Kanjirowa Blues: An Exploration of Environmental and Climate Consciousness in Lower Dolpa, Nepal

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KANJIROWA BLUES
An Exploration of Environmental and Climate Consciousness in Lower Dolpa, Nepal

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Abstract

It has been scientifically demonstrated that high altitude, mountainous regions such as the Himalayas are extremely susceptible to and at accelerated risk of the effects of climate change. The regions of Lower Dolpa discussed in this work, Juphal, Dunai, Chun, & Dapu, lie in a glacial watershed, and are at present risk of landslides, floods, wildfires, and rely on agricultural and transhumant livelihoods that are uniquely susceptible to the impacts of changing temperature and weather patterns. People in this region are being forced to incrementally adapt and reframe their understanding of their surroundings due to both aforementioned severe events as well as gradual climactic changes such as warming temperatures and changing weather patterns, which influence a multitude of local factors. This work seeks to creatively explore these themes, and illuminate an extremely understudied region of Nepal, Lower Dolpa, the towns of which gaze upon the mountains undergoing such rapid change, and ask what the true impact of climate change is for people in their everyday lives. [Key words: climate change, Nepal, Himalayas, environment, severe climate events, lived experience, development].

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1 Samachar Samiti, R, 2017.
Methodology

For this work I utilized participant-observation and both formal and informal interviews with subjects chosen at random as well as specifically for their unique perspectives and insight. I interviewed a total of 32 subjects – youth, adults, and elders, both male and female. I also spent some time observing science classes at a variety of different schools to get a sense of the climate change curriculum and environmental consciousness of the students. I spent three total weeks traveling in Lower Dolpa. I spent four days in Juphal, six days in Dunai, three days in Chun and eight days in Juphal. This breadth of research sites allowed me to obtain a better sense of the variety of ways in which climate change is impacting the rather large region that is Lower Dolpa. Interviews were conducted by me in English and with the help of a co-researcher fluent in Nepali when the subject did not speak English. Conversations in Dunai were all conducted in English, and those in the other locations conducted in both Nepali and English.

Limitations

In Dolpa, individuals who speak English are few and far between. At the beginning of the research period, logistical difficulties abounded, including a lack of a co-researcher that spoke English well enough to translate or even fully communicate with about logistical needs. This issue was recurring until reaching Dapu, where I connected with co-researchers from Kathmandu with a firm grasp of both English and Nepali. However, without a co-researcher familiar with the local customs and language nuances, some things may have been lost in translation or not fully comprehended. Another difficulty was unfamiliarity with local customs, which necessitated catch-up learning along the way as well as accepting a measure of incomprehensibility during this particular field experience. Another issue I had was interviewing women. The society is very male-dominated and interviews with women often turned into interviews with their male family members. There has been extremely little, if any research conducted in this area, which left me at the mercy of what I learned along the way with very little pre-formed perspective. This fact was both a gift and difficulty.

Author’s Note

Creative liberties have been taken with characterizations of some, but not all of the interviewees in this story. Likenesses are more often than not attributed to their original persons, but on some occasions, for continuity of story, substitutions and re-writings have been utilized. This has been done with the greatest respect for the lives of the people on whom this work is based. All quotes are attributed correctly with the numbering system that corresponds to the ultimate list of interviewees. Additionally, for the purposes of this work and also for the sake of continuity I have chosen to refer to the region in question as Dolpa (the official Nepali name for the place), however for a number of the people themselves (specifically those of Upper Dolpa) their home is called Dolpo.
Measured and predicted effects of climate change on human wellbeing in the Himalayan range:

- Injury from extreme events
- Avalanches
- Landslides
- Forest fires
- Flooding
- Precipitation decreases
- Frequency of drought increase
- Changes in patterns of rainfall and runoff
- Temperature changes (especially increase)
- Extreme events exposure
- Access to nutrition decrease (especially low income)
- Air quality decline
- Increased presence of invasive species
- Major losses in agricultural production
- More mosquitos
- Health effects from water (including rainfall, humidity, flooding leading to water borne illnesses)
- Diarrhea increases
- Increased socioeconomic stress
- Internal displacement
- Changes in length and timing of growing seasons
- Changes in migration routes
- Possible decline in production of rice, corn, and wheat
- Changes in tourism and recreation due to changing snow line
- Frequent disasters (flash floods, landslides, avalanches)
- Snowfall changes
- Melting of glacial pack
- Deforestation
- Plastic trash
- New and changing pests
- Increased gender difference due to work increases and out-migration\(^2\)

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In the Kanjirowa School, Ward #10, Dapu, Dolpa, Nepal, twenty children gathered on grass-green carpets and recited over and over. An open book before each, the lesson began.

“What is the difference between a living thing and a non-living thing?”

A ripple of evasive apprehension swept through the room. One braver child who had learned this the year before stood up, shaking his pant leg, smoothing the fabric as he rose.

“A living thing is the thing which has life, sir.”

On the board these words were then written, first in Nepali, then English.

*A living thing is a thing that has life.*

A finger was pointed around the room:

Human?

“Yes, sir!”

Tree?

“Yes, sir!”

Mountain…?

The barely loud enough drum that indicated the end of the period was pounded, the magical moment that is a unilateral breakthrough in a class grasping the concept at hand just evaded, and the students poured forth from the dark cement classroom, a mass of small bladders rushing for the bathroom at once.

Nepal’s largest district, Dolpa, was divided geographically into two regions according to their proximity to two things: the sky and the Chinese border.

Upper Dolpa and Lower Dolpa.

The highland area: famous for it’s snow leopards, the culturally Tibetan people that inhabited the border region, the little yellow marvel Yarsa Gumba, and the long days of travel it took to reach the villages.

Lower Dolpa: famous for a lake, icy teal Phoksundo, where the residents made a habit of asking travelers whether they’d been, assuming there was no other reason that anyone might have made their way from Nepalgunj to Juphal.

Natural resources defined the margins of this place. Yarsa Gumba, Chyaua, Dalechuck berry, Himalayan yew, Spike Nard, all found and sold to Tibet, grew wild, in the shadow of the dangers of over picking. Pine trees edged the impressive rock laden mountains, deciduous trees lining the wetter parts of towns.

This was the toutedly remote region of Nepal, and in many ways it showed. Some towns had no shops, no roads, no hospitals or restaurants or anything that might have hinted at approaching someone’s definition of “developed.” Many people had never seen or had seen perhaps a single lost tourist in their lifetime.

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3 Yarsa Gumba is a famed fungus that is formed from the interaction of a caterpillar with a fungus. It is believed to have strong medicinal benefits and is sold for a steep price, especially in China. This resource has provided much needed supplemental income for many in Dolpa, and during harvesting season (April, May, and June) entire villages will uproot themselves to go collect. The young and elders will be the only ones left in some villages, and schools even have a scheduled holiday so that the children can help their families collect (7).

4 The city where the only airport in Dolpa is located, though a second airport is currently under construction near Chala (32).

5 A rare morel-like mushroom (4).

6 “…transformation of the local economy and society, oriented to surpass the difficulties and existent challenges. It seeks to improve the conditions of life of local population by means of actions concerted between the different local agents, social, public and private, towards an efficient and sustentable use of the existent endogenous resources” (Helmseng, B, 2011).
But the passing of time and the forceful encroaching of the modern, mechanized world had changed the faces of these towns. City-like ether seeped in from the corners. From Juphal, where the single airport that played host to one highly anticipated flight each day, empty Red Bull cans, Nepali noodle wrappers, and ominous red loose tobacco packages led the way eastward to Dunai, the path mirrored westward onto Tripurakot and up towards Likhu, where the villages of Chun and Dapu sat. Accumulating remnants of the increasing influence of the encroaching world were inescapable, a veritable breadcrumb trail of the not-so-new-anymore world.

*A living thing is a thing that has life.*

In the classroom, now empty, the question hung in the air. The Kanjirowa School overlooked three tiers of Snow Mountains. The valley plummeted down below it, hazy in the distance. A road on the other side cut across the rock face. This all presented something of a conundrum, and the conundrum was thus: what was it really that gave something life, regardless of the scientific classroom distinction that was being attempted? Was it breath? A heartbeat? Perhaps it was the capacity for growth or autonomous mechanical motion. Perhaps it was use, social significance or the presence of a human life in relation a certain something.

This moment, the brink between life and non-life, the distinction between the two, the moment where a rolling boulder teeters on the verge of cresting the tip of a mountaintop, the permeation of a membrane, the crossing of a border, it was all evocative of a question: At what point had the living turned a corner in their habitation of the planet, crossed some primordial line. Had they made themselves no longer inhabitants but aliens in their own home, the way a child might cross some filial line, becoming unrecognizable to the parent who used to see a part of themselves in the child’s face? At what point had these living beings of carbon, mostly water, molecular marvels, stopped looking like that from which they had come?

It has been imagined that time moves in many ways other than linear. Time perhaps moves more quickly at higher elevations, is a photo book, a collection of pictures, or a Fibonacci circling of the drain. But on earth it seems that the years advance like glaciers, slowly and invisibly, carving out everything in their path, leaving behind them grit and depositing erratic boulders, markers of time.

We can’t watch as a valley is formed, nor predict the color the remaining stream will run, a unique chemical biome cultivated in creation’s wake. We can’t see as sediment is pressed familiarly together, forming flat shards of mineral glass, as it stretches and moves. But we do see the markers of time all around, the layers left upon earth, the rings in a tree.

The markers were both slow moving and rapidly influential, yet at each site of change life still plodded along—moving very much out of sync with this crux, as though the pinprick of time in which a living thing becomes a non-living thing was expanded a hundred-fold, and each moment held within it a thousand more infinities.

That moment between life and death that transformed something living to something non-living was intangible, the moment of this suspension a larger question from somewhere far away. It was a question of what had been done? It was a question of who would be hurt? It was a question of now, it was a question of later, it was a question of why. In or out? Too late or just in time?

And whether such liminality pervaded the towns in Lower Dolpa... it was difficult to say.

The boulder flinched but did not fall.
It was the Nepali month of Baisakh, the English month of April, and it had been the snowiest winter in recent memory (10).

Those who called home the villages in Upper Dolpa such as Dho Tarap, Saldan, Charrka, and on, had been waiting patiently since mid-May to return home from their warmer lower winter villages, from polluted Kathmandu, from sweltering, malarial Nepalgunj, and from solar-powered Dunai. The multiple high alpine passes that blocked the path home were heavily congested, the way forward a cause of anxiety for all. It was the latest the snow had ever lasted.

“I’m really worried about my teachers,” said Binod, the head of an educational foundation. “They will have to wade waist deep through the snow and you can’t tell which way is down”(16).

“The snow will interfere with the agricultural cycle,” said Norbu, a trekking guide. “The first thing to plant is potatoes, buckwheat, barley, and if they’re planted too late, it will lower crop yields and cut into Yarsa Gumba season”(8).

As if these weren’t enough cause for worry, from up near Shey7 Phoksundo8 came horrible news. Days ago at Shey Gompa9, three monks had been caught in an avalanche. One had been a well-known caretaker at the Gompa that Norbu had often used to connect his trekkers with. They had been circumambulating10 Crystal Mountain. The police and army couldn’t do a thing (8).

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That night, one Didi11 plead with her Bai.12 The sixteen-year-old boy and his friend were planning a visit to the lake that had brought fame to Dolpa.

“If you love us, you don’t go to Phoksundo,” Didi not so much entreated, but insisted—eyes wide, index finger aloft. “It is so dangerous these days” (2). The story of the monks had the family riled with fear. But this anxiety-inducing snowfall had different consequences in the lower villages, interconnected and comprehensive, yet somewhat haphazardly realized.

Uncle Lanka thought of the “very heavy rain” that had wracked Juphal that same weekend. Rain of such magnitude was unusual here, yet all this strangeness lent to such a sprightly beauty. So much water had been a blessing this season. The crops had been growing very well (1, 16).

Juphal nearly sparkled with greenery. Every nettle plant was washed clean and every mica-strewn stream-powered mill whirred healthily. A baby was crying, a whistle sounding, a strong wind rushing through the many shady deciduous trees. One young Bahini13 was chasing her cows home crying “hah, hah, hah!”

There was a strange absence of the obstreperous barking of village dogs –perhaps now like many people, they slept away the hot lazy hours of the afternoon. Baby Sorvina Brapti for one, slept under the shade that draped blankets cast in her cradle, having blinkingly fallen asleep just minutes before. In the evening much would be the same, young girls smiling, fidgeting, fighting, a goat coughing, and mules with bells around their necks ringing them dully as they trod along the muddy pathways.

Beyond the woodpile fence that kept the animals in the yard sprawled terraces, neatly neon, containing rice, wheat, onions, maize,

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7 Lake (Nepali)
8 Phoksundo Lake is a popular trekking destination for mainly domestic but also foreign tourists.
9 Monastery (Tibetan)
10 A common practice in both Tibetan Buddhism and Bön, which is the common religion practiced near Phoksundo.
11 Older sister (Nep.)
12 Younger brother (Nep.)
13 Younger sister (Nep.)
and countless other crops. On an afternoon walk through such fields, Bai grabbed, tore, and munched on a handful of what appeared to be just grass due to the thickness with which they grew but the sharp fragrance, everywhere at once, betrayed the true identity of the scallions.

“Our overall cropping intensity has decreased… which is total crops divided by year,” Sushil, a professor at the local agricultural college stated matter-of-factly (14).

“But Dolpa isn’t doing as bad environmentally as Kathmandu,” he grinned chummily. The formerly fertile valley was well known for the pollution that had overtaken its major city (14).

At the college’s farm in Juphal (“the only agricultural college in all of Dolpa!”) bees bounced through the air, entering and exiting through the small holes that had been made in hollowed logs with tin roofs as doors for them, squeezing their bodies in and out from the hives amongst one another and taking rapid flight once wriggled free. Numerous and lively, the hives lined a terrace’s worth, demarcating the boundaries of the college’s unique practice field.

“The bees are dying.” Tilak, the college’s founder, crouched under an extensive wooden trellis inspecting an expanse of grafted walnut branches. They were wrapped in plastic to keep in the humidity, tiny condensation bubbles blinking watery eyes inside. “I think its because the agricultural office has been using Nuvan.”

He stretched and paced over to a mound covered with a blue tarp. Stepping inside, the air immediately became thick and hot. It took his eyes a moment to adjust to the brownish dark, small hay bales swimming towards him. Mushrooms sprouted sparingly from the humid hay blocks. This was a new cropping of the delicate fungus. He swerved to keep from damaging any growths.

Tilak had lived in Juphal his entire life, learning farming from his grandfather and now had started his own family on this lush hillside.

“Most snow in sixty years,” he said, “but it’s been good for the crops” (16).

Such a nourishing abundance of snowmelt was evident in the powerful stream that flowed down the line of mills cutting through the town. It was evident in the splashy ground, in the evocations of mud season in Vermont, in the swarming of flies, and in the monsoon-like rain that thundered down the valley.

“In Juphal it gets hotter day by day” he wiped his brow, unintentionally punctuating his own words. And it was hot by any standard, a bath of molecular buzzing that beat down, and the ozone closer somehow, thinner.

Un-shaded in the youth of her apple orchard, Auntie threw a candy wrapper onto the freshly ploughed ground.

In the fields at that very moment in another, drier, town called Chun, Manlal Dai drove his cows in a straight line, the hewn wooden plough plunging deep into the warm, piece-y earth, preparing rows to plant the maize that had been growing so well these days.

“Last year this time wasn’t as warm,” he said in his typical joyful manner. “Nowadays it will be warmer” (8).

The temperatures were rapidly increasing in the higher ranges—predictably so—and crops like maize and chino were growing faster than ever before. Manlal’s young son pushed at the plough, making very little difference to the work, and all the difference in this world to the boy to have thought that he did.

14 A systemic pesticide to kill aphids.

15 In Juphal, apple trees were not easy to grow until temperatures increased. A new government initiative has taken advantage of the weather and is providing seeds imported from Nepalgunj to local farmers.

16 Temperatures have been scientifically demonstrated to be increasing in Dolpa, and this change has specifically made it more feasible to grow warm-weather crops such as maize (Samachar, 2017).

17 Millet.
The warmth was welcomed, but everyone could tell. Things in the mountains were changing, and they were changing fast. But from where did these changes come? The forces were closer than they seemed.

Later that night, Manlal’s sister-in-law began to cry. She had been draping katakh18 around her two guest’s necks and placing bags of walnuts at their feet when all of a sudden her eyes became wet and screwed in grief. It had been less than a year since her daughter had died in a jeep accident on the newly carved road. Her guests were the same age her daughter would have been had she survived. She saw her daughter in their faces.

Hers had not been the only loss. Ten had died during construction (22).

But while Didi and the families of the other casualties of modernity mourned, elder men and women sat upon their hearths and roofs and told stories of the old days, the hardships of rural life, the difficulties of not having proper clothes or slippers, of having to make the week-long treks to China and Nepalgunj. Still nothing was easy, but these days—of waiting, of walking—were a thing of a rapidly disappearing past. They lived in the age of development now. Health posts, education, food, all were in closer reach.

Dapu’s ward president Rana spoke of his childhood, how during the years that they couldn’t produce grain, to Saldan in the north they walked the fifteen days and carried salt and rice home on their backs. They would bring food with them and keep it in safe places along the return path, having to travel a certain distance to make it to

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18 A scarf of typically white but also multi-colored fabric primarily utilized in the Tibetan cultural tradition but fully adopted even by Hindu communities in Nepal (due to the prevalence of tourism) as a token of thanks and a way of bestowing honors upon guests (32).
their meals, waking and trudging through the dark of the early morn-
ing.

“Food was always scarce. Rice was precious, like Yarsa Gum-ba. It was hard to have more than one meal” (22). He looked upwards in a pose of remembrance, rolling back his shoulders in a worn black blazer.

“There was nothing to eat. We didn’t have rice so we had to bring food from Jagarkot. My family was better off than others though because we were cattle farmers. People would come to our home and beg for food,” offered another Dai by the fire (28).

“My ancestors and their sons all grew up in poverty. They had to wear their clothes until they were worn through and eat only local grains,” brought forth a grandmother wearing the local bullish hoop in the center of her nose (20). She sat cross-legged, complaining of the divided fields amongst her male family members, responsible for the lessening of the product.19

“There’s good water here, but too much rain and the plants will get rotten, and too much will get into our animal’s sheds.” She sat on the roof carding wool and corralling a fervent toddler, the comical split in the young one’s pants providing entertainment for all those around. She spoke of her the crops she could now grow in the warming world – peanuts, grapes, and bananas, growing triumphanty in ground in which it never would have dared.

“They can be nice to eat… but people do wonder…how can this be possible?” (20).

Her son chimed in.

“It used to only be local foods, but now we can also grow things we didn’t used to be able to like maize. It’s our main source of

income now, although with the new road there are fewer grain buy-ers…” he paused.

“But people aren’t invested in farming anymore. Better to get a good government job. People are slowly forgetting farming” (21).

“Things are so much better now,” they all concluded. “Our sons don’t work as hard as we did.”

But what a trick of the light the modern world could be, with its packaged glitz and convenience. The same forces responsible for easing these lives– increased mechanization of the outside world and reliance on outside goods—were responsible for many of the changes, both troublesome and temporarily beneficial.

And there truly were changes in these towns, both concealed and obvious. Their immediacy hinted at a future veracity, both unfore-seeable and eerily predictable. The temperature changes, the snow and the chaotic consequences of its melting, were just the beginning, and to see what might be coming for Lower Dolpa, all one had to do was look up.

That evening though, the lovely warm breath of the wind was no less enjoyable, the smell of summer no less welcome.

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19 In Chun and Dapu and similar areas in Lower Dolpa, the kinship structure is patrilineal, endogamous based on caste, polygynous, and patrilocal (24, 25).
In the pine jungle, Lolligrass grew wild, falling upon the ground, dew covered, milkily dripping upon the hand of the errant plucker. From the slightly gritty interior sprouted lion-like stamens that would cause one to hallucinate if overeaten. The flavor was of a sour roundedness, biting and just above bitter. Children ran impressively uphill, lungs unencumbered, feet pounding away at mule-trodden earth. They chewed casually at the red pink petals, slightly rubbery and clustered. This floral emblem of Nepal, the rhododendron, was disappearing; species at a time, young fists wrapped protectively around them so, sari-swathed women posing for photographs clutching the sticky branches.

Didi twirled some, laughing at her friends who looked solidly and solemnly at the camera. She turned to her husband, daughter darting nakedly between her knees.

“When you go to collect Yarsa Gumba this year,” laughed her husband, “I’m going to have so many girls around.”

“Oh yes, you’re such a stud,” Didi smiled.

It was the morning of Dashain. All over Juphal tikkas were being brushed thumb upward upon the foreheads of babies and elders alike. Baby Sorvina’s was being applied as Didi quietly exited her room to brush her teeth just in time to see her Bai in plain view on the adjacent rooftop, wielding an axe raised high above the neck of a goat, bringing it down with all his force. Seeing as he wasn’t a particularly large young lad, the axe didn’t make it all the way through the thick goaty tendons, but instead buried itself halfway through. The goat made no sound, but squirmed in partial death while the men who had been holding it still for the swing swiftly went to work finishing the job with implements obscured from Didi’s rooftop lookout.

Bai returned, quasi-triumphantly, and climbed up the hewn wooden ladder. He was greeted with loving rebukes and hearty slaps on the back from his mother, Auntie, and retreated into the bathroom to rinse the blood from his knockoff Nike slides. Didi finished her brushing job and prepared to leave.

In the heat of the morning, Auntie walked out to the hay storage, bent over and loaded onto her back a bale twice her size. She spread it across the ground and let the animals out from the enclosure underneath the house. Goats and cows swarmed for their breakfast.

That day the family was headed down the valley to the nearby village, Tripurakot, where a large festival was being held. Everyone was going, though Auntie was to stay at home with her granddaughter.

They set off at nine-o-clock, after lunch. The road was wide and trenched, a six-year-old marvel of the modern era, jeeps winding impressively along them, 300 rupees a ride. Across the way a dusty off-gassing sort of effect was visible from another roadway, a prelude to a landslide.

“It’s better to walk.” Ever the frugal father, Uncle set off with nothing but a light jacket tucked underneath his arm. The group took off down the mountainside, past power-lines, over a suspension bridge, got momentarily caught in a whirling vortex of trash wrappers, and finally arrived in Tripurakot.

It was one of the bigger villages, with restaurants and a hotel or two lining the dusty main drag. A Demi Lovato song blared from inside the shop nearest to the mouth of the suspension bridge. Uncle stopped here to purchase a pink plastic bag of incense and the needfuls for the festival, and then proceeded to plod up the many stairs towards

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20 The local name for the Nepali national flower.
21 During this local festival, which is referred to as Dashain (a name shared with a larger Hindu festival that takes place across Nepal in September) the flags on one of the four flagpoles atop the Bala Tripura Sundari Babati Temple (see Footnote 24) are changed and a number of ritual animal sacrifices undertaken. This changing of the flags occurs four times each year.
the final destination: the towering Bala Tripura Sundari Babati Temple.22

Everyone was out that day, children with noodle packets and plastic toy guns in hand pushing scruffily past adults, barely avoiding getting trampled by the passing horses bedecked in bells and colorful saddles.

At the temple, the flags adorning one of the four flagpoles which flapped ceremoniously from the top, were being changed, a crowd of men positioned expectantly below to catch the pole in a chopstick-like cross of smaller poles. Strips of the yellow and red from two separate flagposts had become entangled by a year of wind, almost braided together. To remove them from their embrace took hours of problem solving by every male present, all offering opinions, nobody listening to anyone, one man shimmying up with a curved knife improvisationally attached to a pole. One could only imagine the windy view from this barefoot perch.

Even from a less skywardly inclined vantage point the entire valley was visible, vast fields of rippling wheat like crushed velvet brushed up and down in variant shades of green, cerulean blue tin roofs glinting,23 horses galloping, and triangular erosion patterns threatening to repeat themselves.

Shadows became long. Tempers ran short. Finally both poles were brought down and everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief. The festival ended as it began, with an axe’s swipe through the neck of a factory line of goats.

On the family’s way home, in the darkening light, a scuffle was heard from above. With this little warning, a shard of slate thwacked down in front of Didi, causing her to jump back in surprise, then check around to make sure nothing else was coming after it.

The perpetual fear of such events was a part of life here.

“Dry land, no trees, land dry…” earlier that day over a cup of tea, one Nepali teacher had been attempting to say landslide in English, as his colleague later confirmed (5). But this struggle for words effectively summed up the state of the land in Lower Dolpa, precarious and at the mercy of the strong winds that were to blame for the interruption of such ceremonial flag changings.

Faded golden strips of cloth rested and raised with this wind, flowing left then right with no predictability. With no roots to hold the earth together there was little but luck and fate to hold it steady, and over the years the trees had dwindled – clear-cut for farmland, firewood, burned to encourage the growth of new grasses (26).

In the schoolyards the wind would pick up the bleached cinnamon dirt – fine, particulate, and perfect for temporary blinding. Parents and teachers gathered to watch their children in local song and dance and would gracefully weather each laden gust with blasé head-turns and scarf-raisings. Some simply blinked the grit away with accustomed eyelashes.

Years before, the ancestral fathers of Dapu and villages like it had cleared the ground in order to obtain a more abundant yield, felling pine and dragging ploughs through the earth. Then they thought only of providing for their families. Then thoughts were not of taking

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22 The famous “four sisters” Hindu temple in Tripurakot, Dolpa. Tripura Sundari is said to be an incarnation of Durga, the patron Hindu goddess of Dolpa. In the past the temple was the palace of a Buddhist king but has since been appropriated into a primarily Hindu site. It is said to be the place where the hip of Sati Devi, the primary consort of Shiva, decayed while he wandered with her body after her death. (Kinsley, 1987).

23 The modern alternative to traditional earthen flat roofs. Such roofs are more commonly seen in areas with better road access, and increasingly necessary due to the increased intensity with which rain has begun to fall (4).
care to avoid deforestation for the sake of keeping their villages from plummeting into the valley (21).\textsuperscript{24}

In 2010, a particularly heavy wind had torn through the valley, ripping at roofs, tearing them from their wooden torsos, awash in the forcefully liquid motion of the gust, leaving behind kitchens and bedrooms on full display to the heavens.\textsuperscript{25}

That same year an entire town was taken in a single instance of the upending of earth underfoot, under-school, under-home. One moment it sat where it had been for years. Paths, homes, fields, clothes drying, food cooking, and in one instant it was gone, presumably first signaled by the surprising thwack of one slate sheet landing at the feet of a woman walking home.

Didi shuddered at the thought and picked up her pace. An unidentifiable candy wrapper skittered across the road and disappeared over the side of the cliff.

\textsuperscript{24} According to data from the district forest office in Dunai, in the last 15 years 45% forest cover has decreased to 37% (8).

\textsuperscript{25} Deforestation has led to barren mountainsides and increased erosion, mostly due to transhumance. As a result the region is now at an increased risk of landslides. In Juphal a community forest group has been created in the interest of avoiding deforestation. They enforce rules such only cutting dried wood, never green, and make further rules to avoid deforestation, but there is little accountability as these towns in Lower Dolpa do not fall inside the protected area of Shey Phoksundo National Park (14).
Across the valley, around the partition that was the Kanjirowa\(^{26}\) range, a triumphant cloud was rolling away, having finished its work. In the shade of a massive Shiva tree\(^{27}\) under which a smattering of children occasionally played seesaw, a drunken older man stumbled for footing, a battle against the jutting, slippery, ancient roots and surrounding rocks. Rain had washed the air cold, musty scents of leaf-litter and pine clinging to the wind. Schoolgirls on their way home rested along an irrigation ditch gossiping and grinning, their blue shirts stark against the maize fields. They had just escaped the downpour, but the laundry had had no such luck, having been flailingly brought down from the lines.

Wind whipped and warped the plastic insulation lining the wooden house planks. Here in Dapu, where a prominent teal building jutted just above a ganja-carpeted cliff, the apple trees, too young to yield much of a crop but not to produce soft pink blossoms, shuddered under the drops.\(^{28}\)

“It is unusual for it to rain so heavily this time of year,” grumbled Golpana, covering and cradling both her baby and the beans that had been warming in the sun (2).

And just as quickly as it had begun, the squall ceased, the dark sky still tensed on its haunches to begin yet again at will. A young girl walked through the curtain of flies that had returned from wherever they had managed to hide from the torrent. She waved them off, the backside of her hand hitting a few – it would have been difficult to avoid such collisions considering their sheer numbers.

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\(^{26}\) Dreadlock Mountain (Tib.)

\(^{27}\) A couple massive pine trees in Likhu are said to be of Shiva. Temples are built beneath them.

\(^{28}\) It takes 3-5 years for apple trees to produce fruit, so in Dapu, for the time being there is no benefit from their presence besides aesthetic. In Juphal, the apple crop has been doing well, though the local apple wine distillery recently closed due to “bad management” (1, 16, 18).

Changing weather had brought flies as always during the rainy season. This year—even for such a comparatively lush oasis as Dapu, where ample water ran through laundry taps, piped down the natural curve of a glacial stream where the water ran through so strong that the soap bar would be forced out of one’s hands—\textit{slip splash}—down into the pool of water collected below, causing a cloud of white opacity to cascade milkily out over pebbles—it had been very wet.

Some, like a man named Chandra, explained the phenomenon calmly. “This season more rain, across the way you can see. They have snow in times they never used to. In childhood not so much rain” (19).

Some were less blasé.

“Can you explain to me why there are mosquitos in Lower Dolpa now?” Arno asked, incredulous regarding the warm, stagnant water that bred new, unusual swarms of the godless insect (30).

Later that night villagers warmed themselves in their close kitchens. On this particular night, over a healthy serving of dal bhat\(^{29}\) and rakshi,\(^{30}\) Ganesh Sir shifted back on his pelvis, eyes fixated upon the female wrestling program on the small screen in the kitchen’s corner. He moved from his left to his right. He had injured his back a year ago and had only recently returned from getting treatment in Kathmandu.

“I’m not supposed to even pick up this jug of water,” he said, a cigarette dancing upon his lips, “but I have to work.” He turned to a guest and bluntly asked:

“Do you have diarrhea medication?”

The guest admitted that they did.

“You must bring it immediately,” he said. A child from his school had fallen sick.

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\(^{29}\) The classic Nepali dish of rice and beans, usually served with potatoes (\textit{aloo}) and greens.

\(^{30}\) The local alcohol, made from apples.
“This season, so much sickness,” he shook his head in reference to the changing weather that goaded everyone here so.

"We can feel it," spoke one Dai as he crisped a batch of nearly blue roti by the stove. New diseases plagued the towns – mostly upset stomachs, but also maladies such as asthma, ulcers and pneumonia.

He went on.

“People used to die mostly from cancer here, but when I was a child people’s immune systems were better. People are weak now and get sick more easily. This is due to bad habits. People emphasize more imported food. People are lazy and don’t grow their own crops. People are using tobacco. People get weaker day by day. People are starting to use chemicals on the crops.”

Barrages of new insects were coming to the fields, gnawing, cracking, consuming.

“We don't know how to fight the insects,” he said, “but I have a feeling that when the rain comes the insects will vanish” (21).

Weather in Lower Dolpa was changing every day—heat lightning struck at night in the capital city, Dunai, squalls swept across the face of the hillsides, a winter snowstorm had even recently filled Dapu’s footpaths and blocked mules and footfalls. Like hay the snow had been shoveled into baskets and carried on hunched backs, then thrown as far as possible.

“There never used to be snow here [in Dapu]” admitted Ganesh (18).

“We have never in our life seen so much snow as this winter.” A much repeated phrase across Lower Dolpa (3, 4, 9, 14).32

Pine trees peppered the golden brown mountainside, sparse in places where a wildfire some years back had screeched and snapped

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31 Round bread.

32 2.5 feet of snow in 2016, 4 feet in 2018, according to personal records (9).
over the earth. Some trees seemed all-alone upon the great expanse. The remnant stalks rested like cacti, empty bleached ribcages planted in a rolling blackened sea.

Across the valley, over the strong rapids that millions of years before had begun to trickle, wearing down the rocks and earth, imposing blimp-like clouds advanced militarily across the comparatively lightly snow covered peaks. For the most part, these mountains would now have barely been considered skiable by someone other than the locals who would never think to ski them, though it was admittedly more than there had been in recent years, owing to the recent storm that was blocking many from returning back to upper Dolpo. School was slated to begin April 20th.

“I don’t see that happening,” cracked the principal of Crystal Mountain School in Dho Tarap (4).

According to Rana, Dapu’s ward president, this recent snow, asides from being confusing, was not such a problem for their mountains in Lower Dolpa. In fact, a loss of snow across the Kanjirowa range that Dapu and Chun gazed upon was much lamented. The snow was nothing short of welcome.

“[The mountains] used to be like glaciers…now you see almost nothing at all,” said Auntie Sutyrupa.

“They used to be covered with snow,”33 Uncle Chandra said, “and for all twelve months they would be. Today there is only snow because it just snowed” (19).

Indeed there was now a dense white coat upon the impressive expanse, but it was nothing like it had been in an age before.

“We know from the elders that the melting of snow is increasing,” said Gokul, the district forest officer in Dunai (8). And the elders spoke of nothing less.

33 Ten years ago.
“There used to be blue up there. We should have taken pictures,” they said (22, 18), for in the old days a blue-green glacier used to edge the range, reflective and profound.

They used to take a bucket and dig the green snow from below, and it would come like a stone (21). It was said that if they could bring this glacial blue stone back over to the village, it would act a remedy that was able to cure the diseases of their children.

These days the old folk remedies were being lost in ever increasing numbers, and it wasn’t only the melting of a mythically profound ice either. In a small dark office in Dunai, Gokul stated matter-of-factly: “climate change is leading to medicinal plants decreasing across all altitudes” (8).

Yet even as the high snow melted and the rain and snow came fierce and increasingly, monsoon shocks and surprise coatings, the water resources were still on the whole decreasing. In Dapu for the time being there was enough water for the crops, but the natural springs were said to be drying up and despite the current abundance there was no way to anticipate year by year anymore. They used to easily predict the weather, but everything was different these days. One year there had been no rain at all.

“Many animals died,” said Chandra (19). “So many are gone.”

Nearby Chun was more autumnal than Dapu. Trees had a red tinge to them, the sprightly apples trees longer in the leaf, reaching towards the sun and squatter in evolutionary attempt to bring the water closer. There was a water shortage in Chun. Only two springs ran with any consistency, drawing crowds (17). They hadn’t yet started planting yet, as they had to rely on the monsoon rains still to come (27). Fields awaited this spotty promise of rain, this season’s waxing and waning snow line teasing at the water elsewhere. Work was doubled to gather the necessary water for the homes, men and mostly women waiting in a daily queue to fill gasoline container-looking drums. They sat in line on their heels, flat-footed, knees pulled in towards the chest, waiting their eventual turn at the twin spouts, with darkened gallon canisters and buckets in their arms. Errant water lost arched over the cement, rapid Nepali breaking out over the waste.

“Its our turn now,” the words everyone waited for.

Droplets clung to the wrist and stillness fell as the line rose, visible from the sunlight cast through the grubby plastic. The hose was passed, the waiting vessels filled, hoisted onto shoulders, and with effort were carried back to the house, splashing on faces and darkening small polka dots of ground along the way. Each subsequent sip from the teakettle nudged at the muscles, reminding the body of the trip.

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34 When snow and ice are densely packed enough, the light will refract at a frequency that colors it a blue-ish green. This is what gives glaciers their unique color.
35 Childhood pneumonia.
36 Poaching, road-building, and deforestation have led to a decrease in and even extinction of many animals in Lower Dolpa. Deer, bear, tiger, and wild boar, seen in the childhoods of multiple interviewees, are rarely seen anymore. Musk deer is completely extinct.

37 In Chun the nearest water source that can be used for irrigation is past Dapu, and this was damaged by a landslide, meaning that they must wait for the monsoon rains to come in order to have a reliable water source, thus further changing and differentiating their planting season from other nearby villages.
In arid Chun, nestled around the feet of young Dahn Prasad Bhuda, were his fellow villagers, hands in prayer, small bundles of greenery pressed earnestly between their calloused palms. It was oddly quiet, even for the morning.

Bhuda was hunched and folded, fist to forehead. Juniper curled on the coals, sending fingers of smoke towards the blackened ceiling.

Suddenly he yelped, rapt, a shocking “hah!”, threw a pinch of rice, and everyone jumped to. He began speaking rapid fire, forcefully, on his knees, every inch of his body active. One man wiped the corners of his mouth for him. Everyone was moving, the eye uncertain where to rest besides his raised index finger, which came down authoritatively again and again, punctuating the spewing Nepali. His eyes were cast down.

Then it was over, and everyone began talking at once. The noise was jarring after the silence that had previously captured the reverent room. The man who had wiped the spittle from the Bhuda’s rapidly moving lips passed around roti and chunks of coconut. He then left the room, quickly returning with water, which he threw upon the young man.

Not a flinch.

In this area of Dolpa, there were a number of “living gods” and priests who acted as spiritual mediums for the villagers. The gods were said to enter the world through their bodies, momentarily taking over their consciousness. Bhuda explained that as a boy he was able to speak in language that no one else in his family was able to understand, a sure sign that he was special (27). The god smiled softly as if nothing had happened.

In Dapu, a mass of men and women were similarly crowded into another dark kitchen. This town’s venerated village priest, an older living god, reclined on a sheepskin rug, his granddaughter nestled among the bony angles of his lap, fading in and out of sleep.
...The priest’s was the authority on crop planting. It was like a belief system, when to cultivate the crops. When the villagers came to him to predict cultivation dates they always had a better time with farming that year, they said, and he predicted every year. Even for collection of firewood they came to him for guidance.38

“His predictions have never ever, ever, ever, ever failed! We don’t ask what happens when god comes into his body. We don’t ask these questions.” One man was overflowing in his admiration of the priest that sat before him (30).

It was the day that had been predicted would be best for planting maize.

A group of twenty women had gone out to do just that the earlier morning, homes a-flurry with the preparations, voices chiming among the courtyards, baskets and tools aloft.

The women in Lower Dolpa worked triple-time. They threshed grain, cared for their children, poured butter tea, cut potatoes, stirred food, worked in the field. They herded livestock, carried stones, wood, water, and hay. They wore long skirts in floral prints, thick necklaces with turquoise stones, heavy gold hoop earrings, tie-front blouses, scarves on shoulders and heads. They had smooth faces and strong calloused feet, swipes of red at their hairline. They would whip out a breast to calm crying babies, smoothed long dark manes with brushes and oil, and raise hands to firmly and lovingly pop their toddlers on the rear and back. They always served others first, offering the initial grains of rice to Shiva, to men and guests, more and more until they were overfilled, stomachs swollen with rice and spiced potato, then quickly and expertly fed themselves and washed all of the dishes. They would try to stop you from even bringing your own plate to the wash bin. Some ran away from alcoholic husbands, begging their friends to come along back home. Others stayed with men they sincerely loved. They shoved sticks ever further into the fire, picked up coals with their bare hands, kneaded dough, spun yarn, swaddled their babies in scarves, slept under blankets in the heat of the day, refilled the water kettle again and again, tapped the cap of hissing pressure cookers, pressed velvet circles to their foreheads, cackled at their family’s foolishness, washed the dirt from the eyes of their sobbing toddlers, sorted through beans, and scratched at the gold balls in their left nostrils.

But it wasn’t enough for Didi Rana Bora, Ward #9 President, who had recently won the local election against the highly gendered odds.39 In the ward office, a room lined with fabric of a violent violet print, the female president demanded something else.

“If we want women’s empowerment, we should also be allowed to plough the fields,” she said while carefully pouring more tea for her guests. “It's really hard for females, more than men.”40 She spoke of the backbreaking work that was beating the proteinous local chino. “But now with more development food is cheaper and it is easier for women.”

Meanwhile, a group of women trudged down the hillside, slippery from rain, carrying on their backs their respective 80 kilos of firewood, complaining about the rotten patches of their maize fields, thinking of the dal still left to make at home.

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38 The months of prediction haven’t changed, he says, only the dates themselves (29).

39 Women in Dolpa are extremely dominated. In the past women were not chosen over their brothers to go to school and as a result far fewer women are educated than men in Lower Dolpa, though this is changing now (24).

40 In the Hindu towns of Dapu, Juphal, and Chun, women are by tradition not allowed to plough the fields (1, 17).
"Look," said Mr. Singh, indicating his mobile. "My wife is calling. Why are you still in Dolpa? Do you have another girlfriend there?"

He smiled wryly and took another bite of his yellow Dolpian apple.
In Dunai, the capital city of Dolpa, there hadn’t been power for two months. A recent landslide had destroyed the micro-hydropower plant that had been providing power for the region’s capital, and now Mr. Singh grumbled as his faulty printer yet again failed to produce the document he sought.41

“It runs on solar...so...” point made, case closed (10).

Regardless of the bureaucratic difficulties such an energetic dearth provided, daytime comedy TV still blared, an airing of the gory zombie flick – Train to Busan—still penetrated the unwitting diner’s eyes due to the solar panels positioned just outside the windows. Each morning Chinese-made Tibetan tea blenders still whirred.

41 The hydropower plant was supposedly built in an “erosion area.” The coordinator of the project transferred away but some people are still left making repairs (13).

Dunai had many shops that sold everything one might have wanted. Dunai had restaurants, banks, bars, schools, government offices, the lot. A hub.

Later, Mr. Singh treated to coffee at the Murmur Garden Café, a secluded spot overlooking the raging Thuliberi. The river was lined with slowly accumulating wrappers, bottles, and the like.

“This is a good spot, you can relax here,” he sighed (10).

From said spot, on full view, a government funded half-dam-half-park worth 40 million rupees was well underway. A bulldozer lay temporarily dormant while rocks were sledgehammer-smashed and stuffed into tight cages of gaffing wire. Similar projects lined the river;
attempts to buffer the flooding that had recently taken out so many roads and bridges.42

As though on cue, a man walked through the maze of plastic chairs and umbrella-shaded tables and unabashedly dumped a box of trash directly into the hungry mouth of Thuliberi. Paper, cardboard, and plastic bags momentarily caught wind, suspended in air and disbelief, but then, in an act of sudden defiance, plummeted towards the silver waves and were swept along in the fray.43

“I think it’s dangerous to have buildings near the river,” spoke chatty eighteen-year-old Norhindra later in his dark kitchen (11). Last summer, he said, the Phoksundo River, a tributary of Dunai’s roaring Thuliberi, overflowed and washed away roads, bridges, and trails. Retaining walls and intentionally placed plantations were now being used to prevent homes washing away too, though how scientifically this was being done was the subject of some doubt (11, 8, 9).

But water was also in retreat in Dunai. At the Bön School in, a waterfall across the valley from which the staff drew water to irrigate the impressive campus gardens, pomegranate and lime trees, onions and garlic shoots, had replaced their original source, now dried up. That past winter, the pipes they had used to supplement this froze, and then they had no water, exacerbating religious tensions. Their Hindu neighbors, put off by their beef consumption, had retaliated by way of the liquid.44

Shirap the principal sniffled. He too had caught the same cold that all the children in the school had contracted.

“In May our water source dried up. Our Hindu neighbors took water for their fields and we had none. Sometimes we quarrel...” he took a moment before uttering a bit more quietly “they cut our pipes.”

He went on. “In my home in Parle, many water sources are drying up as well as trees. There is a monastery there, that is up a bit from the village, and they had to take water on horseback from lower in the village last year” (12).

Later that night, past the cozy environs of the café, past lime trees and plastic tables, in the navy night a rash of purple lightning moved slowly towards a Dunai that the sun had just set upon. Tendrils biting along the valley, the storm moved closer and closer, sending students back home for fear of errant electric tentacles. It was too early in the season for weather such as this. The air was almost balmy below the snowcaps. The rains were coming three months earlier than usual, and what had once been normal predictions had become anyone’s guess. Regardless, a young man from Upper Dolpo had tried his hand earlier that day.

“If it’s hot in the morning it will rain in the afternoon,” he had said (13). Just so, the clouds rolled in that evening, though a bit later than his forecast. The strange weather, though fully out of season, lucky guess or not, somehow momentarily graspable. The warm night thundered along, haze replacing where the night before stars had clearly shone over the range, Orion and his belt upside down, hanging in celestial befuddlement.

42 The flooding season has changed. It used to be January and February, now it is March and April (8).
43 The Nepali government has not restricted plastics here as in some places. Some cite the plastic problems as coming from trekking, as there are 40,000 people in Dolpa and 700-800 tourists coming every year (8), but in Chun and Dapu there has only ever been one tourist – a German man lost on his way to Jumla (19).
44 Hindus do not consume beef.
A warm night turned on its head to yield a crisp morning. Birds chattered away about everything on their avian minds along with the sounds of clinking dishware and the footfalls of the single jogger in Dunai. The spicy aroma from the brewing chia drifted over the dirty knees of those seated in the kitchen, towards piqued nostrils. Aloo and dal bubbled on the wood-fed, Dalit-made,45 earthen hearth. Chickens clucked outside the thin floral printed curtain on a string. Thunder rolled. People lay relaxed on carpets around the warmth. Smokily the room filled with silence, minds drifting and turning toward a television tuned to the news, some turning downward towards the floor. The winds blew through the cardboard insulated walls of wooden homes where people sat, right hands buried in rice and gingered dal, through the curtain that wisped in the doorway, through the spring trees with and their tender uneducated growths. Bai opened two packages of tea biscuits and without a second thought threw their wrappers into the kitchen fire. The plastic warped, bubbling for a moment, then stuttered into acidic grayness and disappeared among the flames.

Close to the sun and with a thin atmosphere, the blaze beat away at rocky impenetrable ground. “Too hard to dig” the secondary school English teacher explained (5). At Saraswati Secondary school in Dunai the teachers gathered in a dark classroom. Each hailed from different regions of Nepal – Chitwan, Lumbini, etc.—and wore looks of slight exasperation owing to the overflowing classrooms full of 90+ students they were due to return to after this shady break.

An inquiry into science curriculum brought forth a thumbed over textbook, the cover made from an empty package of Oreos. While combing through it the teacher sighed over the current topic of discussion—plastics.

“We burn it,” he said. “We don’t have other ideas. It’s difficult to dig holes because the ground is so hard and stony. We know it’s dangerous to burn, but better than to have it end up in the river.” A shrug. The cookie-clad book snapped shut.

“The environment of Dolpa is so bad. I’m trying to transfer back to my hometown,” said one, a sentiment that echoed by the many government worker transplants currently settled in Dunai (5, 6, 7).46

Three years ago there had swept a blazing wildfire, the likes of which had never before seen in the life of the people from Dapu and Chun. Now from an outcropping, the eye lay upon a bare rise, blackened and brittle. Several times there had been forest fires, sometimes natural, sometimes not so natural. A man from Chun explained. “People don’t so much do it publicly but still in secret. There are hunters who will burn the whole forest so deer will come to them—to make an ambush. With the dry land here the fires spread so fast.”47

He solemnly followed with another story. Talk turned to the fiery past. “You know…I was accused of being too intellectual for Dolpa. They said I must be a Maoist. I was beaten, almost to death. I was made to forcefully sign a document and then was kept in a sack and kerosene was poured on me. I was going to be burned.” He stuffed dried corncobs into the blazing hearth upon which sat the teakettle in which chia was brewing. He spoke evenly and matter of factly (26).
Memories like this still rested heavily in the consciousness of the town, which had only just started to forget the terrible period that was the Maoist conflict.\textsuperscript{48} Dolpa had been an important stronghold for the Maoists, enduring years of the conflict, families turned against one another.

While spooning curd into a bowl, a woman who had been in the Maoist army herself recounted her memories from the time.

“My house was looted and burned. My father knew that the Maoists were coming and fled in the night. He left me behind.”

She sat arms crossed, laying it out as it was. She had joined the Maoist army willingly, seemingly her only option in the face of a difficult family life.

“They came and took me far into the jungle. My brother came after me and told me not to go. I went home for three months but I left again. I had been forced at age fifteen to marry a man, and I didn’t like that. After that I had four months of training. Those unfit for fighting had to do cultural dance but I was able to complete all trainings and fight.” She was proud of this.

Now her husband, who she had met in the army was away for work. He had sustained four bullets while fighting yet the Maoists had given them nothing after the fighting ceased.

“We expected once the war ended that lots of help would come. None came, not even for the injuries” (25). She stoked the fire.

\textsuperscript{48} Between 1996 and 2006 an armed conflict erupted between the Maoist Party of Nepal and the central Nepali government, resulting in over 17,000 deaths and ending in a peace accord that made large changes to the country. The Maoists had a specifically dominant influence in rural areas such as Dolpa. This conflict is referred to as the Nepalese Civil War.
“USAID came three years ago and did an awareness program. They asked us to run it once they left, but people didn’t care so much because of non-education. People aren’t concerned about it and just flow with the times” (19). – Chandra Bhadur Dharala, Dapu resident.

Around the fire at the home of Dapu’s unfailing priest, the room filled with bodies, moths to the light, muffling the sounds of the conversation taking place. A public question and answer session had emerged. The priest’s son, who had been educated outside the village and now worked as a community medicine assistant at the local health post, looked concernedly, effusively wondering.

“What can we do about this climate change? How can we help?” (30).

Such an earnestly valid question struck nearly beyond the questionee’s purview. What could be said? It was loaded. It was so loaded. There wasn’t time. There had never been time.

The tongue paused, because it there was no way to say it all. The tongue hadn’t said anything yet. Pairs of eyes still fixated, waiting for an answer that didn’t come.

The tongue went dry, and it blandly began.

“The environmental education is not satisfactory here,” - Gokul Rijal, Divisional Forest Officer, Dunai (8).

A teacher launched into his first lesson on climate change. The students in class six at the Kanjirowa School were a bit confused. Looks were of polite misunderstanding, of earnest curiosity.

“The students have such a knowledge of their natural environment—where to find plants, how to traverse through the Himalayas, they know all this. They can tell you when it will rain from the clouds in the sky” - Binod Shahi, founder of the Snow Yak Foundation (17).

The students listened intently to a description of how CO2 emissions from large factories and cars were contributing to an overall greenhouse gas effect. Global warming.

“During times of harvest stress, crop failure, water shortages, students will drop out more. It becomes difficult to study and do homework.” – Gum Bhaahadur, principal of the Janipriya School (26).

Such conceptual lessons—a lopsided earth drawn in drying marker on a whiteboard, arrows and squiggles and molecules and badly drawn cars and factories—did not teach that the warmth of the day, the rain that pattered at the school’s tin roof, the minute speed of the maize growth, the falling of rocks, the airborne packages of orange smile cookies, the melting of the glacial blue that used to be able to cure them of their ills, were all a reflection of this oddly drawn graphic. But it was a start.

The mountains looked on, seeming bluer than usual.

“A living thing is a thing which has life.

The Snow Yak Foundation is a Nepali-funded school development initiative founded by “Sir of the Himalayas,” Binod Shahi, a Kathmandu native. The foundation supports schools in Dolpa and sends volunteer fellows from the city to teach in underdeveloped schools for periods ranging from six to eight months. The towns are extremely outspoken in their support for their project, specifically in Dapu (17, 32).
Later that evening, Auntie and Uncle sang softly along to a Nepali song that fell forth from the tinny speakers of a mobile phone. The moon was full and the snowy Kanjirowas were iridescent in its blue light. The blizzard’s deposit atop them could barely be real. The stars that couldn’t be outshined by the lunar light flickered—lonely.

An orange comet streaked across the sky and disappeared into the atmosphere so seemingly nearby. The couple leaned against the railing sharing a cigarette, taking it all in—the place they’d lived their whole life.

What was it about the mountains that made them so fascinating, so daunting and mysterious to so many? Maybe it was that so few people could manage to live among them. Because everywhere else easy had already been settled. Because they were so difficult to imagine breaking. Because they towered like gods, unfailing, unflinching, unmoving. Because to traverse them one risked death. Because they were untouchable.

*A living thing is a thing which has life.*

There Uncle and Auntie leaned, on a railing in the home they had built in Dolpa, children fast asleep by the fire, exhausted by the day. How untouchable were these mountains then, people firmly fixed to their surface—how unfailing?

Thunder rumbled. A single mosquito buzzed.

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**Appendix of Photos**

Title Page – Roof of Manlal Dai’s house, *Chun.*
3. Kanjirowa valley lookout from *Chun.*
5. Manlal Dai and son ploughing, *Chun.*
11. *Chun.*
12. *Dunai.*
Sources Cited


Suggestions For Further Research

Tracking environmental change can be a frustrating and imperfect endeavor, as well as one that is always changing. Dolpa, and all Himalayan regions are experiencing climate change that is very immediate and extremely varied depending on a variety of topographical factors. It will be important to return to these places and see what has changed during this critical period across the world.

On the whole, Lower Dolpa is both under-traveled and under-studied. According to the villagers, we were not just the first Americans, but also the 2nd and 3rd tourists ever to come to Dapu. Any research, any topic, would do well to find footing in this region. For future researchers, I would recommend bringing a co-researcher from Kathmandu, or being 100% set on and in communication with your co-researcher ahead of time. Phone service is very spotty to non-existent in Lower Dolpa, with the exception of Dunai.

In Juphal one could do a much more in-depth study of the airport and the agricultural college. Another airport is being built across from Dapu, a study of that town would be utterly original. In Tripurakot there is a large and very important Hindu temple that we were only able to learn a small bit about but would prove a interesting place to study further. Another fascinating project would be learning more about the living gods. I would also highly suggest future work and collaboration with the Snow Yak Foundation (including a possible internship in their Kathmandu office.)

For any questions feel free to contact me at crgreenleaf@gmail.com.