000 a month or 15,000 a day? So we are totally rely on tourism. Beside, if you don’t have a hotel or lodges you go for trekking, if you don’t have trekking you go for Everest expedition. In a month or two a Sherpa earns 2, 3, 4 *lakhs* [200,000, 300,000, 400,000 NPR]. 4 *lakhs* is not a joke, so obviously they go for [trekking or mountaineering], they risk their lives. They just put one of us up there on the top and earn money.

As a result, few young Sherpas travel to the district headquarters in Seleri to take the civil service exam. Those who do, however, along with applicants from Nepal’s other *adivasi janajati*, face institutional discrimination. Tenzing Sonam goes on to explain,

TZ  Ok, so, there is one government place [Civil Service exam center]. It’s the place where you can go through competition by competition [to compete for government positions]. If you want to go for some government post you have to go through that.
One, two, three, four, five, the question is given by Brahmins [short-hand for CHHE], checked by Brahmins, make it fail or pass by Brahmins. So many indigenous youths, not from Khumbu region—they are totally reliant on tourism, they are happy with the tourism, they don’t have to go to this institution at all—but the western region Sherpa they go there. Only few are in police, only few are in government, only few. So they go there, the question is made by Brahmins, checked by Brahmins, make it fail or pass by Brahmins, so indigenous peoples go with the Brahmin people [applicants]. So if there are five [applicants], and three are indigenous and two among those three are intelligent, they will just take these ones [indicating the two non-indigenous peoples on his fingers] because they are cousins, relatives, it’s like that. You know? So this problem exists here. It is at the root level. Though the government has a system that among five [applicants] one indigenous will be nominated here. But this makes this indigenous more weaker.

LS Why?
TZ [Using fingers to indicate five CHHE and indigenous peoples] Because the [CHHE] thinks I’ll [Indigenous person] obviously go there [the indigenous person is there as a result of the reservation system]. His knowledge will never be [taken seriously].

Tenzing Soanm’s repetition of the phrase “the question is made by Brahmins, checked by Brahmins, make it fail or pass by Brahmins” suggests this may be an often repeated complaint. Moreover, his descriptions of the lucrative alternative the tourism industry offers to young Khumbu Sherpas and the discrimination they would otherwise face in competing for positions in government are examples of the ways in which young Khumbu Sherpas are not only buffered from the marginalization and discrimination experienced while trying to secure financially stable jobs in Nepal, but they are rewarded for being Sherpa. Thus, on the one hand tourism has bolstered a specific Sherpa identity; on the other hand, it has disrupted the formation of a politicized adivasi janajati identity.

Tashi, a man in his forties from Nauche and Kathmandu explains this another way,

Tashi explains that the mystery behind politics is economics. That is that the people rise up when they are hungry. However, Sherpas are ahead in this way [money] and thus do not rise up. They have money and material things, and thus are comfortable. Sherpa culture is VERY expensive. Khumbu Sherpas cannot afford government jobs.

( indx notes 2013)
Overall, increased wealth—the result of a combination of historical, political, and spatial forces coming together in specific conjunctures—is a significant factor buffering Khumbu Sherpas from taking up an *adivasi janajati* identity based in the state discrimination and marginalization experienced by many other groups in Nepal.

Yet, the warning from older Khumbu Sherpas “Sugarcane in the mouth, but chili in the eyes” reminds, especially younger, Khumbu Sherpas of the benefits they reap through tourism, but also reminds them of the costs. That is, just as sugarcane tastes sweet, so do the rewards of Khumbu's thriving tourism industry; and just as chili pepper burns when it is accidently rubbed in the eye, there is pain over the cultural and social sacrifices that many Khumbu Sherpas and their families make in order to participate in the tourism industry. While some scholars and Sherpas themselves lament a perceived loss of Sherpa culture in the face of increased tourism (von Furer-Haimendorf 1984; Adams 1996; Sherpa 2003, 2005), others argue that Sherpa “culture” is and always has been in flux (see also Chapter 2). Barbara Brower (1991) explores the ways in which Khumbu's shifting economy changes relations between landscape and people through Khumbu Sherpa animal husbandry practices. Similarly, Stan Stevens (1993) explores these shifting relations through land use and resource management practices. Yet, much more has changed for Khumbu Sherpas in the nearly two decades since much of this work was carried out. Most recently Jeremy Spoon has correlated increased market integration along the main trekking route to Everest Base Camp with decreased ecological and cultural knowledge (Spoon 2011, 2012).
Nonetheless, the rise of tourism and the protectionist practices that have allowed Sherpas to retain control of the tourism industry (Spoon 2012) in Khumbu have led to great wealth and other benefits among some Khumbu Sherpas. Spoon describes the resulting distribution of earnings and profits,

The Khumbu Sherpa embody approximately 29.3% ($1,369,826.37 earnings and profit in 2006-07) share in the local and regional economy. The earnings and profit frequencies of other SoluKhumbu District residents include Solu Sherpa at 15.9%, Pharak Sherpa at 2.7%, and Tibetan refugees residing in Khumbu at 0.9% … It is important to point out that the Khumbu Sherpa have a significantly smaller population and more economic benefit than the other ethnic groups involved in the economy. Consequently, their 29.3% share affords a higher standard of living for Khumbu Sherpa than for other ethnic groups, even with the higher prices for goods and services that Khumbu embodies (2008, 274).

Those Sherpas who were able to invest in lodges and teahouses along the trekking route, or invest in tourism agency businesses—often from family wealth accumulated through trade and/or business ventures in Darjeeling in the early part of the 1900s—have increased their wealth and as a result are able to access improved educational opportunities in Kathmandu and abroad, travel frequently to Kathmandu and abroad, access improved health care, and generally afford comfortable homes in both Kathmandu and Khumbu. Yet, those Sherpas who remain at the physical or social periphery of the tourism industry have not reaped similar rewards. Thus a continually growing socioeconomic gap, related to proximity to the main trekking route, persists in Khumbu.

*Bypassing the state*

In February 2010, a trekking lodge in Nauche burned to the ground. The fire caused significant smoke and heat damage to the neighboring dental clinic, which had been built
primarily through funds provided by international donors. In the days following the fire, I
toured the dental clinic with one of the staff to survey the damage. In the course of our
conversation, the staff asked me to assist her in putting together a flier or brochure to send
to international donors and sponsors requesting funds to rebuild the clinic. It struck me as
odd that the first request for assistance was going out to international donors and
sponsors, rather than to the community members. Yet, such a request is not at all out of
place among Khumbu Sherpas.

Foreign donors and sponsors, including governments, NGOs, and individuals—many
of whom originally visited Khumbu as trekkers or mountaineers, funded the hospital at
Khunde and clinics at Thame and Phari, schools in all the villages, hydroelectric projects
in Thamo and Nauche, and gonde and monastery restoration projects. Among Khumbu
Sherpas, Sir Edmund Hillary’s legacy is arguably based less in his summit of Mount Everest
and far more in his coordination and sponsorship of school construction, the construction
of the airport at Lukla, and numerous other development projects. Hillary’s sponsorship of
Khumbu Sherpas continues today through the Himalayan Trust. In addition, foreigners
have sponsored the education of some from at least two generations of Khumbu children.
And in some cases that sponsorship has led to education abroad in Europe or North
America. Other Khumbu Sherpas have benefited from the close relations developed with
trekking clients and even researchers by securing visa sponsorship to travel, work, and
pursue educational opportunities outside Nepal.

While it seems contradictory that many Khumbu Sherpa families would be in need
of such sponsorship and support given their relative wealth in Nepal, the legacy of
sponsorship, beginning with early mountaineers, is part of Khumbu Sherpas' historical positioning and continues as such today. That is, for Khumbu Sherpas the benefit of such sponsorship is not necessarily financial, but is often realized through visa support for travel, education, and business ventures abroad. Through the patronage of mountaineers, trekkers, and foreign academics, many Khumbu Sherpas have been able to position themselves as global actors participating in global academic and business networks. Thus, for an increasing number of Sherpa families, their lifeworlds position them simultaneously in Khumbu and on a global stage.

In the context of discussing his views on Nepal's current political wranglings, Aau Lhakpa, a middle-age lodge owner in Thamo commented that Khumbu Sherpas do not care all that much about politics because they are internationally recognized, and thus buffered from Nepali politics. Aau Lhakpa saw more at stake in maintaining the international imaginary of the Sherpa than in Nepali national politics. For Khumbu Sherpas, the intense sponsorship and patronage by foreign governments, NGOs, and individuals provide more benefit to them than does the Nepali state. Indeed, when I inquired about the role of the Nepali state in Khumbu, another middle-aged man from Thameteng explained that foreigners and tourists “do what they say” and provide more for Khumbu than the Nepali government, which does not “do what they say.” As a result, informants see little at stake in state politics and, consciously or not, little need to uptake or mobilize an adivasi janajati identity.
Conclusion: The delicacy of Khumbu Sherpa positioning

In 2008, Sherpa community and conservation leaders gathered at the request of the locally-elected members of the Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee to discuss the ways in which Sherpa conservation practices support a designation of Khumbu as an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA)—designations established and recognized by IUCN and the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity through their Programme of Work on Protected Areas (Stevens 2008). This meeting concluded with the adoption of the Declaration of the Khumbu Community Conserved Area, an excerpt of which explains,

> Sherpas have carried out conservation stewardship throughout Khumbu for many generations through our values, community and regional institutions and practices, our ownership and governance of Khumbu as an Indigenous territory, and our collective ownership and management of village lands (Stevens 2008, Declaration of the Khumbu community Conserved Area).

Stan Stevens, a primary figure in the movement to declare the Khumbu Community Conservation Area (KCCA), explains,

> Conceiving Khumbu as an ICCA and declaring the KCCA involves no new demands for recognition of their human rights or their rights as Indigenous peoples, creates no new institutions, and requires no restitution of nationalized community (kipat) lands which had been taken from Sherpas in the 1960s without their consent and without compensation and which now constitute all of SNP and much of the buffer zone. Conceptualizing Khumbu as a Sherpa ICCA simply recognizes what is already on-the-ground in Khumbu without requiring any land tenure or governance change, gives Sherpas credit for their important conservation contributions to SNP and the SNPBZ, and opens the way of greater international appreciation and support (2008, 6).

Despite Stevens’ assurances, the Nepali government quickly declared the KCCA illegal because it represented an independent conservation area. In the months following, state
officials questioned those involved, including IUCN officials. Ultimately, the declaration was withdrawn and Sherpa leadership forced to apologize to the national park administration and state officials (Himalayan News Service 2008).

While, for Stevens (2008), this controversy brings into question Nepal’s adherence to international standards for conservation and protection of indigenous peoples and also highlights the degree to which indigenous peoples in Nepal continue to be discriminated against, I suggest this controversy illuminates the delicacy of Khumbu Sherpas’ positioning in relation to the state. By declaring a separate conservation area, a threat to state territory, Khumbu Sherpa leaders and outside advocates stepped outside the negotiated, yet tenuous, relationship between Khumbu Sherpas and the Nepali state. That is, while historical, political, and spatial forces have shaped mutually beneficial relations with the state, as opposed to the disenfranchising and marginalizing relations elsewhere in Nepal, those relations are contingent and in constant flux.

Having demonstrated in the previous chapters that Khumbu Sherpa informants base their territorial consciousness in Khumbi yullha, this chapter queried why global indigenous rights movements have not found traction in these understandings, and as a result, Khumbu Sherpas are not taking up an adivasi janajati identity in Nepal to any significant degree. Such an identity is formed from historical experiences of exploitation, disenfranchisement, and marginalization by the Nepali state, albeit such experiences are diverse and situated. While other accounts of mobilization have focused on historically situating localized experiences in order to understand mobilization (i.e. Shneiderman
2009; Lawoti 2013), the account above focuses on the particular experience of Khumbu Sherpas in order to understand a lack of mobilization.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored the multiple spatialities overlapping and interacting in Khumbu, with particular attention to Khumbu Sherpas’ religious landscapes and their relationships to contemporary environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political movements. As academic and activist interest in these relationships continues to grow, I have explored these relationships from a poststructural and postcolonial framework and through the lens of sacred landscape mobilizations. Following Donald Moore (2005), the micropolitics of articulations matter because they call attention to space and spatiality. This dissertation demonstrates that, indeed, the micropolitics of constructions of space and performances of territory play key roles in shaping, enabling, or disabling the processes of articulation that ground global movements in local contexts.

Inspired by Anna Tsing (2005) and Tracey Heatherington’s (2010) global dreamtime of environmentalism, in which global approaches to environmental conservation evoke mythic, ahistorical, and apolitical links between people and place, I have conceptualized sacred landscapes as mobilized activist packages that rely on and perpetuate apolitical and ahistorical narratives, which often essentialize groups of people and their relations to a particular place. The global dreamtime serves as a reservoir of mythic, ‘timeless,’ and ‘uncorrupted’ people, and their relations with a ‘pristine’ environment. Tapping into this reservoir and realizing its potentials is then lauded as the panacea for globally circulating concerns over environmental degradation, uneven economic development, and the marginalization of indigenous peoples. The notion of
sacred landscapes, as activist packages, is both produced from and embodies the environmental conservation, development, and indigenous political movements constitutive of this more broadly understood global dreamtime.

In addition, I have argued that as notions of sacred landscapes take hold in specific times and places, their invocation of the global dreamtime obscures the political, historical, and spatial forces coming together in contingent conjunctures, as well as their production and articulation. I have demonstrated that mobilizations of sacred landscapes problematically essentialize the ideology of the religious authority productive of that landscape and obscure the cultural politics of religion.

To ground these arguments, I focused on attempts to mobilize Beyul Khumbu as a sacred landscape to promote environmental conservation, buttress Khumbu Sherpa identity, and promote tourism development. This case study proved to be especially illuminating because Khumbu Sherpa research informants generally demonstrated disinterest in mobilizing understandings of the beyul to promote environmental conservation. Many informants distanced themselves from the beyul concept by referring me to monastic authorities and community elites to discuss the beyul, claiming the beyul was destroyed by tourism, or stating that they knew nothing about the beyul. Moreover, research informants demonstrated disinterest in mobilizing Beyul Khumbu in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. Thus, where elsewhere notions of sacred landscapes have been especially useful in promoting environmental conservation, development, and indigenous rights, in Khumbu, an intentional attempt to ground global environmental conservation and development movements by evoking the global dreamtime, thus far, has
not been taken up to any significant degree among Khumbu Sherpa informants. This seemingly surprising outcome brought into question the processes of articulation shaping mobilizations of sacred landscapes by exposing the fault lines and ruptures in these processes.

To make sense of these findings requires examining the multiple spatialities at work in Khumbu, the ways in which each of those spaces is accompanied by a claim of territory in Khumbu, and the associated authority claims accompanying those territorial claims. To begin I explored the ways in which both early ethnographers and the uncritical approaches to Himalayan ethnography in the mid-twentieth century have contributed to the construction of an essentialized ‘traditional’ Sherpa identity. Such a narrative identifies Khumbu Sherpas as Nyingma Buddhist monastic subjects who are isolated from the broader world except for their involvement with the trans-Himalayan salt and grain trade networks—images that run close to evoking the timeless residents of the mythic Shangri-la—a quintessential narrative of the global dreamtime.

This ahistorical and apolitical narrative proves problematic in several ways. First, it has become a yardstick against which Sherpa authenticity is measured by both outsiders, and in some cases, among Sherpas themselves—a form of cultural politics. As a result the narrative of the traditional Sherpa is problematically entangled with questions of identity and belonging both within and outside of Khumbu. Second, this narrative problematically grounds much of the more current research in Khumbu that uses the narrative of the traditional Sherpa as a point against which to measure change in the face of modernity. I do not deny that the rise of tourism along with increased (though still limited) state incursion,
as well as similar increases in communication, media, and transportation technologies that have been experienced in many places throughout the world, have introduced new cultural influences, as well as economic and educational opportunities; however, to view these as dominating or corrupting forces denies the agency of Khumbu Sherpas in social and economic transformation. Moreover, it denies the ways in which Khumbu Sherpa society—including economic and social structures—has always been transforming. To view Khumbu Sherpa society as static at any point in time misrepresents Sherpa history and the political, historical, and spatial forces shaping Khumbu Sherpa society today.

To explore the conjunctures of these forces, I then turned my attention to Khumbu Sherpa relations with the Nepali state over the past 250 years. Attention to this history highlights the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas’ relations with the state historically and in the present have shaped their livelihoods, as much as they have been shaped by local environmental and cultural factors. The micropolitics of this history draws attention to spatiality by highlighting the importance of Khumbu’s location, including its proximity to Mount Everest, its location along a main trading route, and its limited accessibility, the significance of the closing of Tibet’s border and the opening of Nepal’s, and the mobility of both Sherpas and trekkers and climbers. Furthermore, this history explores the formation of Sagarmatha National Park as a state claim of territory on Khumbu. Yet, as I’ve demonstrated, today that state claim is relatively weak; rather, the space of the national park is better viewed as a capitalist space of tourism, where spatial divisions and proximity to the Everest Base Camp trekking route shapes an uneven economic and social geography.
My argument then turned attention to the everyday and material practices oriented toward maintaining relations with *Khumbi yullha*, and to a lesser extent local water, tree, and land spirits. I showed that Khumbu Sherpas’ everyday practices associated with *Khumbi yullha* construct and perform a territory based on the authority of the territorial mountain deity. Following this, I explored the concept of the *beyul* and understandings of Khumbu as a sacred hidden valley. I showed that the struggles over and constant renegotiations between understandings of Khumbu as a *beyul* and Khumbu’s animate territory, when historically and politically situated, are best understood as latent territorial struggles over religion. The narrative of the traditional Sherpa as a monastic Buddhist subject denies the complex of Khumbu Sherpa religion, which includes localized place-based spirits, deities, and practices. While a contemporary snapshot of Khumbu Sherpa religion may capture what appears to be a seamless image of woven together Buddhist monastic ideologies and localized place-based traditions, I have demonstrated that ongoing struggles over religious authority play out in a cultural politics of the religious politics practices proper to Sherpa cultural identity. More pointedly, I have demonstrated that these struggles play out in spatial ways as constructions of religious landscapes overlap in Khumbu.

Finally, I took up questions around Khumbu Sherpas’ indifference to mobilizations of either the *beyul* concept or claims to territory based on *Khumbi yullha* to support Sherpa rights in Nepal’s contemporary indigenous rights movements or even claims to a Sherpa state in Nepal’s new constitution. Several entwined spatial, historical, and political forces come together to allow Khumbu Sherpas to position themselves in relation to the state and
international networks in a more beneficial way than other ethnic groups in Nepal. As a result, Khumbu Sherpas have by and large not engaged Nepal’s indigenous rights movement—a forum through which sacred landscapes have found traction in other parts of Nepal.

I have carried three key themes throughout this dissertation: articulation, spatiality, and religion. Following Stuart Hall, and many since him, I have explored the ways in which historical and political contingencies and conjunctures join together to shape subjectivity and identity. In the case of Khumbu, I have explored how ideological elements come together to shape animate territories and sacred landscapes, which are spatial and material expressions of subjectivity and identity.

Throughout this dissertation I have been specifically concerned with expanding theorizations of processes of articulation by calling attention to spatiality and the role of space in such processes. Here I expand on Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) theory of the production of space to demonstrate that the animate territories of Khumbu are produced from historical and political conjunctures. Further, I specifically explore the ways in which Khumbu’s location at the base of Mount Everest as well as along the historical trading routes between the Gangetic Plain and Tibet, the closing of Tibet’s border and British exploration, the rise of mountaineering and tourism and the establishment of Sagarmatha National Park matter, and thus the importance of space in the terrain of the conjuncture.

Returning to my initial entry point—The Beyul Campaign, I suggest there is not a single reason why Khumbu Sherpa informants remain indifferent to mobilizations of the beyul; rather, there are numerous processes at work, many of which are historically and
politically entangled, producing multiple spatialities, which are all shaping this outcome. Yet, to dismiss either the *beyul* concept specifically or sacred landscapes more generally as a conjuring of global elites from the global dreamtime, to challenge attempts to push past Western scientism’s positivist approach to environmental conservation and development challenges, to complicate indigenous peoples’ avenue to the recognition of rights may not sit well for some. I follow Chris Coggins’ and Tessa Hutchinson’s (2006) assertion that, while NGOs and Western donors introduce new ‘conservation’ discourses based on simplified narratives, careful examinations of indigenous landscapes may provide a more powerful tool for autonomy, development, and conservation. In this spirit, I argue that attention to the micropolitics of sacred landscapes and animate territories may, in some cases, avoid problematically essentializing narratives and constructions of space, and potentially reveal even greater opportunities toward meeting community goals.

**Future directions**

This dissertation project suggests several opportunities for further research. Most apparent is the opportunity for comparative research, especially with Nepal’s Tamang people, who are effectively mobilizing *Tamsaling*, a Tamang territory based on a local *yullha*, in Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. Likewise, comparative research exploring indigenous movement participation, pan-Himalayan identity, and relations to Khumbu among non-Khumbu Sherpas in Nepal may prove especially illuminating in enhancing our understanding of Khumbu Sherpas relations vis-à-vis Nepal’s indigenous rights movement.
As political conditions in Nepal are in constant flux, even changing dramatically throughout the course of this research project, following up on this research in the next 5-10 years may reveal significant shifts in Khumbu Sherpa religiosity, as well as relations with the state and Nepal’s indigenous rights movement. As suggested in Chapter 4, new practices oriented toward *Khumbi yullha* may be tied, in part, to the cultural politics of capitalist subject formation and Khumbu Sherpa identity. This certainly suggests an exciting possible direction for future research. Likewise, as Nepal’s protracted constitution writing continues and Nepal’s indigenous rights movement continues as a growing force influencing that process, it will be illuminating to trace Khumbu Sherpas’ involvement either in the constitution writing process or the *adivasi janajati* movement as potentially more is at stake in the future. In addition, I suggest that the 2014 avalanche on Mount Everest, which killed 16 high-altitude workers, including 13 ethnic Sherpas, and subsequent climbing strike, which effectively shut down the 2014 climbing season in Khumbu, may spur a new era of Khumbu Sherpa mobilizations at the national and international scale, which may in turn reshape the ways in which Khumbu Sherpas mobilize animate territories.
Appendix A. Informed consent scripts

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Anusumana samabhagita svastikitiyo jankari

You are about to participate in a study that may involve the use of

Appendix A.

Informed consent

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts

Appendix A.

Informed consent scripts
७ गोपनियता
प्राप्त जानकारीहरू मेरी आफ्नो अनुसंधानको लागि भएको व्ययोग गर्दै र यसलाई सोप्य राख्नुहोस्। रेखेको गरीएको जानकारी लिखितमा सुरक्षित साप्ताहिक राखिएछ। उपलब्ध जानकारीहरू प्रकाशित भएमा तपाईको नाम बा तपाईको परिवार खुल्लुने हुन्छ।
तब दिदाला परिस्थिती आएमा मैल नपरेछ दिएका जानकारीहरू असलाई दिन पनि हुन्छ।
• कानुनले वाणी परेमा।
• तपाई बा अर्को मानसिक नीतिसँग पुनि नै जानकारी बा संैत परेमा।
• कहिलेको हाता, सरकारी निकायहरू बा अनुसंधानको समाजिक पदवीकोरिएको अनुसार जानकारीहरूले अनुसार जानै सहभागिता र उपकरण भएको होको होइन पनि नै हुन्छ।
• देखाएको संयमले कान्जुटाहरू हेर्नुसकिएँ:
  • हुमन रिसर्च अधिकता बा खुल्ला साधन, राज्य बा अन्तरराष्ट्रीय निकायहरू
  • कोषोगता विश्वविद्यालय बोर्ड इन्जुर्सियनल रिप्लाय बोर्ड
  • नेशनल साइंस सोश्यल फाउंडेशन, एमोजिस्वर्य अफ्रीकन जिओग्राफिक, सोसाइटी अफ्रीकन जिओग्राफिक बा ए दोकियो फाउंडेशन

८ अनन्यता
यो अनुसंधानमा तपाईलाई पैसा छुँडैन।

९ सहभागीहरूको अधिकार
अनुसंधानको सहभागीहरू सहभागिता स्वेच्छा सुन्नेछ। सहभागी अध्ययनको तपाईको धन बुझ्नुहोस्। तपाइले जे सुरक्षामा कर्मरी भएतापनि तुलनात्मक हालतमा तपाईलाई नराइश मिलिएको छ।

१० सम्पर्क र प्रस्ताव
यदि तपाईले वस्तुप्रभाव सुन्न गुनाहो बा व्यवस्था छ भने वा आफ्नो गुरु, विद्वान विचारिकोल, रिहिती, काठमाडौं, नेपाल। फोन नं. ९६५-२२३३३१। सम्पर्क इमेल: omgurung@cdsatu.edu.np
सहभागीहरूसँग तपाईको अधिकारीको साक्षात्कार आफ्नो सुन्न गुनाहो भएमा यस्तो स्वेच्छा भएमा इन्जुर्सियनल रिप्लाय बोर्ड मा (IRB) फोन नं. सन्थलालुहो। IRB अनुसंधान दिविद्य मन्त्री छ त्यसलाई निर्धारित हुन। अनुसंधान दिविद्य भएमा तपाईले कुनै कुनै गुनाहो भएमा। IRB लाई सम्पर्क गर्न सक्नुहुन्छ। IRB की फोन नं. २०२२ ३५२३ २०२२।

११ मैनिस्क स्वीकृति
यसको अल्पाङ्क मात्र तपाईको अफ्रीकन भएमा बा विचार गर्नको लागि समय चाहिएमा समय लिन सक्नुहुन्छ।
यदि तपाईले जो जानकारी बुझ्नुपनि र सहभागी छैन सक्नुहुनुहोस कहि 'हुन्छ' भननु।
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Study Title: Claiming Ground: Indigenous politics, sacred landscapes, and human-environment relations in Khumbu, Nepal

Key Personnel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay Skog</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>9808042289</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lindsay.skog@colorado.edu">lindsay.skog@colorado.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Emily Yeh</td>
<td>Faculty Advisor</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>(303) 492-5438</td>
<td><a href="mailto:emily.yeh@colorado.edu">emily.yeh@colorado.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Please think about the information below carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

1. **Purpose and Background**

You are invited to participate in a research study of the relationship between indigenous politics, sacred landscapes, and natural resource management in Nepal. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a state or organization official, a researcher, an indigenous rights advocate, or live in Khumbu. After I read this form aloud to you, please feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study. A total of 186 participants will be included in this study. Funding for this research is provided by the National Science Foundation, the Association of American Geographers, the Society of Women Geographers, and The Tokyo Foundation.

2. **Study Tasks and Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to participate in one interview that will last approximately one hour. With your permission, I would like to audio record or take notes on our conversation. Questions in this interview will center on you and your institution’s perspectives on indigenous politics, religion, and natural resources in Nepal.

You will be asked questions like:
- What is the role of the indigenous rights movement in the construction of a ‘New’ Nepal?
- What is the significance of sacred landscapes in Nepal?
- Are there special considerations that must be observed in resource management in a sacred landscape?

3. **Duration**

The interview will last one hour.

4. **Study Withdrawal**

You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty. We will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your data.

5. **Risks and Discomforts**

To the best of my knowledge, participating in this research has no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

6. **Benefits**

There are no benefits to participating in this study.
7. Confidentiality

All records of this study will be kept private and confidential. Research records will be kept under password protection. Only I will have access to the records. Participation in this research may include audio recording. These data will be transcribed anonymously and stored securely; only the research assistance (insert name) and myself will have access to the audio files. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.

If you choose to participate in a focus group, I cannot promise complete confidentiality. Although focus group members will be discouraged from disclosing information discussed in the focus group outside of the research context, members might choose to disclose this information and breach confidentiality.

These are some reasons that we may need to share the information you give us with others:

- If it is required by law.
- If we think you or someone else could be harmed.
- Sponsors, government agencies or research staff sometimes look at forms like this and other study records. They do this to make sure the research is done safely and legally.

Organizations that may look at study records include:

I. Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
II. The University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board
III. The sponsor or agency supporting the study: The National Science Foundation, the Association of American Geographers, the Society of Women Geographers, and The Tokyo Foundation

8. Compensation

You will not be paid to participate in the study.

9. Participant Rights

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not take part in the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you in any way. I will tell you if we learn any new information that could change your mind about being in this research study.

10. Contacts and Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, please contact Dr. Om Gurung, Centre for International Relations, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone 977-1-4330840
Email: omgurung@cdsatu.edu.np

If you have questions about your rights as a research study participant, you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not want to talk to the study team about. The IRB phone number is (303) 735-3702.

11. Verbal Consent

Please listen to the following statement. At the end of the statement I will ask you if you agree or disagree. If you have further questions or would like more time to decide about whether or not to participate in this study, please feel free to say so.

This form has been read aloud to me. I am aware that I am being asked to be in a research study. I have had a chance to ask all the questions I have at this time. I have had my questions answered in a way that is clear. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I will be given a copy of this form.
Appendix B. Permission and affiliation letters

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
Translation of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Permission Letter

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Forest and land Conservation
Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation

2069/70 eco no.
Serial No.
Correspondence No.
Forwarding No. 2303

PO Box No. 830
Babarmahal, Kathmandu
Email: info@DNPWC.GOV.NP
HTTP://www.dnpwc.gov.no

Date: 2070/03/19

Shree Sagarmatha National Park office,
Namche, Solukhumbu

Subject: Study / Research permit granted.

According to the Secretarial decision on 2070/2/17 Correspondence No WATA 069/70 Forwarding No 129 dated 2070/02/19 Lindsay A Skog, a researcher from University of Colorado at Boulder is given permission to conduct study on “Ground: Indigenous politics, Religion and Human-Environment Relation in Khumbu, Nepal” with a condition to submit the study report to concerned national park officer to forward the study report to Concerned national Park and Department of national Park and Wildlife Conservation.

Signed/ Dated

Haribhakta Acharya

Managing Officer
Attn.
Lindsay A. Skog
Colorado University, USA
Sagarmatha National Park

Lindsay A. Skog
Colorado University, USA


Sishya
Shri Barahdaya Bhumis Narolin. 
Nama vyaruk, Solukhumbu: Janakari ko langi anurahi cha.

Shri nama madhyantar kshetra upamukta samajita
Nama, Solukhumbu: Janakari ko langi anurahi cha.

Shri pramukh yatra madhyantar kshetra upamukta samajita
Nama, Solukhumbu: Janakari ko langi anurahi cha.

243
Translation of Sagarmatha National Park Permission Letter

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Forest and Land Conservation
Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
Sagarmatha National Park Office
Namche, Solukhumbu

Letter No. 069/70
Forwarding No: 508

Subject: Permission of research and study

Lindsey A. Skog
Colorado University, USA

On the above mention subject, according to the from Ministry of Forest and land Conservation correspondence 2069/70 eco no. forwarding no 2303 dated BS 2070/02/19 you are given permission to carry out your PHD study in the subject of “Ground: Indigenous Politics, Religion and Human Environment Relation in Khumbu, Nepal” from 2013 June 1 to 2013 November 1 with the condition to submit report to this office and to Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and to coordinate the study with Ramchandra Kandel, chief conservation officer.

Attn.
Shree Barahdal Gulma, Sagarmatha National Park
Namche Barrack, Solukhumbu: for information
Shree Namche Buffer zone user group
Namche, Solukhumbu: for information
Shree Khumbiyulha Buffer Zone User Group
Khumjung: for information

244
Ms. Lindsay A. Skog  
USA.

Dear Ms. Skog,

We are pleased to inform you about the approval of your registration as researcher to conduct the study on "Claiming Ground: Indigenous politics, religion, and human-environment relations in Khumbu, Nepal" in the specified area(s) of Nepal. You have been affiliated with the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, TU for the study period. You are advised to contact with Dr. Laya Prasad Upreti at the Department for necessary academic support. You are also advised to keep him informed about the progress of your study regularly and also advised to provide biannual progress reports to the affiliated Department as well as Centre for International Relations.

Your registration No. is 34/69 which is valid from April 26, 2013 to Oct. 25, 2013.

Please feel free to contact this Centre whenever you feel, we can be of any service to you.

We wish you a happy stay in Nepal and successful work.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Bal Mukunda Bhandari, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

CC:  
Central Department of Linguistics  
TU, Kirtipur.

Dr. Laya Prasad Upreti  
Central Department of Linguistics  
TU, Kirtipur.
References


254


http://www.mountain.org/map/building-livelihoods (last accessed 4 September 2014).


