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They Come Like the Clouds: Governing the Mountainous Periphery

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“They Come Like the Clouds”

Governing the Mountainous Periphery

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Abstract

This paper addresses the extension of governmental power into the mountainous periphery of the village of Dho Tarap in the Dolpa District of Nepal. New technologies, new markets, and new social dynamics are penetrating the Himalaya and reshaping the connections that mountain people have to the outside world. In this context of connectivity and modernity, the people of Dho Tarap are also being thrust into far closer proximity to the Nepali government. After a series of geopolitical moves in Nepal and China in the 1960s, Dho Tarap as part of an isolated border region has been a part of a national state-building effort at consolidating borders and border populations. These state-building efforts have included asserting and establishing the sovereignty of the state, and then attempting to reach these populations to raise revenues, keep records, and to generally govern.

This paper, then, tells a story of people who have, until recently existed in the “periphery” of the nation-state and explores and tells their experiences with incorporation into that state. The paper suggests that it is far easier to exert influence and establish sovereignty over a peripheral region than to govern it fairly. State power has been established in the Tarap valley, but through the testimony of villagers this paper argues that the Nepali government has failed to deliver on the promise of government itself: namely protecting and providing for the welfare of its citizens. In Dho Tarap, instances of governmental presence are defined by neglect and both by the exploitation of villagers and the support of existing exploitative power structures. Finally, the paper identifies spaces where the state may have more influence and more responsibility in the future, hinting at the normalization of state control in Dho Tarap and exploring the active process of a modern state attempting to govern its people.
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Introduction

The Dolpa District

The District of Dolpa is a parliamentary district within the Nepali state located in Northwestern Nepal, bordering Mustang to the east, Jumla and Mugu to the west, and Jalarkot and Rukum to the south. To the north lies the Tibetan border. Dolpa is the largest district in Nepal, but has a very small population (number) spread out across a large landmass. Dolpa is very much a Himalayan district. It is mountainous and rocky with many 15,000 foot passes and high snowy peaks.

Dolpa is split, administratively, geographically, and culturally into two regions; Lower Dolpa and Upper Dolpa. The only real divide administrative border between the regions delineates trekking permit areas for travelers, as permits for Lower Dolpa are much cheaper than prohibitively expensive permits for Upper Dolpa. However, these permitting boundaries between Lower and Upper Dolpa is mostly arbitrary and locations that people in Dolpa consider to be in Upper Dolpa (such as Dho Tarap) are technically a part of Lower Dolpa. However, there are very real differences between the people and the geography of Upper and Lower Dolpa. The region of Lower Dolpa is wooded and characterized by deep river gorges, and large pine forests (that are rapidly disappearing as Dolpa’s energy and construction needs increase). People live in villages that dot the steep hillsides of the valleys and on the river edges. The spoken language is Nepali and there exists a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, and Bon practitioners. The two largest population centers in Dolpa, Dunai and Juphal, are in Lower Dolpa. The town of Dunai is the administrative headquarters of the District, meaning that it is the home to many administrative offices and is centrally located for access to the rest of Dolpa.
**Dho-Tarap**

The village of Dho Tarap is located on the Tarap River, a three days walk from Dunai and the rest of Lower Dolpo. While the numbers are by no means certain, the village of Dho Tarap consists of around 250 households and 1,000 inhabitants. Dho Tarap is a name for really two separate villages, Dho and Tokyu. The two villages are located about a 45 minute walk from each other, but together they make up one Village Development Committee (VDC) and are administratively a single village. Strong family ties and inter-marrying between villages as well as a shared school, language, and way of life make the two villages feel as if they are combined into one. The entire region is often referred to as Tarap or Dho Tarap, and will be used in this way for the remainder of the paper, except when specific places are called for.

There is an often-told truism in Dolpa and on online sources that Dho Tarap is the highest altitude semi-permanent human settlement on the planet. Regardless of the veracity of this claim, Dho Tarap is extremely high up. The village of Dho is around 4,000 meters high, (which varies depending on the map you use) and the village of Tokyu is around 4,200 meters high. All said,
Dho Tarap is entirely over 13,000 feet in elevation. The ground is barren in the winter and spring, besides for some shrubs and grasses on the hillsides. It is not an easy place to live, a phrase that many Dolpo-pa echoed in interviews and conversation. The only crops that grow (besides in small greenhouses) are barley and potatoes and these two crops make up the majority of the Dolpo-pa diet. The Tarap valley is a wide, rolling valley that is characteristic of Upper Dolpa. The topography on the valley floor is very flat, making the valley suited for agriculture and human settlement.

The people of Dho Tarap are descended from Tibetans who settled in the Tarap valley and are culturally Tibetan in their dress, traditions, spiritual practices, and language. They speak a dialect of Tibetan, and refer to themselves as Dolpo-pa, which translates to “the people of Dolpo”. Dolpa, specifically the four valleys of Upper Dolpa, garnered early serious attention from European and American scholars because of the history and prominence of a number of high Buddhist lamas who come from the area.¹ Dolpo-pa are mainly farmers and pastoralists, whose semi-nomadic lives revolve around the animals that they keep, especially the fabled yak. Households own yak, goats and sheep, horses, and occasionally cows, oxen, and mules and these animals are used for food, clothing, plowing, trading, carrying loads, transportation, fuel, and for a variety of other tasks. Dolpo-pa are a semi-nomadic people, who move from their settlement in Dho to other locations in Dolpa and beyond to find ample grazing grounds for their yak.² The yak caravan, made famous by Eric Valli’s film Caravan Himalaya, is another example of the primacy of husbandry in Dolpo-pa life. While the film is a dramatization of Dolpo-pa “caravaneering”, it shows a long journey to the southern hill regions of Nepal to trade Dolpa salt for grains. Caravan Himalaya illustrates the importance of mobility, adaptability, and trans-regional connections in Upper Dolpa.

Getting to Dho Tarap is a challenging affair, hugely complicating governance. There is an airport in the town of Juphal, that sends one or two flights per day to and from the city of Nepalgunj in far southwestern Nepal. From Juphal, there is a semi-motorable road to Dunai, a one hour drive or a three hour walk away, but this road is the only finished motorable road in the entire district. While many people come and go from the airport, the nearest road that connects to the rest of the Nepal highway system is a two day trek from the town of Juphal. Getting to Dolpa itself is only half of the battle. Dho Tarap is a three day, six thousand foot climb on a well-established but precarious mountain trail. Compared to other places in Upper Dolpa north of the Tarap valley, Dho is very accessible and the trail to Dho is not as difficult as many of the other foot trails in the district. However, because of difficulties in transportation and lack of physical proximity to the rest of Dolpa and Nepal, Dolpo-pa are physically insulated from outsider contact. For centers of bureaucracy and state authority, the physical remoteness of Dolpa makes it a headache for government officials; tax collectors, surveyors, national park officials, or well-meaning authorities attempting to bring health care and education to an incorporated but far-off region of the Nepali state.
Map of Dolpa. Dho Tarap is indicated as “Do” and “Tokyo” in the lower right hand corner. Image courtesy of “The Tapriza School”

The Expansion of State Power in Dolpa

Dho Tarap, and Dolpa as a whole have only been involved in greater Nepali politics for a very short time. Because of the physical isolation of the Tarap Valley, the region was historically never a center of large and powerful kingdoms that dominated most of Nepal. Instead, Dolpa was incorporated on and off into the competing regional sovereign authorities of the kingdoms of Jumla and Lo. Dolpo-pa mostly acted as a tax base for these kingdoms and interacted very little with outside authorities. Even with the unification of Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah ending in 1769, the new central government of Nepal paid little attention to such a remote region and in turn "his majesty's government had largely been ignored by villagers in Dolpa". Dolpa largely remained on the "periphery" of the Nepali state, meaning that Dolpa and its inhabitants somehow exist as a part of the Nepali state in name, but in practice, operate separately and

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3 http://dolpo.tapriza.org/TAP.aspx?EB=0&Tabid=1&E0=1&E1=0&E2=0&IDAkt=0&hp=1&lang=en

semi-independently of the central authority of the modern Nepali state. Positioning Dho Tarap as “peripheral” is a claim that demands justification. While identifying the region as peripheral makes implicit judgments about a single, permanent center that is necessary for a periphery to exist, in simpler terms the “periphery” designation is a product of 1) Dho Tarap's physical remoteness and 2) very new governmental attention and exertions of power.

Dolpa and Dho Tarap as peripheral to the rest of Nepal is central to understanding the relationship between the government and Dolpo-pa. Until the 1960s, Dolpa villagers relied mainly on both the still active Kingdom of Lo and Khampa guerillas operating in exile near the border of Tibet after the 1959 Chinese invasion of Tibet. Both of these agents in Dolpa levied taxes and acted as a de-facto government until the 1970s. In his book, High Frontiers: The Changing World of Himalayan Pastoralists, anthropologist Ken Bauer tells a story of a number of centralizing moves by the Nepali government led by King Birendra in the 1970s to collect tax revenues and exert control over peripheral populations in a highly tense border region. In the wake of the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the corresponding activity of Tibetan guerillas within Nepali territory in the regions of Mustang and Dolpo, the Nepali government was prompted to action. Tibetan resistance constituted both a challenge to sovereignty and as a strain on Nepali-Chinese relations. Nepal, looking to control its northern border and as a party to a global wave of nationalistic, state-making endeavors, began to strive to incorporate and control border regions and people.

King Birendra updated the established “panchayat” system of governance, which formally divided the country of Nepal into parliamentary districts and into smaller units called Village Development Committees (VDCs), that allow for local elections and coordinate parliamentary elections district-wide. The reformation of the panchayat system and its territory divisions set a precedent for tax collection and the formalization of private property, allowing the Nepali government to raise land taxes in remote areas and keep track of the holdings of its citizens. This new system was both a decentralization of authority to multiple levels of government that resembled a federal system of government, and in places such as Dolpa, helped to bring in peripheral groups closer to the power of a state. The panchayat system implied all sorts of change in Dolpa. It made Dunai the official district headquarters and as such it became the epicenter of the Nepali government in Dolpa. The VDC of Dho Tarap, while arguably maintaining traditional power relations within the village, that centered around headmen of powerful and established political families, systematized local governance in accordance with the

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5 Ibid., 110.
6 Ibid., 102.
oversight of the Government of Nepal. A series of land and livestock reforms were also attempted as a development effort by the Department of Livestock Services. The reforms were Western in style and attempted to circumscribe grazing lands to separate families, totally ignoring the reasons for Dolpo-pa semi nomadic grazing practices and a well-established commons system in which livestock are free to graze wherever they might find food.

Political factors outside of the realm of influence of Nepal also pushed Dolpo-pa into greater proximity to the Nepali state and completely altered the agro-pastoral practices of Dolpo-pa. Immediately following the Chinese takeover of Tibet, the Chinese government closed the Nepal-China border that lies on the northern edge of the Dolpa District. The geopolitical move made it no longer possible for the semi-nomadic people of Tarap to take their animals to graze on the relatively mild and grassy Tibetan plateau during the cold winter months as they were accustomed to doing. Instead, they were forced to move south to the foothills of Nepal in Lower Dolpa during these months, both to graze their animals and to trade as the massive border markets in Tibet were temporarily disrupted. In effect, the closing of the Chinese border to the north forced Dolpo-pa “further into the economic and administrative mainstream of Nepal”. While border restrictions are now mostly relaxed for locals, the closing of the border irreversibly diminished the status of Dolpa as a “periphery” region. All told, the history suggests a consolidation of state power and of attempts at state-building and the creation of state subjects in Upper Dolpa and in Dho Tarap.

This paper draws on the theoretical underpinning and language of James C. Scott's work The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. The book, published in 2009, theorizes expansion of “state space” from physical centers of state power, to “appropriate” mountain peoples in southeast Asia. Scott explores methods of state appropriation of periphery and the response of the populations being appropriated. He argues that the mountain peoples of southeast Asia have developed and rely on a “cultural portfolio of techniques for evading state incorporation while availing themselves of the economic and cultural opportunities its proximity presents”. The mountainous region of southeast Asia, home by necessity to people that use its physical impenetrability to evade state control, Scott identifies as the region of “Zomia”. This paper is not interested in portraying Dolpo-pa as a part of this region in character, culture, or intention. Rather, it leans on the conceptual framework of a dynamic and evolving relationship between centers and peripheral populations during periods of state-building and expansion.

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8 Bauer, High Frontiers, 102.
9 Ibid., 114.
11 Ibid., 329.
This paper is about how a pastoral society that is physically difficult to reach (and therefore difficult to govern) becomes assimilated by governmental forces and how people respond to assimilation. There is a tension between increasing state power, and the reality of life in the Tarap Valley: namely physical remoteness, small population, and a mobile, agro-pastoral society that are "notoriously difficult to deliver government services to".\textsuperscript{12} Focusing on the village of Dho Tarap, the paper seeks to understand the consequences of Nepali state-building. The paper explores the ways in which villagers interact with government forces and the experiences of people as subjects of the state. Furthermore, it evaluates the successes of the Nepali government in incorporating Dho Tarap and its formerly somewhat autonomous people into the greater Nepali state. Situating Dho Tarap within the context of modernization and increasing connectivity to the rest of Nepal and the world, the paper also suggests that the lives of Dolpo-pa are being brought into closer and closer proximity to the government of Nepal. Finally, the paper examines the activity of Action Dolpo, a French NGO that operates in the Tarap valley and contrasts the activity of the NGO to the reality of governmental presence and activity within the valley.

\textbf{Governing Tarap: Forms of Governmental Access in Dho Tarap and the Lived Experiences of Villagers under the Nepali State}

Dolpo-pa living in Dho Tarap have, in general, a very cynical view of the Nepali government and its activities in Tarap. In every interview, participants were asked if they felt the presence of the Nepali government is Dho Tarap. Almost every participant said that they did not feel the presence of the Nepali government. One 49-year old woman from Dho said that she "couldn't even smell" the government in Dho Tarap. When asked, neither could most Dolpo-pa identify any specific government services that had been provided them, their families, or their neighbors. “I get no help from the government” was a common phrase.

Government-run health programs both illustrate an increase in governmental interest in Dho Tarap and is a perfect example of the dissatisfaction that Dolpo-pa feel towards government workers and the presence of government institutions. There is a health worker appointed to Dho Tarap by the name of Deepa Serma.\textsuperscript{13} Her presence itself shows a clear investment of the Government of Nepal in the affairs and the health of its citizens. She administers health programs and is tasked with looking after the health of villagers. Outside of the telephone room and the \textit{amchi} school directly in the middle of Dho and Tokyu, Deepa Serma held a meeting with a group of village women and new mothers intended to create awareness about maternal health

\textsuperscript{12} Bauer, \textit{High Frontiers}, 139.

\textsuperscript{13} Her name is included because she is an employee of the Government of Nepal.
and how mothers should care for their newborns. She distributed anti-worm medication for children and gave advice to the Dolpo-pa women who congregated in large groups to receive medicine.

![Dolpo-pa women at a maternal health event with the Dho Tarap village health assistant.](image)

Photo: Author

However, two days after the program, Deepa was gone back to Dunai, where she spends the majority of her time. From the accounts of a group of Dolpo-pa amchis (Tibetan doctors), this is typical behavior of health workers. The amchis, who look after the amchi khan (amchi school) and take care of villagers using traditional medicine for no cost, said that this is the way that all government health workers in the valley operate. "They come and they go as a cloud" one of the doctors quipped. In five separate interviews, villagers said that it is almost impossible to get government workers to come and actually stay to do their jobs in Tarap. The Crystal Mountain School as a government institution is, according to one teacher, only able to retain outsider government teachers for the entire school year because the teachers receive a bonus in addition to base government salary from French NGO Action Dolpo. The health post building, which was completed recently and is one of the most modern-looking buildings in Dho Tarap, was
essentially abandoned by government workers after its construction. It has since been taken over full-time by the local health workers employed by Action Dolpo, but the building still serves as a physical reminder of the neglect shown in Dho Tarap by the Nepali government.

A growing During the night on Saturday, April 16th, 2016, five men with guns entered the household of a lama in the village of Tokyu right above the school building. At gunpoint, they forced the lama to hand over five precious statues. After leaving the house, they went to the satellite phone (which is the only working phone in Dho Tarap), cut wires and smashed off the expensive satellite receiver. The next day, the entire valley was talking about the robbery. Villagers said it was obviously an inside job. Nobody felt safe. While the family that I was staying with in Tokyu had never once locked the doors to their house before the robbery, afterwards whenever I returned home, the front door was padlocked shut as was each individual room. Observing the psychological effect of this event on Dolpo-pa was striking. After the event, some Dolpo-pa who answered questions about the government cited the robbery. “The government is weak here, if it was strong the robbery would not have happened”, said one Tokyu man, age 55. There is no police in Dho Tarap (except when they are summoned and take the three day walk from Dunai), nor is there any way of truly protecting villagers. Crime, which has been on a seasonal increase in the formerly peaceful valley, is sometimes attributed to the new yartsa gunbu industry and the outsider pickers who flock to the region in the summertime. Regardless of the reason, villagers now feel that they are threatened and there is nobody that can help and indeed even attempts at controlling their land and access to it by outsiders is challenged rather than encouraged by the Nepali state (see: Yartsa gunbu: regulation, conflict, and sovereignty).

A concurring theme with Dolpo-pa villagers is the ill fate of money and development projects that are intended to come to Dho Tarap from Dunai or Kathmandu. While it is possible for the headmen of the nine wards of Dho Tarap to attain funding for projects from Dunai, the money rarely reaches Tarap. Instead, the aid is siphoned away en route by bureaucrats and contractors in Dunai. One of the cooks and helpers at the local Crystal Mountain School (CMS) said that in Nepal there is a “river of aid” but by the time it get to Dho Tarap and its people, “it is only a drop”. An often cited example is a large, modern metal bridge that crosses the Thuli Bheri river just outside of Dunai. According to an elder Dolpo-pa from Tokyu, the bridge was originally meant to be located in the Tarap valley, but ended up in Dunai. For community-scale projects in Dho Tarap such as infrastructure building and maintenance, Dolpo-pa are mainly left to themselves to complete the work without any help or compensation from the government.

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15 Ibid
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
While no contractors or bureaucrats were contacted to comment, and the truth of these claims could not be established, Dolpo-pa feel as if they are marginalized and forgotten by the government.

Dolpo-pa are technically provided rice at no cost from the Government of Nepal, provided that Dolpo-pa travel to the Chinese border where they can pick it up and bring it back to Dho Tarap. The logistics are cloudy, but what is clear is that rice-aid has not been delivered for over a year as of April 2016.\(^\text{18}\) The earthquake in April 2015 that devastated the city of Kathmandu and much of central Nepal certainly limited the capacity of the government, but a year after the quake and the villagers go without promised rice. One man from Tokyu directly criticized the Constituent Assembly (CA) member from Dolpa for not delivering this rare substance so high in the mountains, saying that he is at blame and is responsible for the welfare of the citizens of his own district.

The list of grievances of villagers towards the government on the grounds of neglect is long. In addition to the examples already given, Dolpo-pa spoke about promises made by the National Park governing organization (whose activities will be further discussed in a later section) to share their revenues from the $35 US Dollar park entrance fee. In fashion, Dho Tarap has seen none of that money.\(^\text{19}\) The activities of the organization, called the Shey Phoksundo Buffer Zone Management Committee (SPBZMC), has continued nonetheless in the name of conservation, including making villagers purchase permits that allow them to cut wood and to pick the almost-too-important \textit{yartsa gunbu}. A Dolpo-pa coordinator of Vision Dolpo, the Nepali subsidiary to Action Dolpo, stated simply how villagers feel about the government. “They don't care about us”, he said.

Some villagers took this question about government presence and services, and challenged its premise. A village from Dho, age 46, said that he never thinks about the government of Nepal, and as far as he is concerned, he himself is not a subject of the Nepali government. While most villagers did not go that far, this comment illuminates that the society in which they live has been relatively self-governing for most of its history and despite the legislative and centralizing encroachments of the Nepali national government, still appears to those within to be self-governing. When considering the many given examples of government neglect, this is an understandable narrative. In “\textit{yartsa gunbu: regulation, conflict, and sovereignty}”, this paper explores how villager constructions of local sovereignty has come in conflict with national forces that have violently denied this notion of self-sovereignty or self-determination.

\(^\text{18}\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^\text{19}\) \textit{Ibid.}
These anecdotes of governmental failures, shortcomings, and overall dismissal of Dolpo-pa might question the truthfulness of this paper's claim that the Nepali state in recent years is exerting more authority in Dho Tarap. However, when pressed on specific examples, Dolpo-pa in Dho Tarap identified and commented on ways in which they do interact with the government. However, the responses of villagers even in these cases were largely cynical. Accordingly, these nodes of interaction deserve further scrutiny.

**A Vote for You: Political Clientelism in Dho Tarap**

Casting votes in district-wide elections for legislative representatives is one of the ways villagers consistently identified interacting with the government on a semi-regular basis. Voting is a primary way in which citizens in any kind of representative system theoretically have a voice in the activities and priorities of the governing body, making that body by extension an arm of the people. In reality, representative systems are always messy and have a tendency to exclude and dilute public opinion, especially on country-wide scale. This is certainly true in Nepal. The most recent Nepali legislative elections were held in 2013 for a second Constituent Assembly (CA), after the first CA spent many years failing to draft a new constitution for a nation. The CA, which has since drafted a controversial constitution that has sparked protest in the Terai region of southern Nepal, was tasked with reconciling two sides of a bloody civil war and the competing demands of many ethnic groups. The 2013 Constituent Assembly, often referred to as the “parliament” is composed of 601 members from every district and is the legislative arm of the Nepali government.

With one sole exception, every Dolpo-pa who was interviewed reported that they had voted in the 2013 elections.21 Even those who most adamantly declared that the Nepali government did not do anything to help improve their lives and livelihoods, all voted. As has been discussed, Dolpo-pa overwhelmingly are disenchanted and dismissive of the role of the government in Dho Tarap. But yet they turn out in frankly astounding numbers to cast a vote when they also know they are unlikely to see any kind of benefit from doing so. When asked why they voted at all or why they voted the way that they did, Dolpo-pa gave fascinating answers about their choices.22

In four separate interviews, respondents said that they voted the way they did because of the help they personally received from the representative of the party. However, in these accounts aid did not take the form of subsidies, public services, protection, or other governmental, public-sector tasks. Rather, people in Dho Tarap were helped by candidates and their associates to perform tasks such as arranging flights in and out of Dolpa (which the author knows from experience to

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21 Sousa, *Personal Interviews.*

22 Participants were *not* asked for which party they voted.
be a major hassle and dependent on your contacts), and helping to get citizenship cards for family members. Other Dolpo-pa recounted how groups of young men from Lower Dolpa, who were ostensibly representatives of the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist – Leninist (CPN-UML), came to Dho Tarap and to the other villages of Upper Dolpa to try and convince villagers to vote for their party. They used tactics such as “putting Buddhist texts on [Dolpo-pa's] heads” and making them promise to vote.\(^{23}\) Making promises, especially with a Buddhist text on their heads is not something that Dolpo-pa take lightly and many did indeed vote for this reason.\(^{24}\) Additionally, many villagers who said that they had voted also said that they did not know why they voted for whom they did. Many cited not only societal pressure to vote in general, but specifically there was societal pressure to vote for “the sun party” (As it turns out, the logo for the CPN-UML is a shining sun, and this is a way for many elder Dolpo-pa who cannot not read Nepali to identify the party when casting a vote).\(^{25}\) One man from Dho, age 46, said that he voted the way he did because “the whole village wanted to vote for the one party”. While citizens should be afforded the ability to vote regardless of prerogative or political savvy, Dolpo-pa seemed to vote because everybody else was, and because of the promises that they had made to a political party that relentlessly recruited their votes.

When it is not necessary for a political party to deliver services, envision change, or follow through on commitments to become elected, voters are no longer *constituents* of that party. Rather, voters become *clients* of an industry that is designed to sustain itself, its power, and the pocketbooks of its leaders. This kind of relationship is only possibly in situations in which is a clear power imbalance between the government entity and its clients.\(^{26}\) In the case of Dho Tarap, political parties that employ clientelistic practices take advantage of the new proximity to the Nepali state that Dolpo-pa find themselves, illiteracy among the elder population and are able to use force without repercussion. In this way, disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the government does not necessarily also include disenfranchisement, although it is debatable whether voters-as-clients truly are “enfranchised”. Regardless, mass voting for an established party in a society where governmental encroachment is seen as nonexistent can perhaps be best explained as a system designed to exploit the politically peripheral in a context of increasing connectivity to the center in Kathmandu and Dunai. Voting practices indicate that because political organization and political awareness on a national scale within Dho Tarap is limited by virtue of the novelty of party-centered state government, political parties are able to extract votes and further marginalize Dolpo-pa. In the words of Gregory Pierce, state-centralization and

\(^{23}\) Sousa, *Personal Interviews*.

\(^{24}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{25}\) *Ibid*.

top-down development schemes push Dolpo-pa into a “system with which they have neither experience nor proficiency”.  

This is not meant to portray Dolpo-pa as passive non-agents who are being acted upon by outside forces. An analysis of voting behavior in Dho Tarap illuminates the methods of response that real people take when outside forces come knocking. Indeed, some Dolpo-pa report being actively engaged in the voting process and informed about parties and candidates. A number of villagers said that they voted with their own interests in mind and with the belief that the party for which they voted would bring development and positive change to Dho Tarap. Perhaps this is a profoundly hopeful view, that even though the government is now nowhere to be found in Tarap, by actively participating in Nepali politics they could change the future for the better and bring attention to the needs of Dolpo-pa.

**Roadbuilding in Tarap: Project or Pipe Dream?**

On the lower circuit hiking trail from Dunai to Dho Tarap, which follows the Thuli Bheri river and then cuts up the Tarap valley, a road is being built. While the exact plans for the road are unclear, construction follows the already existing small foot trail designed for humans, mules, sheep, and yak. Along the side of the trail there are strewn metal rock braces, that either lie unused in the dust or are placed into formation as a loose skeleton of a future road. Two women from the village of Khani in Lower Dolpo and run a small trailside hotel say that there is a group of workers who come for 2-3 months out of the year to work on the road. The workers bring hand tools with them and camp along the river valley, working to widen the trail small sections at a time. Inbetween the villages of Tarakot and Bysagar, passerbys in mid-April could see a large contingent of (mostly) men hard at work attempting to finish a section of road. While work is being done, but the road to Dho Tarap is far from complete.

The most optimistic projection about when the road will be complete came from a road surveyor from Kathmandu who was spending time in Dunai at the time of the interview. His guess: one year for the entire 50 kilometer stretch. Villagers in Dho Tarap were nowhere near as optimistic. Some would throw out answers such as 5 years, or ten years but there was no confidence. A number of villagers said that it was simply impossible. When one elder woman from Tokyu was asked, she simply laughed and through a translator said, “just look”.

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She had a point. The geography of the valley seriously complicates any attempt at road building. At some points, the riverside is flat and earthy and the dirt path is already wide enough for two jeeps to pass. But the majority of the trail is small, narrow and rocky as the valley walls become steeper. In these sizable sections even foot traffic is daunting. It is almost laughable to think of a group of people with hand tools and water coming in and making a road.\textsuperscript{28} To really make a road, anyone who has traveled up and down the valley will attest that it take many years, lots of explosives, and heavy machinery.

\textit{A road to nowhere: road construction along a cliff near Laisicap, Dolpa, Nepal}

\textit{Photo: Author}
There is another road in construction. This road heads north from Dho Tarap towards the Tinkyu valley and all the way to the border of China. Because of proximity to China, many of the packaged goods are Chinese in origin rather than Nepali or Indian. As a traveler moves north up the valley from lower Dolpa to Dho Tarap, the abundance of Chinese goods increases at each of the small, tent hotels along the way. If complete, the road would make trade with China and the acquisition of Chinese goods far easier and much less expensive. Work is also being done on the northern road, but according to villagers this other road was supposed to be finished as of last year. As a whole, Dolpo-pa villagers want both of these proposed roads to be completed very much. They would make it much easier to go back and forth from either Lower Dolpa or China, would drop prices of goods, and according to everyone who was asked, would generally improve the lives of people in Dho Tarap.

The roads are perfect examples of the forms of influence that the Nepali government has in the Tarap valley and of the way that state-building both manifests itself and is experienced. While there is being work done, the outcome of said work seems to matter very little. Delivering services such as a road to a place like Dho Tarap is something that the Nepali government can do in name only. According to an educated Dolpo-pa who is a teacher at the Crystal Mountain School, the parliamentary representative from Dolpa is the individual who owns the government contract for constructing the road to Dunai from Dho Tarap. According to the source, contractors in Dolpa are only interested in getting the contract itself. Actually completing the project (road) is of little importance, meaning that contractors actually profit off of delays and inefficiencies. In an interview, one Dho villager, age 58, said that all of the government contracts are “eaten” by contractors. These testimonies, compounded by the slow progress on a seemingly impossible road and broken promises on the other, seem to paint road building as a money-making endeavor under the guise of development in a remote region. These claims could not be verified and will not be presented as fact, but regardless there is a deal of suspicion surrounding the motive of Nepali road-builders in Dolpa. In this way the framing of expansion of state control in the Tarap valley is be viewed as a transient, non-committal and corrupt method of pseudo-governance.

A Note on Modernity and Change

Dho Tarap is a place in flux, and a place that is becoming increasingly connected to greater Nepal. As is recently documented by Lin Zhu, the people of Tarap are being challenged by external forces (including new connections to the government) and the result is a “shaping and reshaping of the Dolpo identity” Even as a difficult to reach peripheral region within the Nepali

29 Sousa, *Personal Interviews.*
state, Dho Tarap is caught within a shifting global system of trade, exchange, communication, and social change. While development from outside state and non-state actors in Dho is inescapable (nor would Dolpo-pa want to escape development), Ken Bauer argues that Dolpo-pa actively “engage development and negotiate circumstances to their own benefit” by navigating development programs and benefitting from them while attempting to retain cultural autonomy.32

Thanks to the operation of Action Dolpo, whose impact in the valley will be elaborated on (see: Action Dolpo: NGO Governance in Dho Tarap), a new generation of young Dolpo-pa are sent to Kathmandu to study after grade seven. Not only are these children becoming formally educated, but they also have connections with people and places that are outside of Dolpa. Furthermore, there is a trend among younger and better-off Dolpo-pa to leave Dho Tarap during the in hospitable winter months and migrate seasonally to Kathmandu.33 While migration is not in itself a major change given the transitory nature of Dolpo-pa pastoral life, this move to Kathmandu is a clear indication of closer economic and social ties to the rest of Nepal and centers of governmental authority beyond Dho Tarap.

Satellite phone receiver and solar panels in Dho Tarap

Photo: Author

Modernity is touching Tarap itself. Most villagers have cell phones (although the local cell phone tower of the Hello! telecommunication company is only sporadically operational). Some of the wealthier households and the school have satellite TV dishes. All over the valley there are

32 Bauer, High Frontiers, 134.
33 Sousa, Personal Interviews.
small portable solar panels that power small devices and light-bulbs. Motorbikes imported from China are fairly common on the wide paths between the villages of Dho and Tokyu. These items of modernity have not fundamentally altered life in Dho Tarap, but they are signs of a society that is “acquiescing” to western-centric forms of development.\textsuperscript{34}

Perhaps the largest driver of change and modernity in the Tarap valley is the new \textit{yartsa gunbu} industry. \textit{Yartsa gunbu} is a Tibetan word that literally translates to “summer grass, winter insect”. \textit{Yartsa} is a subterranean caterpillar that during the summer, creates a fungus above ground that mummifies and solidifies. The fungus is highly valuable in Chinese traditional medicine. It has numerous purported medicinal qualities, but in popular lore and recent publications, it is most memorably used as an aphrodisiac.\textsuperscript{35} Since the 1990s, \textit{Yartsa} demand in China has skyrocketed. According to a CNN report, from 1997 to 2008 the value of the caterpillar fungus increased by 900%. Dramatic increase in price has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in picking in Dolpa. The picking season, which only lasts for about two months in mid-summer is a massive endeavor and increasingly vital in Dho Tarap. In a recent study, out of more than 40 inhabitants of Dho Tarap, every one reported that they pick \textit{yartsa}.\textsuperscript{36} The fungus is so lucrative that during the picking season, thousands of migrant Nepali workers come to the mountainous hillsides of Dolpa where the fungus is found to pick, causing widespread consternation among locals. The consequences of the \textit{yartsa gunbu} industry in Dho Tarap in terms of governmental relations will be addressed in the next section, but it is important to underline the significance of the industry and the radical change that \textit{yartsa gunbu} has caused in Dolpa. \textit{Yartsa} has thrust Dolpo-pa into new social and economic relations with each other and with people from outside the Tarap valley, it has created a (sometimes) vicious seasonal cycle of boom-and bust, and has brought unprecedented amounts of cash and capital to the region as well.\textsuperscript{37} With \textit{yartsa gunbu}, Dolpo-pa are increasingly dependent on and connected to outside forces: foreign and domestic market prices, migrant workers, and government oversight.\textsuperscript{38} Modernity in Tarap not only implies new and profound interactions with new people, markets, technologies but also newfound connections with a modern government.

\textsuperscript{34} Pierce, “The Vitality of Ice and Bone”.
\textsuperscript{35} Knight, Kyle. “‘Himalayan Viagra’ taking its toll on Nepal”. CNN (8 July 2012).
\textsuperscript{37} Sousa, \textit{Personal Interviews}.
Yartsa Gunbu: Regulation, Conflict, and Sovereignty
Forecasting New Dolpo-pa Relationships with the Nepali State

_Yartsa gunbu_ as a cash crop that continues (despite recent free-falls in price and concerns over harvesting sustainability) to bring money, power, and people into the Dolpa District has garnered the attention of government officials. The primacy of fungus picking in Upper Dolpa is likely to continue to place Dolpo-pa in Tarap closer to the administrative control and oversight of the Nepali state. A violent conflict between police and Dolpo-pa in Dho highlights the contentious, but also increasingly close relationship between Dolpo-pa and the government.

The SPBZMC is a governmental group, formed in 1996, that has authority over the “buffer” regions that surround Shey Phokundo National Park. The park lies directly to the west of the Tarap valley, a two day trek over two 15,000 foot mountain passes. Dho Tarap falls within the authority of the SPBZMC as a part of the Buffer Zone, as do all nine of the Upper Dolpa VDCs. According to Narayan Prasad Bhusal of Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, the establishment of Buffer Zone committees as extensions of the National Park system was intended to heighten public participation in conservation measures. In return for a portion of the profits from the $35 US dollar entrance fee, people who live within the Phokundo Buffer Zone are expected to “participate and assist in park management activities”. As a conservation organization, the SPBZMC is concerned with land use, forestry, husbandry, all of which are very sensitive and vitally important aspects of Dolpo-pa life. As a highly valuable natural resource that exists in the high mountain commons, the SPBZMC also acts as the regulatory organization for _yartsa gunbu_ picking in Upper Dolpa. The Committee collects a seasonal fee for anyone who picks _yartsa_. As of 2013 when the fee was raised considerably, Dolpo-pa from the Tarap valley pay 500 Nepali Rupees (NPR), people from Dolpo but outside of the valley pay 1500 NPR, and everyone else pays 3,000 NPR. Clearly the National Park and the Buffer Zone Committee is interested in controlling and monitoring _yartsa_ to raise revenue and create a semblance of conservation in the mad midst of natural resource extraction.

The citizens of Dho Tarap for whom _yartsa_ has been a blessing, also feel cursed by the flood of outsiders coming to the valley. Massive amounts of seasonal _yartsa_ pickers operating in the valley has caused all sorts of social and environmental harm in the form of increasing crime, trampled grasslands, and disappearing shrubbery for firewood. Dolpo-pa pastoral life relies on the availability of grass in the commons for their yaks. Grasslands, disappearing under the boots

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41 Sousa, _Personal Interviews_.


of migrant yartsa pickers, constitutes a major threat to Dolpo-pa pastoral traditions. Furthermore, Dolpo-pa are noticing that the annual yartsa yield in their favorite picking spots is diminishing year by year, likely as a result of overharvesting. A 2013 analysis by Shrestha and Bawa finds that yartsa in the Nepali Himalaya are being harvested at “unsustainable” volumes. Villagers tell tall tales of the abundance of many years before and how difficult it is now to find the precious bugs. In response, the citizens of Dho Tarap began to levy their own fee. Beginning in 2008, outsiders who came to the Tarap valley to pick yartsa were charged to pick on their communal lands. The fee was also increased in 2013 and amounted to 3,000 NRP for migrant workers on top of the SPBZMC fee.

On June 4th, 2014, thirty five police officers and a handful of officials from the SPBZMC came to the valley objecting to the fee raised by villagers and demanding repayment. The group proceeded to confiscate all of the money that had been raised, amounting to over 7,000 US Dollars. A gathering of Dolpo-pa attempted to appeal the confiscation, but were blocked from doing so by police personnel, who attacked the group attempting to reach SPBZMC officials. This paper will not go into details of the conflict, but from all accounts it was bloody and brutal. Two Dolpo-pa were killed by police and dozens more badly beaten. In the aftermath of initial conflict, police forces raided homes, vandalized property, and attacked more people. The scars of the conflict are still very visceral in Dho and Tokyu as threats have continued and nothing has really been done to address the damage. “Justice and compensation appear distant illusions”, writes Dho native and personal friend Phurwa Dhondup in a recent paper. Since the incident, an investigation by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has been launched into the police regarding suspected human rights violations, but nothing has come of it.

The conflict has important implications for people-government relationships within the Tarap valley. As a violent, repressive act of a government of its citizens, it has strained relationships and had garnered much outrage as a governmental abuse of power and repression mostly within the Dolpo-pa population in and outside of Dolpa. However, most Dolpo-pa did not immediately discuss the yartsa conflict when asked about “the government” and generally cited a lack of police presence (the April 2016 robbery, for example) rather than an ultra-present, repressive state.

42 Stone, “The Himalayan Gold Rush”, 16-18/
45 Dhondup, “Yartsagunbu breeds violence in Dolpo, Nepal”.
46 Ibid.
In the context of the expansion of state power over the peripheral regions, this conflict can be understood as a conflict over self-determination. One 27-year old villager from Tokyu who has been involved in talks and renewed relations with the government post-conflict, said that the reason for the conflict was simple. The establishment of the yartsa fee amounted to the villagers establishing their right to control access to the space in which they live. But from a governance standpoint, local populations in a greater nation cannot restrict access to public land or raise their own fees unilaterally. In the end, the SPBZMC/Nepali government challenged the right of Dolpo-pa to self-govern. While the Dolpo-pa response was immediately confrontational (one young man from Tokyu reported that some of the young men wanted to burn their Nepali citizenship cards), locals have become increasingly aware of the power and presence of the Nepali state. Because of the conflict, the same Tokyu villager said that people had “learned our lesson” and now generally understood that they cannot raise fees by themselves on outsiders/ Villagers generally said that they should be able to collect a fee on these observed invaders, but now it is clear that they cannot.

The Dolpo-pa response to the conflict was in the end much more moderate than confrontation via acts such as burning citizenship cards. Villagers, while rightfully infuriated, chose to work within the established system in Dunai by creating relationships with administrators rather than by trying to reject state control and authority entirely. A group of villagers (all men, common for power structures in Dolpa) formed a group whose name roughly translated to “The New Pilgrims” to repair relationships with the SPBZMC. The purpose of the group is to both "protect the environment and form better relationships with the government" by sending delegations to Dunai many times a year to discuss conservation issues and to do the work of fully participating in Buffer Zone activities, per the expectations of the SPBZMC. A sub-goal, according to one of its members, is to participate and in the process keep government scrutiny off of Dho Tarap regarding how they deal with migrant yartsa pickers in Tarap in the future.

Despite falling prices and worries about extinction, the yartsa craze is certainly not over and continues to reshape Dolpo-pa economic and social relations to themselves and to the world outside the Tarap valley. With the presence of a highly valued commodity, the Nepali government will in the future continue to play a role in regulating yartsa. As of June 2014, a piece of legislation from the Department of Plant Resources that would involve “regulating trade to increase government revenue, investing in scientific research, strengthening local institutions

47 Sousa, Personal Interviews.
and raising awareness among the locals” in Dolpa was being discussed and pending approval.\(^4^8\)
As long as *yartsa* is still picked in the Tarap valley, the government will be interested.

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**Action Dolpo: NGO Governance**

This paper so far has painted a very bleak picture of conditions in Dho Tarap related to traditionally governmentally-available services such as education and health care. As a periphery area in the state of Nepal, there is little interest in investment and in extensive services in Dho Tarap despite centralizing moves by the Nepali state. The next section of the paper considers the activity of a foreign NGO in the Tarap valley. It argues that while Action Dolpo is widely considered among Dolpo-pas to be a non-state government because of the services that it provides, those services are likely to push Dolpo-pa into closer proximity with the Nepali state which Action Dolpo, for a time, supplants.

Action Dolpo is an incredibly important NGO and institution within the Tarap valley. It was founded by Marie-Claire Gentric, who came across the Tarap valley while trekking in the Himalaya in 1992. By 1994, Action Dolpo had been founded and the Crystal Mountain School was operational and educating its first wave of children.\(^4^9\) The two main functions of Action Dolpo are to support and manage the schooling for all of the children of Dho Tarap, and to run a vital health post in a region where the nearest medical care is many days of walking away. There are three distinct Action Dolpo programs: Crystal Mountain School (CMS), The Snow Leopard Residence (SLR), and the Health Post.

The operation of the village health post is an essential function of Action Dolpo in the Tarap valley. The health post itself was (as discussed) built as a government-run health post but was abandoned and now used by Action Dolpo staff. One villager who has some medical knowledge is employed by Action Dolpo to administer medicine to people in need. Medicine and medical help is always free. In stark contrast to the health services offered by the government, the post is staffed year-round. One 49-year old woman from Dho expressed her gratitude for the availability and generosity of the Action Dolpo health post. She reported that she had gone many times to treat joint pains in her leg and other minor illnesses. The health post is like a “prayer being answered” she said.

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The Crystal Mountain School is a large primary school located directly in between the villages of Dho and Tokyu. Children from both villages, more than 200 of them, attend the school which is about an hour walk both ways. Dolpo-pa children attend CMS from class 1 to class 7. From class 4 to 7, children are required to live in the boarding house that is situated directly next to the school house. According to a math teacher, age 25, who the author lived with in Tokyu, this is a way of making sure that the students can come to school and are not forced to work on the fields or to help out at home by their parents. This constitutes a remarkable prioritization of education over pastoral traditions and home life. While at CMS, students take a variety of classes including Tibetan language, math/science, and English.

The Crystal Mountain School
Photo: Author

The Snow Leopard Residence represents the extension of Dolpo-pa education beyond class seven. CMS students take entrance exams to a variety of Kathmandu secondary schools and if they are permitted entrance, they come to Kathmandu for six more years of education. SLR is a large building near Boudha on the outskirts of Kathmandu and houses all Dolpo-pa students from Dho and Tokyu studying in Dho. At SLR, students receive meals, company of other Dolpo-pas in Kathmandu, housing, and the support of SLR staff.
These are not the only services or projects that Action Dolpo undertakes in Dho Tarap, but they are the largest ventures. Another very important project is the construction of household greenhouses. These greenhouses, constructed with rock walls and a plastic-like insulating sheet as the ceiling, allow Dolpo-pa to grow vegetables in the summer and fall months that otherwise could not be grown in the tough Tarap soil such as spinach, cauliflower, and sometimes even tomatoes. The greenhouses also serve as a warm place to relax, eat, meet, and interview as people would gather and spend a lot of time inside the greenhouses. On cold days especially in winter, the only reliably warm place is inside of the greenhouse.

Interviewing inside a greenhouse  
*Photo: Author*

Not only has Action Dolpo set up these projects, but more importantly the NGO pays for the everything, most notably every step of Dolpo-pa students' education. CMS is technically a government school, but it is funded almost entirely through Action Dolpo. One of the
coordinators of Vision Dolpo in Kathmandu reported that the NGO covers 90% of the operating budget of CMS. After leaving CMS, Action Dolpo pays for the living expenses, tuition, and even travel to and from Dolpa for SLR students. It is a remarkable organization. The Vision Dolpo coordinator also said that without the money and help from Action Dolpo, families would not be able to afford to send their children to school, regardless of motive or desire. Because of all of the services rendered, it is little surprise that in interviews, Tarap villagers have an overwhelmingly positive view of Action Dolpo. Not one villager criticized Action Dolpo or had anything bad to say about the organization.\textsuperscript{50}

Furthermore, Dolpo-pa in Tarap think of Action Dolpo as being “like the government” for them.\textsuperscript{51} Being involved, supporting, and governing Dho Tarap is, according to an amchi, 58, “the government's job, but Action Dolpo is doing it”. Action Dolpo operated within the context of a vacuum of governmental services and attention in the valley, and likely would have a much smaller role to play in Dho Tarap had the government truly followed through on delivering education, healthcare, transportation, and all of the things that governments do and the Nepali government has promised to do. So as a beneficiary of Dolpo-pas that allows for relative self-determination, the status of Action Dolpo within the Dolpo-pa mindset as a non-state governing body complicates the position of the Nepali government and likely creates a standard that a fledgling democracy cannot hope to live up to.

One of the teachers at CMS in an interview said that recently Action Dolpo has pulled back some of its funding as a way of trying to make Dolpo-pa more self-reliant and as a development NGO, the goal is ideally for Action Dolpo to no longer be needed in the valley. But the alternative is the Nepali government. Villagers opined that because the government’s non-presence in Tarap, “Action Dolpo is all that we have”. Put another way, the reason that Action Dolpo is able to do all that it does that leads people to view it as a de-facto government is that the government itself does very little within the valley.

Importantly, Action Dolpo's programs in Dho Tarap also potentially spell the end of its importance. The two educational programs, CMS and SLR, also ensure that students have proficiency in both English and Nepali – the language of the Nepali state. In \textit{The Art of Not Being Governed}, James Scott describes a number of mechanisms by which people who belong to the state-evading region of Zomia seek to escape from the state control and state-building schemes. Refusing to become literate as a population is one of the more fascinating state-evading mechanisms that Scott describes. The theory is that reading and writing is a way that governments can raise taxes, collect information and incorporate new citizens into the sphere of

\textsuperscript{50} Sousa, \textit{Personal Interviews.}

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}
administrative control and Scott argues that because of this many civilizations in Southeast Asia have foregone literacy as an ideal. The idea of state-building or as Scott would have it, “appropriation” by literacy is an important idea. The people of Dho Tarap have embraced literacy and education instead of evading it as a way totally separate from the Nepali state. However, this does not mean that education and literacy does not coincide and allow for state intrusion. Indeed, NGO sponsored education in Dho Tarap is reshaping local relationships with the government.

When asked about possible forces that could make the Nepali government stronger in the valley in the future, in three separate interviews people identified education as as a point of connection. In language and experiences, widespread education among the young people of the Tarap valley is dramatically changing the way that people interact with the outside world and with the government as well. The more literate and educated that people become, they also become more state-literate. Dolpo-pa who live in Kathmandu for a time are not only learning the languages of the state but they also learn how the government functions and are able to position themselves and their home village within it. Importantly, these experiences are not limited to the individual or restricted spatially to the smoggy Kathmandu valley. Instead, as Dolpo-pa move back and forth from Kathmandu to Dolpa again and again, they bring back to their homes among other things newfound understandings of the workings of the Nepali government.52

The structure of Action Dolpo provides a remarkable way in which the people of Dho Tarap receive aid from abroad and are given the autonomy to manage and oversee the aid themselves. International (mainly French) members of Action Dolpo pay dues every year to support the NGO. Action Dolpo is the parent organization to the registered Nepali NGO that calls itself Vision Dolpo. Vision Dolpo, as a subsidiary of Action Dolpo, receives all of its funding directly from Action Dolpo. But the members, organizers, and coordinators of Vision Dolpo are all Dolpo-pa from the Tarap valley. Vision Dolpo, then, is able to take foreign funds and use them towards improving people's lives with local knowledge about how to do so. Although Action Dolpo is a foreign NGO, it is highly successful of being a participatory organization that makes decisions using local perspectives and perhaps most importantly, a legitimate interest in the welfare of Dolpo-pa.

Action Dolpo will likely continue to play a key role in the life of Dolpo-pas for some time, as long as they continue to support the education of Dolpo-pas. However, the reason that Action Dolpo can be the entity that it is in Tarap is tied to the hands-off approach of the Nepali government towards the region that creates a space for a well-meaning and well-funded project to fill. As Action Dolpo-funded education in Dho Tarap continues, what will be the role of

52 Sousa, Personal Interviews.
Action Dolpo in the future? While the exact answer is unknown and will not be known, the non-state governance of Dho Tarap ironically seems to be paving the way toward greater state governance, potentially edging out the space or vacuum where Action Dolpo formerly operated.

**Conclusion**

Dho Tarap is being caught in a wave of modernization. There is an entirely new generation of young, educated people with a global worldview. The prized caterpillar fungus is reshaping Dolpo-pa economic relations and bringing new markets, products, and unprecedented wealth as well as increasing numbers of trans-local fortune seekers. Villagers can communicate with friends and family who now live outside of the valley, and modern technologies are becoming commonplace. This paper has argued that modernity in Tarap also leaves space for the government to exert more power and to be increasingly connected to the people of Dho Tarap. The tentacles of government authority in the Tarap valley has caught Dolpo-pa in a paradox. Exertions of state power in the valley are usually manifested as self-interested and half-hearted attempts to govern or transparently exploitative. In health care, education, domestic protection, and local representation, Dolpo-pa feel a general absence of state power in the forms of services and are highly cynical about the activity of the state. Hopelessness and dissatisfaction at neglect creates discontent when the state exerts itself to establish its sovereignty and attempt to regulate the lives, properties, and historic self-determination of Dolpo-pa.

In *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Scott portrays state power and centralization as a monolithic process that constantly exerts power and that seeks, constantly and unrelentingly, greater control over its peripheries. This paper suggests that the ways in which state power is exerted in physically isolated, mountainous region is dependent on the strength and motives of individual state actors. The book shows a constantly evolving relationship between the government and the people who are becoming appropriated by the government. Scott argues that the people of zomia recoil, socially, economically, and physically from the state. While Dolpo-pa are by no means zomian (in fact many would love more state-led projects, development, and cash in the valley), this does not mean that Dolpo-pa are passive agents in the statebuilding process. Rather, Dolpo-pa confront the advances of the state and own those advances with agility. be it the takeover of a governmental health post with the help of Action Dolpo, or resisting state-sponsored attempts at diminishing the ability of villagers to use land as they see fit.
Methodology and Limitations

This paper was informed by 35 interviews that I conducted from 1 April to 18 April 2016 with people who are from or currently residing in the District of Dolpa (see Appendix A). Participants ranged in age from 18-62 and averaged 41 years old. Participants included 12 women and 23 men. I conducted interviews in both one-on-one and in group settings. I made every effort at interviewing as many women as possible, but their voices were too often lost in group settings as a result of gender dynamics. Interviews were commonly conducted around wood stoves in people’s homes, in the the fields during breaks as they worked, at the schoolhouse, mostly over cups of Tibetan butter tea. I employed an informal interview technique and the interviews varied depending on circumstances and individuals. However, there were questions that I asked every participant.

I found my questions evolving as I learned more about both my topic and the place more generally. If I was to do this study again I would have formalized a list of interview questions before-hand for consistency. I would also have taken more time with a translator in the District Headquarters of Dunai to attempt to interview administrators and government officials stationed in the town. I think that this would have greatly benefited the final product and well supplemented my research. Formalizing interviews and emphasizing one-on-one conversations would perhaps have also made the study more inclusive to women.

The subject matter is sensitive and could constitute potential for harm to participants. To ensure anonymity of participants, I did not include names in the study. Furthermore, I made every attempt to conceal identities by only using common qualifiers (i.e. age and place of origin). Participants involved did so willingly and I made sure to ascertain consent prior to administering interviews. In the interest of mutual understanding and full disclosure with participants, I always encouraged participants to ask questions of me, and many curious participants took me up on this opportunity.
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Appendix A

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Appendix B
Tibetan and Dolpo-pa Terms

amchi  Tibetan traditional doctor
chorten  A buddhist monument
dolpo-pa  A culturally Tibetan person from Upper Dolpa
yartsa gunbu  A caterpillar that produces a fungus valuable in Chinese medicine

Appendix C
Acronyms Used

CMS:  Crystal mountain School
NHRC:  National Human Rights Commission
NPR:  Nepali Rupee. 100 NPR = approximately 1 US Dollar
SLR:  Snow Leopard Residence
SPBZMC:  Shey Phoksundo Buffer Zone Management Committee
Suggestions for Further Research

Past SIT Independent Study Projects in Dolpa have remarked upon the hotbed of interesting research that Dolpa presents and I completely concur. As Dolpa becomes more like neighboring Mustang, with roads, four story hotels, yakdonalds™, tourists, and t-shirts, which I predict it will, there will be a whole host of interesting changes in economy, agriculture, governance, transportation, regional power, you name it. Specifically, I think that an ISP specifically focused on the timber industry in Lower Dolpa, the dynamics of timber trade to barren Upper Dolpa, and rapid deforestation would be a fascinating opportunity. It would touch on trade, regulations, social exclusion and hierarchies, and environmental degradation and there would be a plethora of research opportunities all the way from Dunai to Dho Tarap.

Directly related to my research, I think that a closer examination of the activities of the Shey Phoksundo Buffer Zone Management Committee’s activities in Dolpa is warranted. The study could expand to touch on governance of people within a National Park, buffer zone regulation, tourism, and local benefit-sharing.

Any kind of project could be done and done well in Dolpa. People are friendly and more than willing to help students. I would highly encourage SIT students to go to Dolpa for their ISPs, but would encourage them to do so with a positive attitude and an understanding that nothing is guaranteed in Dolpa. More practically, Dolpa is about the worst place I can imagine to get sick, and I would highly advise students bring anti-diarrheals, at least one round of antibiotics, and one can never have enough medical tape. Another piece of advice: having the help and company of a local or an insider was absolutely essential to the success of my project and any other project that I can imagine in Dolpa.
The author and friends at the Crystal Mountain School
Photo: Alexa Adams