

8-1-2012

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## Recommended Citation

Daurio, Maya (2012) "The Fairy Language: Language Maintenance and Social-Ecological Resilience Among the Tarali of Tichurong, Nepal," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 31: No. 1, Article 8.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol31/iss1/8>



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# The Fairy Language: Language Maintenance and Social-Ecological Resilience Among the Tarali of Tichurong, Nepal

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank James Fisher for his continued guidance and support and for paving the way for my research. Laaje Budha provided crucial input, insight, and assistance, and I could not have managed without the kind support of Dhanu Budha, Jitendra Jhankri, or Jag Bahadur Budha. I am deeply indebted to the people of Sahar Tara for their hospitality.

# THE FAIRY LANGUAGE: LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG THE TARALI OF TICHURONG, NEPAL

Sahar Tara is a community in Dolpa, Nepal, one of three villages in the world where the Kaike language is spoken. Kaike speakers are called Tarali. The perpetuation of the Kaike language is attributable to the resilience of Tarali livelihood systems and their continued attachment to place. Using informal interviews, participatory mapping, and participant observation, this research engaged Kaike speakers in an exploration of the relationships among their language, environment, and knowledge systems. Tarali negotiate their social and spiritual lives through highly developed adaptive knowledge about the environment, mitigated by natural forces, deities, and intimate historical ties to the land. As explicitly revealed in the story about the origins of the Kaike language, Tarali define themselves and their collective history in the Tichurong Valley concurrent with their conceptualization and cognition of the landscape. This is also expressed in the abundance of Kaike names with which they categorize and compartmentalize their spatial understandings of where they live and work. Tarali situate themselves on their land and in their environment through site-specific traditions of remembering in the form of oral histories and social narratives, highlighting the important role of language in perpetuating these traditions. In this place-based community where one's livelihood depends on successful interaction with and adaptation to the specific ecological conditions of Tichurong, language acts as a mediator in articulating social-ecological relationships. This adaptive knowledge is transmitted across generations through Kaike and the continued reenactment of ceremonies, worship, and a particular physical and geographical occupation of space. The maintenance of the Kaike language is dependent upon the resilience afforded by this sustained engagement with a place-based livelihood system.

Meanings of landscapes and acts of speech are personalized manifestations of a shared perspective on the human condition. – Keith Basso (1990:130)

## LANDSCAPE AND LANGUAGE

The relationship between landscape and language is significant because all people reside in and experience landscape, or environment, and process this experience through the medium of language. Iain Davidson-Hunt and Fikret Berkes (2003) refer to this experience of, and knowledge about, the environment as adaptive learning for social-ecological resilience. Resilience represents the capacity of a system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same function and structure (Walker et al. 2006: 2).

Adaptive learning occurs through social memory, the shared set of memories that allows an individual to engage with the predictable events of daily life as well as confront novel situations (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003: 2). Particularly among place-based peoples, social memory is created within the context of a people's relationship to land. In other words, experiences within a landscape imbued with history and biophysical attributes cultivate adaptive learning processes about that landscape (ibid., 16).



FIGURE 1: THE VILLAGE OF SAHAR TARA (PHOTO: M. DAURIO).

Among Indigenous<sup>1</sup> communities, this relationship with land spans a long period of time and is imbued with highly-specific, localized ecological knowledge, which is expressed, embedded, and encoded linguistically. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000) refer to this as the “detailed knowledge of the natural environment encoded by human languages spoken by small groups who have lived for centuries in close contact with their surroundings” (ibid., 15). Language facilitates the way people classify and make sense of themselves and their place in the world (Harrison 2007: 59). Much of the knowledge transfer among Indigenous communities occurs through oral transmission, so the efficacy of this process is directly tied to language maintenance (ibid., 53).

This paper focuses specifically upon the interaction between landscape and language among Kaike speakers, also

called Tarali,<sup>2</sup> in Sahar Tara, Nepal (see Figure 1), by examining the following processes: one, how transmission of knowledge is expressed in beliefs and practices; two, how experience of the landscape is delineated by, and articulated in, language; and three, how different social roles define the relationships among language, environment, and knowledge.

## METHODOLOGY

The research described here was undertaken from September to December of 2008, split between Kathmandu and Sahar Tara, a village in Nepal’s Dolpa district. In 2008, Dolpa was an entirely roadless district. The Tichurong Valley, in which Sahar Tara is located, is a five to six hour walk from Dunai, the district headquarters, and Juphal is several hours beyond that, the site of the remote district’s airstrip, with flights from Nepalganj and Pokhara. Flights cannot be relied upon, and it is a four to six day walk to Jumla, the next closest

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

2. The Kaike language is also called Tarali Kham, and its speakers are referred to as Tarali.

airstrip. It is also possible to walk for two weeks from Pokhara over the 15,000 foot Jangla Pass above Sahar Tara.

I developed specific research approaches outlined by researchers who have had extensive and long-term experience working with Indigenous peoples (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003; Mukherjee 1993; Crawhall 2007; Offen 2003). In particular, my methodology included the following: 1) participant observation; 2) informal interviews; 3) identification of three different groups of people to take part in cultural mapping sessions; 4) meetings with respected members of the community and ongoing consultation; and 5) secondary sources such as government and non-governmental organization documents.

Participant observation is an effective means of understanding the daily lives of people within a community and presents opportunities for contextual conversations with people about habitat, relationship to land, and livelihood systems (Mukherjee 1993: 45-48; Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003: 4). Importantly, participant observation provides a venue for understanding place-making within the context of the ideas and practices by which it is realized (Basso 1996: 7). In Sahar Tara, this took the form of accompanying people during activities such as collecting firewood, harvesting potatoes, threshing grain, grinding grain, processing slaughtered animals, and teaching at the local school, among other things.

Informal interviews took the form of conversations where interviewees guided the dialogue based on my initial questions. An additional advantage to these informal interviews was the opportunity to have conversations with people regarding topics that were contextually relevant at the time. For example, while gathering manure with a woman in one of the fields above the village, I would be able to appropriately ask about agricultural production, gender roles, property ownership, etc. Most interviews took place with Kaiké speakers in all locations, but I also spoke with linguists, professors, activists, students, and development workers. Table 1 provides the specific numbers and geographic locations of the people I interviewed.

Three groups of people were identified with whom to conduct cultural mapping exercises. The basis of cultural mapping is the representation of cultural and natural landscapes from Indigenous or local perspectives (Crawhall 2007: 2). Among other things, it has been used to document landscapes of dying languages (p. 3). Cultural mapping provides insight into how Indigenous people understand and relate to their land as well as opportunities for expression from different elements within the community. In Sahar Tara, for example, I was interested in the differentiated perspectives of men, women, and children, examining the ways in which gender and age shape one's relationship with the landscape. Cultural mental mapping provided a basis for translating the intangible into a more explicit medium for purposes of examining the role of education and intergenerational transmission in retaining social-ecological knowledge systems (Crawhall 2007: 6).

Mapping has also been used to ascertain social identities associated with place and a "cultural appraisal of the environment," as in Karl Offen's (2003: 382) experiences mapping Miskitu land claims with that community in northeastern Nicaragua. Similarly, John Pickles argues that identity formation is in part a "spatialized historical process of mapping occurring at many scales simultaneously" (2004: xii). In this sense, a given space embodies many different meanings for different people and at various scales.

Accordingly, three different groups in Sahar Tara produced maps: a group of women of all ages; a group of young men; and a group of boys in the sixth to eighth grades. The women's group provided a gendered perspective on sense of place compared to the young men's group. Young men are the primary agents of change in Sahar Tara, so their map also provided an interesting measurement of changing perspectives of place. Although I would have preferred to have both girls and boys make maps, I was assigned to work with the sixth to eighth grades as a volunteer at the local school. There were no girls in these grades. A map drawn by older men and women would also have been illuminating.

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

Table 1: Informal Interviews, 2008



FIGURE 2: YOUNG MEN DRAWING A MAP OF SAHAR TARA (PHOTO: M. DAURIO).

These groups were selected as a result of various factors. Most of my time was spent with women, as previously mentioned. The group of women who participated in map-making consisted of women of different ages and educational levels. It began with three women and culminated in a much larger group providing input and watching. The group of young men (Figure 2) represented the group most susceptible to outside influences because they tend to have higher levels of education than the women and travel more extensively either because of work or education. They are the only group of people whom I sometimes overheard speaking in Nepali among themselves instead of exclusively in

Kaike, as was the case with all other people in Sahar Tara. Lastly, the group of male schoolchildren was chosen simply because I had established a rapport with them while volunteering several times a week at the local school. The headmaster and other teachers had suggested I work with the older grades teaching English, and as the school only goes up to the eighth grade, I taught pupils in the three highest grades, who were all boys. Because of the particular roles boys play in the village as herders, horsemen, and woodcutters, the map they made offered a distinct perspective of how they view their world.

The boys also made an additional map illustrating Kaike field area names, as seen in Figure 3.

These three groups were all asked simply to draw a map of Sahar Tara as they see it. The mapping sessions took place separately and at different times, and within each group every person participated by providing input, although only one or two did the actual drawing.

The three groups of people in Sahar Tara – women, young men, and children – were identified for purposes of elucidating their relationships to the landscape and giving each group the opportunity to “place” their social identities in the village on the map. To make the process as collaborative as possible, I included community members in providing input and choosing groups of people to make maps and left the originals in Sahar Tara, taking only photos or copies back with me. Map-making with these groups served two purposes. First, it provided a medium for translation which allowed me as an outsider to analyze conceptualizations of space and place according to gendered and children’s perspectives. The map-making process itself also facilitated dialog among these groups of people regarding relationship to land and provided insight regarding the processes of social identity formation.

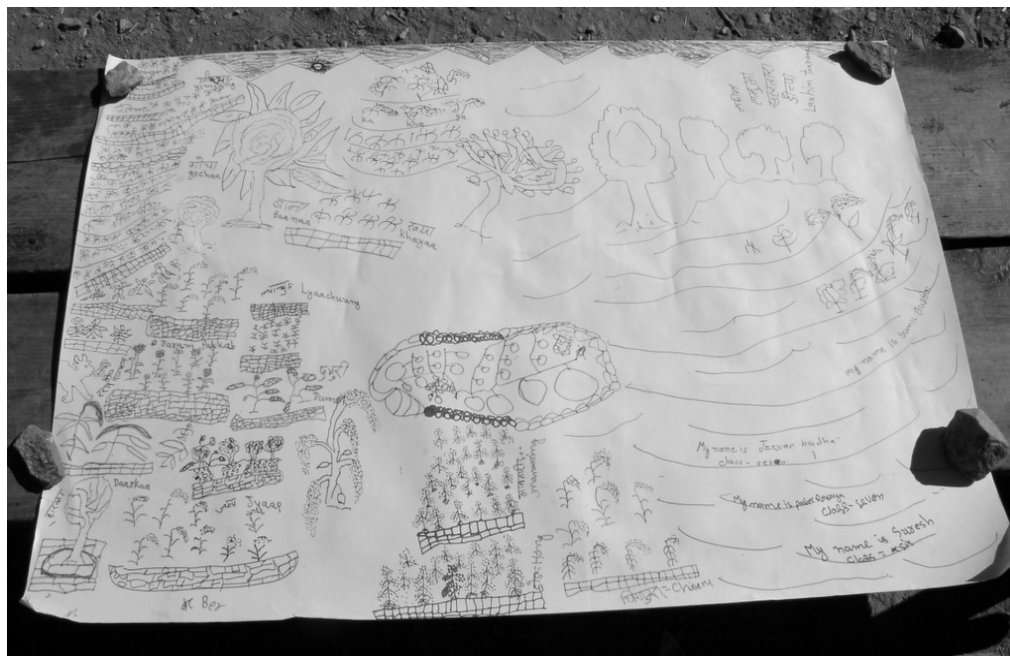


FIGURE 3: PARTIAL MAP OF FIELD AREA NAMES DRAWN BY BOYS, GRADES 6-8 (PHOTO: M. DAURIO).

## SAHAR TARA

Sahar Tara is a village of between seventy and eighty houses located at approximately 28° 53' latitude and 83° 00' longitude in Sahar Tara Village Development Committee (VDC) in the district of Dolpa in Nepal. There are 373 residents in Sahar Tara, 220 females and 153 males, respectively. Table 2 shows the distribution of Sahar Tara citizens throughout Nepal and abroad.

Place	Male	Female	Total
Sahar Tara	153	220	373
Kathmandu	32	14	36
Bhaktapur	3	3	6
Dunai	8	7	15
Bhantara	1	0	1
Maikot	1	1	2
Tachen	1	3	4
Pokhara	12	1	13
Darjeeling	1	0	1
Dehradun	1	0	1
Australia	1	1	2
United States	1	0	1
Belgium	1	0	1
Total	216	250	466

Table 2: Distribution of Sahar Tara Citizens, 2008.

There are seven villages comprising Sahar Tara VDC located on the west side of the Bheri River. On the east side are six villages which constitute Lawan VDC. Both of these VDCs are located in what is known in Tibetan as Tichurong, a steep valley cut through by the Bheri River, a glacial, fast moving river devoid of fish at this point in its journey to join the Karnali River. The thirteen villages of Tichurong are situated approximately between 2352 and 3636 meters and vary widely in their ecological context. Tachen, the highest altitude village in Sahar Tara VDC, can only grow potatoes and barley, in contrast to Sahar Tara, which grows at least seven kinds of grain. The thirteen villages, when viewed from across a valley, appear to cling precariously to the sides of the mountain, so steep is the land on which they are situated.

Of the seven villages in Sahar Tara VDC, all have primary education government schools up to the fifth grade. Only Sahar Tara has a lower secondary school with grades up to class eight. It is only feasible, however, for students from the villages of Gumba Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot to commute on foot to Sahar Tara and back home every day to attend school after the fifth grade. There are no boarding facilities in Sahar Tara, and the farthest village in the VDC, Tachen, is a five to seven hour walk up river.

Sahar Tara itself ranges between 2432 and 3000 meters and is one of the largest villages in Dolpa district. It is surrounded by terraced agricultural fields spread both vertically and horizontally across the hillside, and there are also scattered apple trees throughout the village, as well as old and large sacred coniferous trees. It is at least an hour's walk uphill to reach a dense forest of mostly coniferous trees, with deciduous trees dispersed without.

The forest still appears extensive once inside it, but the

land surrounding Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, Tarakot, and Gumba Tara, all on the same side of the river, is certainly devoid of trees and consists entirely of terraced fields. Villagers in the Tichurong Valley rely heavily upon the forest, not only for firewood for warmth and cooking fuel but also for building houses.

Men are responsible for cutting whole trees used for building houses. Horses are used to drag the tree back to the village. It is women and girls who do all of the firewood collecting, which begins after most of the agricultural harvest is complete and continues until the firewood storage area is full or until it snows. People also used to hunt but have given this up voluntarily. Though there are supposed to be bear, deer, mountain sheep, and snow leopards (at higher altitudes), I observed virtually no wildlife.

During the months of October and November while I was there, a group of approximately ten women would gather before dawn nearly every day to venture up the mountain for two hours in one direction to collect firewood, bringing back up to 100 pounds of firewood on their backs using a tumpline. They assert that they have to travel increasingly farther to collect firewood, as the forest continues to recede. I recorded eleven Kaike names for trees used for firewood (see Appendix 1). Some of these types also constitute the sacred trees ringing the village (Rungpacha, Rungpikhi, Lashin Tanama, and Chiseru) and are used for worship and ceremonial purposes. The mountains on which the villages reside extend above the tree line, and there are many snow-capped mountains visible from certain vantage points beyond that, constituting part of the Dhaulagiri Range. There is a glacier visible from higher up the mountain from Sahar Tara.

### KAIKE: THE FAIRY LANGUAGE

Kaike belongs to the Tamangic language of the Bodish section of the Bodic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group (Regmi 2007). Kaike is a glossonym, the name of the language (*ibid.*), but cannot be used to refer to the people. Kaike is one of over 100 mother tongues spoken in Nepal (Turin 2007). For reasons not entirely clear, Kaike is spoken only in three villages of Dolpa district: Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot. Although Kaike is exclusively spoken at home and usually within the village, the majority of people from these communities are also fluent in Nepali and Tibetan, with the exception of small children and some elderly people. It is unknown how long Kaike has been mutually unintelligible from any other language, but the linguist Merritt Ruhlen (1991) says this process probably takes from 500 to 1000 years in most cases.

Current estimates about the number of Kaike speakers are difficult to decipher. Van Driem (2001) asserts Kaike is spoken by 2000 people in several villages in "Dolpo" [*sic*] district.<sup>3</sup> The 2001 Central Bureau of Statistics Report claims

3. Dolpa and Dolpo are often used interchangeably, although Dolpo

that while the Tarali population is 2000, only 794 people (39.7 percent) speak the language as their mother tongue, three of whom apparently live in Lamjung district (Regmi 2007). As yet, there has been no census taken of Kaike speakers living in the Kathmandu Valley, even though according to my crude estimates, there are fifty-two people from Sahar Tara alone living in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur (see Table 1), which does not account for migrants from Tupa Tara or Tarakot. Because Sahar Tara is the largest of the three Kaike-speaking villages with 373 people, it is impossible that the villages of Tupa Tara and Tarakot make up the rest of the population of 2000. It is feasible that there are only 794 speakers of Kaike in Nepal distributed primarily among Sahar Tara, Tupa Tara, and Tarakot, but an assessment is needed of the number of mother-tongue speakers in neighboring villages, particularly Gumba Tara. Also interesting to consider from a linguistic standpoint is the village of Riwa, populated entirely by Kamis, or people from the blacksmith caste. As noted above, although they speak Nepali at home, because of an ongoing relationship with Tarali in which the Kamis perform work in exchange for grain, cloth, or cash, they are also fluent in Kaike.

As is revealed in Tarali's own origin story about Kaike, explained below, the language is strongly rooted in the Tichurong Valley. It has been perpetuated until now largely because it continues to be relevant to the Tarali. They have, for instance, more than twenty names in Kaike for areas encompassing different fields (see Appendix 1 for a shortlist) and twenty-four names for different areas of forest. The village of Sahar Tara itself is divided into twenty areas with different names indicating geographical location vertically and horizontally across the hillside (see Appendix 1 for a shortlist). Everyone knows which houses are included under which area. This wide-ranging knowledge of environment and landscape also extends to children. It is only by engaging in the livelihood systems which encompass social identity construction and religious and spiritual expressions of the community's relationship to their land that the Kaike language is contextual and relevant. "Languages are at risk when they are no longer transmitted naturally to children in the home by parents or other caretakers" (Nettle and Romaine 2000:8). For those children growing up in Kathmandu without participation in this socialization process, Kaike will cease to be applicable.

## KAIKE ORIGINS

"Kai" means fairy, and "ke" means language (Fisher 1986), implying the holy genesis of the language according to its origin myth. Fisher records this legend in his book *Trans-Himalayan Traders*, and the version I was told differs only slightly. It was told to me by my host, a thirty-one year old woman. She recorded it in both Kaike and Nepali, and I translated the story from Nepali to English.

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generally refers to the region of Upper Dolpa. This is how I use Dolpo in this paper.

In the beginning, how did our country come to be? In this place, how did this come to be? In the beginning, what happened was that near India,<sup>4</sup> a big war took place. And near India, after this war had started, was a pregnant girl. Saying to herself, "this child is in my stomach. Am I going to die or..." she escaped from India. And after escaping, she was followed by a soldier.<sup>5</sup> The pregnant girl was ahead, and the soldier came behind. Coming farther, the girl arrived at the Byas River. A long time before there lived a king at this place. The escaped girl beseeched the king, "I am running away from somebody trying to kill me. I am with child. My child's... If I am killed, my child will be killed. I will be killed. Please give me a place to hide, king," said the girl. The king, who had never told a lie in his life, had to tell a lie for the girl that day. So the king, after having been beseeched by the girl, hid her away. After she was hid, the king sacrificed a chicken and spread the blood around outside. Later, the soldier arrived at the Byas River and asked the king, "Hey King, I have come here after a girl who has escaped. Have you seen this girl?" The king responded, "Nobody has come here. I haven't heard anyone's voice or seen anyone. I am alone here. I have one daughter who has just given birth, and I have killed a chicken. Look at the blood here. Nobody has come here," said the king. After this, that soldier turned around and left.

The next day or so, the girl left. She came to Tarakot, below here. Two days later the child was born, and it was a son. After the son was a little bigger...now the mother...they had many cows. The son would take the cows to Gumba, where there was a big flat area. In this area, there was a big lake of milk, and the boy would only take his cows there to graze.

And going there, what did he see? Three goddess sisters.<sup>6</sup> With his own eyes, he saw them descending from the sky. They would bathe in the lake of milk and then fly back into

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4. In Fisher's version, the woman was fleeing fighting roughly two days' walk to the west during the time of the Kalyal rajyas. See Fisher, 1986: 35.

5. Fisher was told two soldiers were sent to pursue her, and the king locked her in one of two palaces under his jurisdiction. The soldiers asked to search both palaces, and the king told them that they could search everywhere but the locked room, in which was his pregnant daughter. The soldiers made him swear on the sharp edge of a sword that the woman in the room was his daughter and not the woman they were pursuing before they left. See Fisher, 1986: 36.

6. Fisher was told a version of the story in which there are seven goddesses. See Fisher, 1986:36.



the sky, those sisters. They would always come to the lake to bathe and then fly away into the sky. The boy with his cows would see this. "I'll tell my mother when I get home today," the boy would say, forgetting after he arrived. The next day he would forget again. Then one day he decided to take a stone with him in his pocket to remind him to tell his mother. So from the flat area where the lake of milk was, he picked up a stone and returned home.

When they were eating some food, the stone fell out. After this, the mother said, "Son, you and I are the only people. I escaped and came here. We two live here. Today are you going to kill your mother? Why have you brought a stone?" the mother asked. The son replied, "No, mother, it's nothing. It's just that at the place I take the cows to graze, there is a huge lake of milk.

At that lake of milk, I saw with my own eyes three goddess sisters; three goddesses fly down from the sky to bathe in the lake of milk. After bathing and cleaning themselves well, they fly away again. For several days I have kept saying that I have to tell my mother about it, but I kept forgetting. And today, in order to remind me to tell you, I have brought this stone with me. I only brought it with me to remind me, not to kill you, but to make you understand while I am at your side."

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

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

In the next day or so, the son again took the cows to graze. Just as his mother had instructed, he sat by the edge of the lake of milk. And he pretended to fall asleep. Then, from the sky above, the three sisters came and bathed. And first, the eldest sister bathed and went. The second sister also bathed and went.

And at the last, the boy grabbed a hold of the youngest sister. He said to her, "I am just a human, and I have contaminated you." And she couldn't fly.

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

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

And the son and daughter-in-law conceived three sons. And those sons grew up and came up from Tarakot to Sahar Tara. After they came here, they stayed here and lived. The three sons said, "There is nobody in this world, no castes, no names, nothing. If we wanted to marry, how would we marry?" So the three sons created clans for themselves, in order to marry. For one, they assigned the name Rokaya, another was Budha, and another Garthi. After these three clans were formed, one son went to Tibet. One went to India and married. And another brought a girl from near

Rukum, near Deurali. They all brought women back and married them and three clans were created, Rokaya, Budha, and Gharti. And after they married, many people were conceived. And many people lived in Sahar Tara, in this place. And the Kaike language was taught by a goddess, our Kaike language. Tupa, one, Sahar Tara, two, and Tarakot. The Kaike language exists in these three villages. And that's it.

In addition to the three clans mentioned above, there is a fourth clan named Jhankri, the origin of which is explained in Fisher's book. One day, one of the three sons, who was a shepherd, followed a female goat, which ran off from the rest of the herd every day. Near the present day village of Tupa Tara, he discovered a baby boy in a hollowed out section of a bamboo tree, to whom the female goat was giving her milk. After returning home and discussing the situation with his family, they decided to bring the boy home. He is the ancestor of the Jhankri, whose descendants do not eat she-goats in honor of the she-goat who fed their ancestor in the bamboo tree (Fisher 1986).

The details attached to the story explaining the origin of the Kaike language illustrate its significance for the Tarali, perhaps most cogently apparent in the language's godly foundations. Additionally, although linguists and anthropologists insist that the Tarali originated from Tibet, their own belief in ancestral ties to India or Jumla, depending upon the version, indicates the importance of their self-identification with a Hindu people and place.

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

### SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

People in Sahar Tara not only possess extensive knowledge of the fields and forests surrounding the village, which is encoded linguistically, they are also bound spatially within the village by a number of sacred sites. Typical of Buddhist communities in Nepal, the symbolic entrance to Sahar Tara both below and above is marked by a *chorten*, a religious cenotaph. The trails leading to the east and west and to the villages of Gumba and Tupa, respectively, are marked by smaller *stupas*.

Additionally, Sahar Tara is partially ringed by sacred trees spread out across the landscape, which are sites of

*puja* during certain times of the year. The map drawn by the group of women illustrates both the location and type of these trees inhabited by deities. *Rungpikhi* and *Rungpacha* are deities described as the older and younger brother, respectively, who inhabit two of the trees near Sahar Tara. Both of them are worshiped during *Rung*, a monthlong local festival usually occurring around January or February. Each household has two flagpoles, one mounted with Buddhist prayer flags and replaced when it gets old. The other flagpole, called *Tarjua*, which is mounted with juniper branches and a local flag, is replaced annually during *Rung*. The festival's beginning is marked by the mounting of a new pole, which is determined by a particular alignment of the stars. When the constellations *Rungpacha* (Seven Sisters) and *Karma mido* (I do not know the English equivalent) appear to touch in the sky, indicating the presence of one of the major deities, *Jobata*, it initiates a four day *puja* beginning at *Rungpikhi*. The next morning the new flagpole is erected. *Jobata* resides at the glacier to the east of Gumba Tara. If the glacier were ever to melt, inhabitants of the Tichurong Valley believe their villages would all be destroyed.

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

Another deity, *Chiseru*, resides below Sahar Tara and is considered the friend of *Rungpikhi* and *Rungpacha*. *Chiseru* is worshiped to ask for rain or in times of too much rain, for the rain to stop. People make special food during this time and take it to *Chiseru* to offer it to the deity and share food with each other. Similarly, *Lashin Tanama*, who resides in a tree directly above the village and is considered the father deity among the tree dwelling deities, is worshiped during the Nepali month of *Baisakh* to induce it to rain. The deity *Lashin Tanama* flew in and settled in the tree, which was here before the arrival of people. At another time, a sheep is sacrificed at *Lashin Tanama*, whereas this is not allowed at *Chiseru*.

In addition to the deities inhabiting trees around the village, each household is made up of three levels, on each of which resides a deity. The uppermost and lowermost level deities (*Chan* and *Lamu*, respectively) must be worshiped with the help of a *lama*. The deity residing on the middle level, *Risumgombo*, can be worshipped on one's own. In the map of Sahar Tara drawn by the group of women, each house clearly has three levels. This was not an important depiction in the map drawn by young men, but it was in the map drawn by sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys. There is also a fire deity residing in the fire pit in each household.

There are also three deities who reside in the Himalayas and come to Sahar Tara three times a year to possess the bodies of shamans, or *dhamis*. Each shaman has his own house where only *puja* is performed, and villagers go to the *puja* house during the three times of the year to ask questions



FIGURE 4: VILLAGE MAP DRAWN BY SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE BOYS. MOST OF THE HOUSES ARE DEPICTED WITH THREE LEVELS (PHOTO: M. DAURIO).

of the deities. Interestingly, these three deities have only Nepali names, *Masta*, *Deurali*, and *Lathi*, respectively. *Deurali* and *Lathi* are brother and sister. Once, shepherds lit a fire in the grass near *Deurali*'s home in the Himalayas, igniting the fire all around. Six of his other sisters were old enough to recognize fire and ran away, but the seventh was too young to know better and became engulfed in the flames. From that time on, she was no longer able to speak, and so she is called *Lathi*, which means mute.

Clearly, Sahar Tara residents worship a plethora of deities who exercise control over individual health, climate, and community cohesion, and who reside in tactically important places such as trees surrounding Sahar Tara, in the Himalayas towering above, and in individual households. Tarali sacred geography also extends to the stars and constellations. Although watches do exist, time is also assessed according to the constellation *Mintun*, which is the Big Dipper. The most important star, however, is *Karchen*, who sometimes dwells in a woman's stomach for ten months, tricking the woman into thinking she is pregnant. When the woman gives birth, the room is illuminated with a bright light, but there is no baby. Other times, a baby will be born and die as an infant, and it is said the baby is taken to this star to live. One day in the third week of November during my stay in Sahar Tara, one woman noted that *Karchen* had not

risen in the east that morning as it usually did. Perhaps, she speculated, the star was residing in somebody's stomach, pretending to be a child.

Sahar Tara is a society dependent upon its agricultural output and hence dependent also on the weather and other forces of nature. It is also a society with extensive ecological knowledge systems, and this knowledge is revealed in both small and individually reckoned ways as well as within a larger socio-cultural context. The above-mentioned descriptions and examples illuminate strategies for situating one's self within one's community and within one's environment.

These strategies are often expressed and transmitted through language. On a daily basis, people make sense of, and occupy, their world through private conversations, in passing observations, and in small acts, all positioned within a larger cultural framework. Full moons are marked by lighting oil lamps; women whistle as they winnow to call the wind to them to help blow away the chaff from the grain; on a cloudy day women speculate that someone's climbing the mountain *Deurali*<sup>7</sup> and causing the advent of clouds. On the first windy

7. *Deurali* is also commonly called *Dhaulagiri*. Climbing mountains for the sake of climbing mountains was looked upon with some disdain and a vague sense of offending the deities residing in the Himalayas as well as affronting common sensibilities. *Jobata*, one of the most powerful deities, resides at the glacier located up a tributary southeast of the village of *Gumba Tara*. One day in the early morning when I accompanied a group of young women to collect firewood an hour-and-a-half above Sahar Tara, they pointed out the glacier to me and said the deity would kill those who venture there. Another woman told me that long ago a man from *Gumba* reached the glacier and found an abundance of turquoise in the center. He brought some back with him to *Gumba*, but the next morning when he awoke, all of the turquoise had returned to the glacier of its own volition. Again he traveled to the glacier and returned with turquoise, only to have it disappear again by the next morning. Finally, he put a piece of turquoise in his shoe, which effectively contaminated it (note the similarity in this story and the origin story of the *Kaikae* language regarding contamination), it having touched his feet. It is said that someone still has that piece of turquoise somewhere.

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

## THE GENDER FACTOR

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

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

and other supplies.<sup>8</sup>

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

The differences in the two maps illuminate the gendered division of labor, the occupation of divergent social and physical spaces by men and women, the role of women as transmitters of cultural knowledge, and the role of men as agents of change. The latter is evident in appearances, as well. All of the women wear *lungis*, or sarongs, and a cummerbund. If it is warm, they wear t-shirts or tank tops with this, over the top of which they wear a *choli*, a Nepali shirt that ties together in four places, for warmth. They also have old, valuable *lungis* which are passed down from mother to daughter and also given as bridal presents from the groom's family. They usually wear these once a year during the four day *puja* for *Rung*, the month-long festival. The young men invariably wear t-shirts, jeans, and fashionable jackets, accompanied by sunglasses. They are indistinguishable from their Kathmandu counterparts, whereas the women would stand out as villagers in the city. Women are also the primary caregivers within the family. Information about livelihoods, spirituality, and relationship to both place and the community as expressed both linguistically and behaviorally is conveyed principally through mothers. One mother, whose son has lived and studied in Kathmandu for the past seven years, expressed her desire for a writing system for Kaike so that he can learn about deities, the village, and the language.

The realm of work constitutes the primary mechanism for gendered responsibilities. Both men and women travel to the fields and the forests in different capacities beginning at an early age, and children's worldviews are also shaped

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8. In 2008, only one man from Sahar Tara accompanied his own horses. The rest of the horses were taken by hired help.

by these gender-specific tasks and experiences. Men usually take care of animals because women are religiously prohibited from causing animals to suffer. Whereas women must collect firewood on their backs, men are able to use horses to bring wood back to the village. There are three shepherds in Sahar Tara, and all of them are men. Men engage in trade both near the Tibetan border and in Pokhara and the Tarai. Men plow the fields and fix terraces but do little else in the fertilizing, planting, harvesting, drying, threshing, pounding, pressing, and winnowing process of subsistence agriculture. Of course some men do more and some do less. Women perform all of these tasks, in addition to those associated with running a household: laundry, fetching water, cooking, cleaning, rubbing in fresh applications of cow manure on a roof or wall, picking up the monthly supply of rice from the district headquarters, and worshiping household deities and important Buddhist Lamas. This extensive division of labor according to gender also results in social segregation, in which women spend the vast majority of their time with other women and men with other men. Thus men's and women's perspectives of and progression through their lives, their village, and the social-ecological landscape are simultaneously informed by the same broad values, beliefs, and traditions and by highly gender-specific worldviews.

### CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES

While staying in Sahar Tara, I volunteered at the local school, primarily as an English teacher. I was assigned to work with the sixth- to eighth-grade classes, which were comprised of approximately five boys, because there were no girls in these higher grades. During this time, one of the exercises that I conducted was to have the boys create maps, one of their village and one partially representing the different areas of fields having names in Kaike. These maps illustrate several critical points: they serve as evidence of effective inter-generational transmission of social-ecological knowledge; they indicate gendered perspectives among Sahar Tara children regarding space and place; and they depict the autonomy of children's worldviews. The map in Figure 3 is an intricately detailed geographical representation not just of field area names but also of the location of certain crops. Sahar Tara children have more experiential knowledge about the food which sustains them than most American adults, as exemplified by their accurate drawings of walnut trees, *chinu chamal*, Japanese millet, and amaranth, among others.

Interestingly, the boys drew the school in Figure 4, a building which is absent from the women's map and barely apparent on the young men's map, disproportionately large and central relative to the rest of the village. The houses, similar to the women's map, are mostly drawn with three levels, and the boys were meticulous in drawing every family's house, even pointing out to me in which house I was staying. Boys, and children in general, travel the village

paths more than anyone else to fetch water from the tap, to follow a herd of horses up the hillside, to chase water buffalo (during the slaughtering season), and to engage in play. In the top right corner, they also drew a section of forest and the kinds of animals found in the forest. Their map illustrates the intersection of play and work worlds, the mobility of children in Sahar Tara, and their absorption as male children of gendered knowledge systems, those passed on by both the men and women in their lives.

### IMPLICATIONS

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

Tarali situate themselves on their land and in their environment through site-specific traditions of remembering in the form of oral histories and social narratives, highlighting the important role of language in perpetuating these traditions. These histories and narratives are reinforced and observed through ceremony and engagement with the metaphysical and spiritual, affirming the idea put forth by Pearce and Louis (2008) and Oliveira (2006) that Indigenous sense of place is often articulated through performance. In Sahar Tara, people worship a variety of deities in socially mandated and community-wide ceremonies, while other deities are worshiped individually and privately, such as *Risumgombo*. This sustained "place-making" (Basso 1996: 7) though occurring within a socio-cultural context, is negotiated simultaneously at the individual, familial, and communal levels.

### DISCUSSION

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

Tarali situate themselves in their landscape through culturally specific and linguistically coded experiences. Their worlds are strongly delineated, and these boundaries

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

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

Ironically, the greatest threat to language retention and cultural identity is formal education. Significantly, education removes children from the culturally formative, place-based experience of growing up in Sahar Tara and also introduces ideas of modernization antithetical to cultural identity and language retention. Because of poor

infrastructure and educational opportunities only up to the eighth grade for people in Sahar Tara, parents are obligated to send their children to boarding schools, primarily in Dunai or Kathmandu, to obtain a complete and higher quality education. Accumulation of social-ecological knowledge and language acquisition are place-based experiences. The removal of children from the social and environmental setting in which these experiences occur, to schools outside of the village, precludes them from the traditions, beliefs, and performative practices which embody the adaptive knowledge necessary for continued social-ecological resilience. "The loss or abandonment of rules for constructing and transmitting knowledge, and for authority and legitimacy (i.e., the institution of knowledge), would indicate a loss of resilience" (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003: 16). Significantly, this loss is not only social in nature for the residents of Sahar Tara, but ecological as well, due to Tarali connection to place and the structuring of Tarali worldview within the ecological context of the Tichurong Valley. Access to the collective social memory that is created through experiences on the land is untenable for those who seek education outside the village and leaves the entire community less resistant to disturbances, less capable of adaptation. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge learned at schools outside of the village setting render pursuing one's livelihood in Sahar Tara unviable. At the moment, a small percentage of children are placed in boarding schools. However, greater societal emphasis on education and literacy without associated local educational options will likely encourage increased out-migration.

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

#### Appendix 1: A Glossary of Kaike Sacred Landscape Terminology

Kaike	English equivalent (some of these could not be determined)
Arang	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
badima mako na la	yak mother and child himal (mountain); also a place people harvest yarsagumba
Baidi	name of field area in Tupa Tara
Banari	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
bharo	sour buckwheat
bong	tree used for firewood, grows together with <i>tapha</i>
bor	a bush which bears fruit during June through August (Nepali months of Asar and Saun) and grows near fields
Chan	deity residing on the uppermost level of a house

changma	tree like walnut but doesn't bear fruit
Chiseru	deity inhabiting tree below Sahar Tara
chotoro	tree bearing sour reddish fruit used in chutney
chu	mustard
chukarbo	yarsagumba harvesting area for Gumba Tara
do	inside place of worship in kitchen where cedar branches and buckwheat are tied to post
Durbha	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
Garub	name of field area near Tupa Tara
Gharti	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara; also clan and family name
gyasha	juniper; tree used for firewood
gumaa	tree used for firewood
Hangyimpu	unidentified constellation name, described as five stars in a line
Hongpa	himal above Sahar Tara
ibitaplamu	corner in fireplace where puja is done to the god during Rung
Jamphu	cluster of houses on flat spot at western end in Sahar Tara
Jangla	himal above Sahar Tara; also name of pass
Jobata	major deity residing at the Kang glacier to the east of Gumba Tara
jum	fir; tree used for firewood
kama	walnut tree
Khani	cluster of houses at bottom of Sahar Tara
Karchen	bright star appearing in eastern horizon in the morning; Durbatara in Nepali
Karma mido	unidentified constellation of six stars; when these stars and the Seven Sisters constellation meet in the sky, a four day <i>puja</i> is initiated
kujar kyalbo	literally "king of the sky;" Milky Way (akaasha gera in Nepali)
Kwaaring	name of field area near Tupa Tara
Lamu	deity residing on the lowermost level of a house
Lashin Tanama	father deity inhabiting tree directly above Sahar Tara and worshiped to induce it to rain or to stop raining during the Nepali month baisakh
lashur	tree used for firewood; <i>Rungpacha</i> is a <i>lashur</i> tree
magal	also tree like walnut but doesn't bear fruit
majala	himal above Sahar Tara
manga	cluster of houses below <i>Rungpacha</i> in Sahar Tara
mashera palma	white amaranth
mashera loma	red amaranth
Mintun	Big Dipper
na	barley
namdel	cluster of houses below <i>Lashin Tanama</i> in Sahar Tara
Nankhi	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
ngyama kasherma	sunflower
Nublung	himal above Sahar Tara

pachi	marijuana (the seeds are used for cooking oil)
Panidal	himal above Sahar Tara
Pansa	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
Pla	name of field area near Tupa Tara
Pungpal	himal above Sahar Tara
Purka	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
ran	Italian millet
rangbharo	sweet buckwheat
Risumgombo	deity residing on the middle level of a house
Rokaya	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara; also clan and family name
Rung	month long Indigenous festival usually occurring around January and February
Rungpacha	deity inhabiting tree to west of Sahar Tara where puja is performed during Rung; considered brother to Rungpikhi; also the name of a constellation, Seven Sisters in English, Saptarishi in Nepali
Rungpikhi	deity inhabiting tree to east and above Sahar Tara where puja is performed during Rung; considered brother to Rungpachaa
Samtiling	cluster of houses above Sahar Tara
Shyardung	himal above Sahar Tara
shyaula	tree used for firewood
Shyong	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara
shyupa	cedar; tree used for firewood; Rungpikhi is a <i>shyupa</i>
Sor	himal above Gumba Tara
Tangra	himal above Sahar Tara
tanshing	pine; tree used for firewood
tanu	tree used for firewood; <i>Lashin Tanama</i> is a <i>tanu</i>
tapha	tree used for firewood; grows together with <i>bong</i>
Tarjua	pole erected annually during Rung and mounted with a local flag and dupi branches
tasha	tree used for firewood
tashiyo	tree bearing red fruit
tyutsangsa	holy water brought from stream between Sahar Tara and Tupa Tara
Walluma	cluster of houses in Sahar Tara

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank James Fisher for his continued guidance and support and for paving the way for my research. Laaje Budha provided crucial input, insight, and assistance, and I could not have managed without the kind support of Dhanu Budha, Jitendra Jhankri, or Jag Bahadur Budha. I am deeply indebted to the people of Sahar Tara for their hospitality.

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FIGURE 5: GIRLS COLLECTING FIREWOOD. (PHOTO: M. DAURIO).