

An Exploration of Sherpas' Narratives of Living and Dying in Mountaineering

by

Maggie Miller

A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Recreation and Leisure Studies

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2017

© Maggie Miller 2017

Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner

Adam Keul

Assistant Professor
Department of Social Sciences
Plymouth State University

Supervisor

Heather L. Mair

Associate Professor
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Internal Members

Troy D. Glover

Professor, Department Chair
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Bryan S.R. Grimwood

Assistant Professor
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Internal-External Member

Shana MacDonald

Assistant Professor
Department of Drama & Speech Communication
University of Waterloo

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Mountaineering is the cornerstone of Nepal's \$370-million-a-year adventure tourism industry. Each year, Climbing Sherpas lead foreign mountaineers (paying clients) up the Southeast ridge of Mt. Everest as they make their bids for the summit. These Sherpas commit themselves to securing and saving the lives of their clients by doing much of the dangerous labour, often jeopardising their own lives in the process (Davis, 2014; National Public Radio [NPR], 2013; Peedom, 2015).

Social justice concerns arise as tensions grow between the international demand to climb and the risks and fatalities associated with summit attempts. Mountaineering is an extreme sport, historically reserved for highly skilled climbers. However, it is becoming increasingly blurred with our understandings of adventure tourism as a recreational activity open to anyone with the financial means to participate. Consequently, the industry is critiqued for the ways in which people with "means," regardless of experience, pursue mountains like Mt. Everest (Davis, 2014; Payne & Shrestha, 2014). Moreover, within current mountaineering, tourism, and leisure discourses perspectives from Sherpas have been limited.

Stemming from critiques of Nepal's growing adventure tourism industry, and recognising the centrality of Sherpas' roles within it, this research considers Climbing Sherpas' stories of living and dying in mountaineering within the Solukhumbu (commonly known as the Mt. Everest Region) of Nepal. This critical narrative inquiry has been shaped by philosophical and theoretical positions underpinned by existentialism, as well as Foucault's notions of power. Inspired by visual methodologies, this research draws upon fieldwork observations and thirteen audio and visually recorded interviews conducted in Nepal in the spring of 2015.

Analysis of narrative findings reveal an interplay of death, pride, responsibility, and power in experiences of freedom on the mountainside. Sherpas' participation in mountaineering expeditions is reflective of socioeconomic pressures faced off the mountain, but is also increasingly related to the perceived "name" and fame that comes with successful mountain summits. Additionally, Sherpas' stories of death provide a space to critique tourism development. Sherpas affected by disasters, death, and the like find themselves "betwixt and between" their life prior to the event and an uncertain sense of the future (Turner, 1960, p. 95). Liminality, an anthropological concept introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1960), becomes transformative as Sherpas and their communities use these moments of uncertainty to take stock of the purpose of their lives, often considering new trajectories. Accordingly, as Sherpas navigate their own experiences of death, power relations shift and they demonstrate individual freedom and collective agency through their responses to the pressures and demands of Nepal's commercial mountaineering industry. Rather than being seen as static and always vulnerable, Sherpas harness inherent systems and power, which at times is vital to sustaining their lives.

The Sherpas' stories presented in this work challenge assumptions of immobile host populations that underlie some of our current understandings in tourism and recreation disciplines, further disrupting oppositional binaries of East/West and us/them. Additionally, exploring death as it relates to power on the mountainside draws attention to critical concerns regarding tourism (and its associated industries) as a mechanism for economic development. As the research findings highlight, access to the means (both personal and societal) for development indeed help to shape one's power to choose to engage in risky industries and activities. Finally, this research illuminates the ways audio-visual technologies may be utilised to provide opportunities for Sherpas to represent themselves, their cultures, and experiences within

academic, as well as media, canons. As the Climbing Sherpas have a vital role to play with regard to the sustainable development of Nepal's mountaineering and adventure industries, the inclusion of their voices remains integral. Such methodological insights warrant deeper consideration of how we engage the voices of people in marginalised communities in other tourism, recreation, and leisure contexts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer a warm and heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported, and continues to support me, unconditionally in my academic pursuits. I could not have completed this doctoral thesis without each and every one of you.

First and foremost, to the Climbing Sherpas who opened their homes to me and shared their stories with me, I am much indebted to you and forever grateful. Despite being in Nepal for research, I believe that I met you for so many more reasons. Spending time with you has enriched my life in unexplainable ways. Thank you.

To Heather, I cannot thank you enough. You are such a remarkable scholar and an admirable supervisor. Learning from, and working with, you is something that I will always cherish. You were my guide. Your support was unwavering; you believed in this work even when storms clouded my own vision. You helped me build the confidence and strength to carry forward, to continue up the mountain.

To each of the committee members who have graciously agreed to be a part of this journey, Bryan, Troy, Shana, and Adam, thank you. Your insights and expertise are much appreciated and I look forward to engaging in fruitful conversations on May 1, 2017.

To Dr. Susan Arai, our time together led to some instrumental insights, which helped give shape to this research study. Thank you.

To Danielle, you were pivotal in the editorial processes of this dissertation; thank you for taking time to read it. More importantly, you unknowingly held me to submission deadlines that were integral to the completion of this document (so thanks for that)!

To my parents, through this process, a beautiful relationship blossomed. Thank you for your unconditional love. Mom, I appreciated opening my mailbox to find the “care cards,” each

of them containing a positive message and outlook. Also, Dad, your daily motivational quotes have continuously inspired me. Thank you for taking time each morning to send me a text message filled with words to live by: “Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” – Howard Thurman

Love and gratitude to my beautiful, large, and motivated family – Kimberly, Nicholas, Michael, and Molly – without you leading the way, I may never have shot for the moon. I love you all.

To my friends and colleagues near and far, thank you. It's almost hard to believe that four/five years came and went. My achievements would have never been possible without your constant encouragement and much needed social distractions.

And finally, to Teryl, words will always fall short when trying to express my gratitude for you and everything that you mean to me. Thank you for always understanding me, knowing exactly how to help me, even before I know how to help myself. Thank you for loving and supporting me unconditionally, staying up with me until 4:00am any given night before a big deadline. Without you, I would not be here today. I love you.

Dedication

In memory of Lhakpa Gyaljen Sherpa, who was physically paralysed by the mountaineering industry early in his career, and recently passed away after he lost his balance and fell from the hillside while collecting firewood.

And to all of the Climbing Sherpas who graciously shared their stories with me, thank you.

Table of Contents

Examining Committee Membership	ii
Author’s Declaration	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
List of Figures	xiii
Chapter One: A Pause	1
1.1 Outline of Dissertation Structure	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	9
Foreword – The Disappearing Shangri-La	9
2.1 Tourism as Development in Nepal	12
2.2 Compounding Ideological Influences on Nepali Tourism	14
2.2.1 Modernisation theory & economic growth	15
2.2.1 Neoliberal globalisation	17
2.3 Mountains and Mountaineering	20
2.3.1 Mountaineers as explorers	22
2.4 Commercialisation of Mountaineering	26
2.4.1 Adventure tourism	28
2.5 Risks and Commercialisation	30
2.5.1 Adventurous risk-taking	31
2.5.2 Sherpas as risk-takers?	34
2.5.3 Power & risk-taking	36
2.6 Death in Mountaineering and Tourism	38
2.6.1 Death & modernity	41
2.7 Engaging and Addressing Death	42
Chapter Three: Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings	45
3.1 Existentialism and Existential Consciousness	46
3.1.1 The ‘givens’	47
3.2 Michel Foucault and Power	53
3.2.1 Disciplinary power	56
3.3 Death as a Liminal Moment	58
3.3.1 Liminality	58
3.4 Freedom, Power, and Liminality	60
Chapter Four: Visualising a Critical Narrative Inquiry	62
4.1 Telling About and Knowing Of the World Narratively	62

4.2 A Sensorial-Narrative Approach	66
4.2.1 Visuals as part of sensorial experiences	69
4.3 Methods for Sensing, Embodying, and Storying Experiences	75
4.3.1 Mapping out my fieldwork	75
4.3.2 Emplaced learning through participation and observations	85
4.3.3 Understanding sensoriality through interview conversations	91
4.4 Analysis and Interpretation	96
4.4.1 Iterating active immersion	98
4.4.2 Visualising the complexities	100
4.4.3 Re-storying conversations	100
4.4.4 Reading and seeing across stories	102
4.5 Re-storying Sensorial Experiences on the Mountainside	105
4.5.1 A re-telling of lived stories	106
4.5.2 Visualising stories from the Solukhumbu	109
4.6 Sharing the Climbing Sherpas' Stories	110
Chapter Five: A Re-Telling of Lived Stories in Emplaced Conversations	113
<i>Prologue</i>	113
A Conversation with Mingma Sherpa on Sunday – March 15, 2015	114
A Conversation with Tashi Sherpa on Tuesday – March 24, 2015	120
A Conversation with Dorchi Sherpa on Saturday – March 28, 2015	127
A Conversation with Phuri Sherpa on Monday – March 30, 2015	133
A Conversation with (Pemba) Rinchen Sherpa on Friday – April 3, 2015	140
A Conversation with Kaji Sherpa on Friday – April 7, 2015	147
A Conversation with Da Gelje Sherpa on Wednesday – April 8, 2015	151
A Conversation with Lakpa Sherpa on Wednesday – April 8, 2015	160
A Conversation with Kami Sherpa on Friday – April 10, 2015	165
A Conversation with Lhakpa Dorji Sherpa on Sunday – April 12, 2015	171
A Conversation with Dawa Sherpa on Monday – April 13, 2015	179
A Conversation with Lhakpa Gyaljen Sherpa on Tuesday – April 14, 2015	186
A Conversation with Ang Phurba Sherpa on Friday – April 17, 2015	193
Chapter Six: Collective Stories of Living and Dying in the Mountains	202
Chapter Seven: A Discussion of the Collective Stories	203
7.1 Climbing to the Top: Narratives of Development, Conquest, and Pride	203
7.1.1 Life before climbing	204
7.1.2 Changing fortunes	207
7.1.3 More than porters	214
7.1.4 Good communication	219

7.1.5 Reaching the ‘top’ _____	221
7.2 Encountering ‘Death’: Narratives of Risk, Strength, and Fear _____	226
7.2.1 Risky business? _____	226
7.2.2 Risk-taking as projects of ‘self’ _____	231
7.2.3 Performing strengths _____	234
7.2.4 Fear and death anxiety _____	239
7.2.5 Boundary situations as point zero _____	244
7.3 Choosing to (Dis)continue: Navigations of Power, Death, and Freedom _____	247
7.3.1 The paying and the paid _____	248
7.3.2 Death as liminal moments _____	252
7.3.3 Life is important _____	256
7.3.4 Individual freedom and collective agency _____	258
7.3.5 Complex practices of freedom: Choosing to continue _____	261
Chapter Eight: A Re-thinking of (Continued) Development on the Mountainside _____	268
8.1 Research Contributions, Insights, and Implications _____	270
8.1.1 Theoretical contributions _____	270
8.1.2 Methodological contributions _____	273
8.2 Limitations and Future Research _____	276
8.3 Concluding Thoughts _____	282
References _____	285
Appendices _____	310
Appendix A: Letter of Recruitment _____	310
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form _____	314
Appendix C: Observation Guide _____	316
Appendix D: Interview Guide _____	317
Context Glossary _____	318
Places & Locations _____	318
Mountains & Mt. Everest _____	323
Mountaineering & Relevant Industry Terms _____	329
People & Relevant Organisations _____	332
Sherpa & Nepali Terms _____	335

List of Figures

Figure 1: Annual Deaths on Mt. Everest	52
Figure 2: Map of Nepal	320
Figure 3: Map of the Khumbu	323
Figure 4: Satellite image of the Himalayan Range	325
Figure 5: Topographic map of the Himalayas	325
Figure 6: Mt. Everest	327
Figure 7: Mt Everest commercial climbing route	328

Chapter One: A Pause

They [the foreign clients] leave me behind, and they run before, down. Then I am alone... I'm so tired and I get the ice in my goggle, the sweat. When I almost get to the last camp I couldn't see, then I fell down. I fell down from that. It's about 250, about nearly 300 [meters]. I fell down, like rolling down.

I don't know how long I was *dead*. I thought [it's] like a dream, like when I woke up I had no goggles. I had no ice axe... Then after that I get to [the camp at] [South Col](#) at 6:30pm. Then other members [clients], about three members in the South Col, they don't care me. They didn't know where I was...When I was there I am so cold; I no can walk that time. I tried to make a cup of ice and tried to make the water. I couldn't eat anything; I didn't drink the water. The whole night I couldn't sleep because I'm worried that I was dead. That time I'm not married. I'm single. Just my parents, but even I'm so scared. I said that time I don't want any more expeditions. I thought that time, no more.

Then when I came back...next year and came to [Camp II](#). I was in Camp II, and they pressured me [to join] another team for another summit. I said "NO!" Then they bring me to Basecamp and they talk a lot of questions. "Please go do another summit." And I said, "NO!"

– *Lhakpa Dorji* (Interview on April 2, 2015)

Alone in my room, in my temporary Nepali home, a dizzying sway consumed me. I assumed the bout of vertigo that I experienced yesterday in the mountains had returned. A rumbling sound as loud as a freight train accompanied the tremble, and the sensation persisted. One by one, books dropped from the shelf. I quickly realised the threatening sway was not only felt by me. "Dhōkā! Dhōkā!" the panicked voice from upstairs rang loud and clear, but what did it mean?! Hastily, my mind cycled through my limited Nepali vocabulary... *Door, it means door!*

As I gripped the word's English meaning, I began to process the direness of my situation. Yadunath and his mother burst into my room, and yanked me beneath the metal bedroom doorframe. My head suddenly flooded with conversations from two weeks prior: "It'll be huge. It's bound to flatten [Kathmandu](#), we don't have the right infrastructure. Who knows when? Scientists agree it's long overdue." Terrified the intense shaking would never end we stood huddled beneath the doorway. Embraced in a tight hug, we prayed, "please, please make this stop."

My research fieldwork was cut short. Privileged with freedoms, days after the quake I reluctantly left Nepal, well knowing that I did not have a skill set that could provide the much-needed aid on the ground.

– *Personal Journal Entry* (May 20, 2015)

Mountaineering is the cornerstone of Nepal's \$370-million-a-year adventure tourism industry (Schaffer, 2013). Each year, Sherpa¹ and Nepali climbers² lead paying clients up the Southeast ridge of [Mt. Everest](#) to attempt its summit. "Climbing Sherpas,"³ acting as high-altitude guides and porters, commit themselves to securing and saving the lives of their clients by doing much of the dangerous labour, often jeopardising their own lives in the process (Davis, 2014; NPR, 2013; Peedom, 2015). This is illustrated in Lhakpa Dorji Sherpa's story provided above, as he describes what he thought was a fall to his mortal end. High on the mountain, Lhakpa Dorji was stranded by his foreign clients – individuals whom he just led to the peak of Mt. Everest – so they could claim their summit success. Much of the mountaineering discourse suggests that Sherpas' willingness to proceed up the mountain, among dangerous and precarious environments, is reflective of socioeconomic pressures faced off the mountain (Bott, 2009; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Ortner, 1999; Peedom, 2015).

According to resiliency scholar, Simin Davoudi (2012), when "faced with adversities, we hardly ever return to where we were" (p. 302). Death, crisis, and rupture, the corollaries of disastrous adversities, provide opportunities for reflection on how life is being lived and could be lived differently (Jencson, 2001; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). The vignettes provided at the beginning of this chapter hint at the potency of knowing and experiencing death. Though

¹ Sherpa has multiple meanings within a mountain context. Originally, and more times than not, this word signifies a member belonging to an ethnic group of Tibetan descent in the Himalayas of Nepal (Ortner, 1999). However the category of "Sherpa" has undergone changes as these Sherpa natives have been recognised to be well suited for supporting commercialised climbing expeditions. Thus, "Sherpa" as an identifier was adopted to indicate individuals who assume a role and status as a specialised high-altitude porter (Ortner, 1999). I use the term Sherpa to signify the ethnic mountain population. Note: The use of "Sherpas" with an 's' is used to denote multiple Sherpa people vs. "Sherpa" which is descriptive and distinguishes belonging to the ethnicity/culture. Additionally, the majority of Sherpas take "Sherpa" as their surname (e.g., Pemba Sherpa).

² As the abovementioned footnote describes, "Sherpa" was adopted as an identifier for high-altitude mountain workers. At times this identifier can mask the varying Nepali-nationals that assume positions on the mountainside. This project takes interest in the stories of Sherpa natives, however, it should be noted that other Nepali populations (e.g., Rai, Tamang, etc.) do climb, although they are often misidentified by the term Sherpa.

³ Many Sherpas will identify their position on the mountain as "Climbing Sherpa" or simply "Sherpa." Though this can sometimes become confusing, both are used as identifiers to signify a high-altitude expedition guide in the Himalayas, generally charged with securing climbing routes, setting up camps, and carrying clients' supplies and equipment. I use the phrase "Climbing Sherpa" throughout this document to distinguish this role.

experienced as destabilising and life threatening in the moment, confrontations with death create *a pause* in the everyday, rupturing the status quo. Within this pause, individuals and communities may take stock of their lives, and often consider new trajectories – future possibilities. For instance, for Lhakpa Dorji, death (or the idea of it) fostered a space to evaluate his continued involvement in the mountaineering industry: an industry that so often places Climbing Sherpas’ lives at risk. Therein, death reveals insight around freedom, and subsequently power. Rather than being static, vulnerable, and powerless, Sherpas like Lhakpa Dorji, assume active roles in mountaineering and adventure tourism. Power relations shift on the Nepali mountainside as Sherpas demonstrate agency to say “no” to commercial industry interests.

Notions of freedom and power also underpinned my own confrontation with mortality. What became ever apparent was the nonpareil and inevitable nature of death (Berger, 1967; Yalom, 1980). Life as I knew it was suspended (along with millions of others), and I became powerless as I awaited my fate in what felt like a never-ending tremor of the 2015 Nepali earthquake (cf. British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2015; National Emergency Operation Centre, 2015). When the first 7.8 magnitude shock subsided, I was grateful to have survived it, and my Nepali family and I raced for refuge in an open field. Similar to Lhakpa Dorji’s reflection around his own accident, over the next several days, I began to take stock of what this unexpected rupture meant for me, my dissertation research, and also for Nepal and its people. I reluctantly left Nepal, knowing that I could not offer the necessary aid on the ground. From this freedom to walk away, however, arose internal conflict around my privilege to do so, increasingly illuminating the tensions and paradoxes between death, freedom, and development. These arising complexities around freedom, were reflective of what my research set out to question and better understand in the first place: What do Climbing Sherpas’ navigations of

death reveal about freedom? Additionally, this “knowing” of death through my own experience, which constituted some of my researcher subjectivities, and inherently contributed to the ways in which I analysed and made sense of the Climbing Sherpas’ stories and experiences of death that are represented in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

Death remains the greatest extrinsic facet of existence: an unavoidable condition that all societies inevitably must address. It is “point zero,” whereby human control finds its outer limit (Giddens, 1991, p. 16). Tourism and leisure scholars (Lewis, 2000; Stone & Sharpley, 2008), sociologists and thanatologists (Bauman, 1998; Berger, 1967; Shilling, 1993), and existential philosophers (Sartre, 1948; Yalom, 1980) have indicated there is something to be learned through reflecting on death as an aspect of living. Yet, death and other existential concerns do not appear to be at the fore of our tourism and leisure narratives. Instead, modern societies objectify, impersonalise, and minimise death and individuals’ experiences of death, consequently silencing their meanings (Stone & Sharpley, 2008).

Along with silences around death, Sherpas are often referenced as “silent” partners to international mountaineers (Lieu, 2016; Ortner, 1999; Panzeri, Caroli, & Haack, 2013). This silent characteristic is reified within our tourism and mountaineering literatures and media discourses, whereby Sherpas’ voices, perspectives, and experiences remain absent from many works. In the initial phases of my dissertation research, I recognised this absence, which was recently reflected by Karsang Sherpa, in his interview with the *Alpinist Magazine*: “There have been over two-dozen films, shorts, TV series and segments produced about Everest for Western audiences. Like the *Everest* film... most of them seem to render the Sherpa staff ‘invisible’” (Lieu, 2016).

Existing tourism discourses focus on economic, environmental, and social impacts of the

trekking industry in the Nepali Himalayas (Bhattarai, Conway, & Shrestha, 2005; Chad, 2000; Nepal, 2007; Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004), while extant recreation and mountaineering literature explores areas such as: experiences from foreign trekker and mountaineer perspectives (Brymer, 2010; Mu & Nepal, 2015); dominant narratives in media representations of mountaineering disasters (Davidson, 2008; Elmes & Frame, 2008); and morals that guide negotiations of mountaineering or high-risk activities (Oliver, 2006). However, investigations of Sherpa communities within the Solukhumbu, specifically the narratives of Climbing Sherpas, have been limited. A few notable exceptions include works by anthropologists Sherry Ortner (1999) and Susan Frohlick (2003, 2004), sociologist Ether Bott (2009), and the recently released documentary film, *Sherpa: Trouble on Everest*, directed by Jennifer Peedom (2015).

The silences within our academic and media canons reveal gaps in our scholarship, and thereby understandings of the complexities of mountaineering and adventure tourism. It is time for tourism and leisure research to engage with discussions of *death*, more directly. Additionally, the growing tensions between the international demand to climb and the risks and fatalities associated with mountaineering beg for research to consider the narratives of high-altitude Climbing Sherpas, as these individuals hold integral roles within the industry. Thus, shaped by philosophical and theoretical positions underpinned by existentialism, as well as Foucault's notions of power, the purpose of this critical narrative inquiry is to explore Sherpas' stories of living and dying in mountaineering.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that stories are not meant to simply describe or communicate, but it is through listening to others we may learn and know. Where work like Ortner's (1999) ethnographic study was written in one authoritative voice (the researcher's), this project is committed to fragmentation, relativity, and particularity (Crotty, 1998; Richardson,

1997), as I acknowledge the complexities that exist on Mt. Everest by fostering space for Climbing Sherpas to share their stories in their own words and voices. Furthermore, as confrontations with death enact a vast influence upon one's existence (and conduct), I argue that encounters with death provide a useful conduit for understanding responsibility, power, and ethics in experiences of freedom in relationships on the mountainside. Research questions that guided this exploration include:

- How do Climbing Sherpas story life and death on the Nepali mountainside?
- What do these stories reveal about how death is navigated?
- What do Climbing Sherpas' navigations of death reveal about freedom?

Additionally, this inquiry employed visual and sensorial research methods with hopes of privileging Sherpas' voices, and decentering dominant narratives (e.g., foreign climbers, media accounts, researcher). The use of film, as a representational medium, also offers accessibility to a larger audience, whereby knowledge exchange may not only occur within academia, but between tourism industry stakeholders such as Climbing Sherpas, foreign expedition companies, and governments. Thereby, there is hope that practical industry standards and governmental policies influencing freedoms on Mt. Everest (and the Nepali mountainside) may be reconsidered.

1.1 Outline of Dissertation Structure

To address this inquiry's purpose and its questions, I structured my dissertation as follows: in [Chapter Two](#) I review relevant literature on tourism development, mountaineering, and adventure tourism. More specifically, I outline the ideologies that have likely shaped some of Nepal's tourism development, contributing to the commercialisation of mountaineering and adventure tourism within the Himalayas and subsequently increasing risks associated with these industries. Additionally, I explore the power relations that exist on the Himalayan mountainside.

Lastly, I outline relevant literature about death and the ways it is taken up in tourism contexts. Drawing on ideas from sociologists and existential philosophers, I indicate how death, as an entry point, may lend to deeper understandings of power and freedom on the mountainside. Subsequently, in [Chapter Three](#), I detail the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this research by reviewing literature on existentialism and Foucault's notions of power. I then introduce the concept of *liminality*, developed by Arnold van Gennep (1960), as an apparatus for investigating how Climbing Sherpas' navigate encounters and experiences with death.

From these theoretical orientations, I outline my use of narrative and visual methodologies in [Chapter Four](#). Here, I detail my sensorial-narrative approach, including the methods I used in fieldwork and data collection processes as well as the procedures and steps I implemented in the analysis and interpretation of the Sherpas' stories. In the latter half of the fourth chapter, I describe my choice to represent these stories as narratively-written conversations, as well as through a short documentary film. In [Chapter Five](#) and [Chapter Six](#) I share these representations. [Chapter Five](#) depicts the thirteen individual conversations that occurred between each Sherpa and myself, while [Chapter Six](#) presents the audio-visual representation of the collective stories, illuminating experiences and insights as they relate to all of the Climbing Sherpas' narratives. Then, in [Chapter Seven](#) I critically unpack the analysis and interpretations of the findings through a discussion focused around three main through-lines: Climbing to the top, Encountering death, and Choosing to (Dis)continue. Finally, in [Chapter Eight](#) I summarise the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this research, while making note of the limitations of the study and highlighting several areas for future research. In this final chapter, I also conclude with new questions for tourism scholars, developers, governments, Climbing Sherpas, commercial industries, and community members to

consider as they continue to navigate the consequences of tourism-led development in the Solukhumbu of Nepal.

Lastly, important to the structure of this document is the “[Context Glossary](#).” Although, details of Nepal and its mountaineering industry have been included throughout the entirety of this thesis, the Context Glossary provides supplementary information for the readers to consider. If reading this as an interactive PDF file⁴ click on the hyperlinks that have been imbedded into the main body of text throughout the chapters, which quickly bring you to corresponding maps and supplemental information including mountain descriptions, definitions, and cultural terms. This glossary was created for several reasons. First, by removing maps and definitions from the main body of text, there is less disruption to the flow of the document, particularly the presentation of findings in Chapter Five. Secondly, because many of these unique place names and terms are reoccurring, it is more effective to have them listed in one central location. Finally, the use of hyperlinks affords a digitised and interactive medium, which dynamically conveys the various complexities and contexts that exist within this project. Note that if viewing this as a hard copy, the Context Glossary falls at the very end of this document, behind the references and appendices.

⁴ Note to committee members and examiners, the jumpstick that has been provided to you has a PDF version of this document to allow you to utilise the hyperlinks and dynamically switch between chapters and the Context Glossary.

Chapter Two: Literature Review



Foreword – The Disappearing Shangri-La⁵

Nestled in the [Himalayas](#), bordered by China to the north and India to the south, [Nepal](#) was once storied as a hidden Shangri-La. A name used to describe a mythical utopia—a fictional place from the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton—Shangri-La has become synonymous with “earthly paradise.” Nepal’s natural, geographical, and cultural treasures have long been recognised, making claims to the literary trope. A country removed from Western modernity captivated the few foreigners that visited in the 1950s, who then returned to their respective countries to convey exotic tales and encounters of the mystical Shangri-La (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Heinen & Kattel, 1992). Stories of simple and agrarian life, devoid of amenities, seized the imaginations of individuals who became unabashedly attracted to the remote and unknown lands of the Himalayas, and left their countries on their own quests for a less frenetic and materialistic society (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Fisher, 1990; Shrestha, 1998).

According to Bhandari (2010), “How certain people are represented, places are constructed, and the story of the past is told are important in the making of tourism identity” (p. 69). A story I often tell about my very first visit to the [Solukhumbu](#) of Nepal, in the spring of 2013, echoes the quests for the earthly paradise that were recounted by foreigners some 65 years ago. Upon my arrival, however, I felt disappointed. As James Fisher (1990), a member of one of the 1962 Hillary school-building expeditions, indicated: Nepal “somehow fell short of Shangri-La” (p. 2). After an eight-hour hike to [Namche Bazaar](#), through some of the most magnificent mountain valleys that I ever had privilege to step foot in, I sat down to drink what felt like a much-deserved beer. It was while sitting with throngs of other tourists, trekkers, and mountaineers at the “world’s highest” Irish pub that I began to reflect on Nepal’s development and overpopulated tourist enclaves, and how they coincide with the disappearing Shangri-La. Furthermore, in this reflexive moment I began to feel ashamed for latching onto the romantic and simplistic narratives of Nepal, which silenced the complexities of the nation, its people, and their cultures (Aitchison, 2001; Amoamo & Thompson, 2010). Sherpas and the Himalayas have indeed developed and changed along with the rest of the world (cf. Adams, 1996; Frohlick, 2003; Nepal, 2005, 2015).

⁵ The photographs presented above were captured during my preliminary site visit to Nepal in the Spring of 2013. I use them here to depict some of the tourism development that has occurred in the Solukhumbu Region of Nepal, and my interpretation of the disappearing Shangri La. The left image portrays natural beauty of the Gokyo Lakes, while the second image captures an ancient Buddhist Gumpa hidden in a tree-covered valley of the Solukhumbu. The third image illuminates some of tourism’s impact on Namche Bazaar; the majority of the buildings represent tourist services (e.g. tea and guest houses, hotels, pubs, souvenir shops). The most right justified image is of a Starbucks, albeit a knock-off, in the village of Lukla.

Development of a place and the ways in which it is represented reflects its historical, social, economic, and political situations (Bhandari, 2010). Raj Panday (1999) contends that with the right social, political, economic, and administrative processes, a nation will find opportunities for advancement with whatever resources it has at its command. Mair (2006) indicates that the biophysical base of a region often dictates the kind of developments that are available, while these places and their economic histories are considered among national, continental, and global economies.

Situated in the heart of the Himalayas, eight of the fourteen world-famous mountain peaks over 8000 meters tall are located in Nepal. With Mt. Everest being the tallest mountain in the world, Nepal was positioned and promoted as a unique place to visit since the reopening of its borders in 1951. Tourism became an option by virtue of its “unspoilt” and relatively underdeveloped status (Bhattarai, et al., 2005). The exotic tales of foreign travellers acted as a prism through which the world viewed Nepal, while the first successful ascent of Mt. Everest by [Sir Edmund Hillary](#) from New Zealand and local Sherpa and Nepali native, [Tenzing Norgay Sherpa](#), in 1953 further enhanced it as an alluring adventure destination.

Shrestha and Shrestha (2012) discuss the importance of the Nepali Himalaya and indicate that, “tourism in Nepal began with mountain tourism” (p. 59). The market eventually capitalised on the commercial potential embedded in Nepal’s enchanting natural sceneries and mountainous terrains (Bhattarai, et al., 2005): commodification that led to increased demand for adventure tourism. Mountaineering, including trekking, in the [Solukhumbu](#) is now the cornerstone of Nepal’s adventure tourism industry. Over 37,000 foreign trekkers hike the Mt. Everest Basecamp (EBC) trail annually, while to date 4,469 people have successfully summited

Mt. Everest over 7,646 times (Arnette, 2016; Nepal, 2016; Schaffer, 2013).

The first ascent of Mt. Everest was undeniably accomplished by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay; yet what is often omitted from this heroic tale is that it was done with the integral support of over 382 Sherpas acting as guides and porters (Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation, 2017). Over six decades later Sherpas continue to work in the Himalayas providing support to commercial mountaineering expeditions. Recently the mountaineering industry has been critiqued for the way in which people with “means” are allowed to pursue Mt. Everest, regardless of experience (Davis, 2014; Payne & Shrestha, 2014). As previously mentioned, Sherpas often risk their own lives, to ensure the safety of their clients, by fixing ropes, setting routes, preparing high camps, and carrying supplies up treacherous terrain and in dangerous conditions (Davis, 2014; Krakauer, 2014; NPR, 2013; Peedom, 2015; Prettyman, 2014). Consequences of these risks were illuminated in the most recent [Mt. Everest tragedy](#) on April 18, 2014, when an avalanche surged through the slopes of the [Khumbu Icefall](#). Seventeen Sherpa and Nepali climbers were killed and ten more injured; all were reported to have been fixing ropes and carrying loads for commercial mountaineering parties (Davis, 2014; Krakauer, 2014; Prettyman, 2014).

With opportunities for tourism development come inevitable challenges. Canton (2012) contends that as our fellow humans are used as objects to craft narratives of self-fulfillment, we broach the social consequences of tourism (and mountaineering). These consequences are what propel tourism researchers into questioning the rationalisation and responsibility of tourism’s growth: asking *why tourism* and *now what* (Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Mair, 2006; 2012)? To further understand the growing complexities and consequences of tourism development, specifically on the Nepali mountainside, I present a review of relevant literature, providing contexts for readers

to contemplate as they engage this critical narrative inquiry.

Considering the rising international demand for mountaineering pursuits, the centrality of Sherpas in the industry, and the risks associated with summit attempts, it is vital to explore the development of commercial mountaineering and adventure tourism, along with notions of power and death as they play into Sherpas' freedoms on the mountain. Thus, I begin by examining tourism development in Nepal, briefly reviewing ideological influences that have likely shaped some of its development. I then discuss mountaineering, its historical ties to colonial explorations, and its evolution into a recreational activity, which is increasingly blurring with definitions of adventure tourism. In part, the evolution of mountaineering is reflective of increasing economic development, whereby mountains have been commodified and summit attempts can now be purchased. I then consider the ways risk affects participation in mountaineering and adventure tourism activities. Within this discussion around risk, I explore the power relations that seemingly exist on the Himalayan mountainside. Lastly, I consider how encounters with death can provide scholars with an entry point to build deeper understandings of how freedoms are enacted in mountaineering contexts.

2.1 Tourism as Development in Nepal

Recognised as one of the fastest growing economic sectors, tourism generated a global export income of approximately \$3 billion US dollars per day over the last 50 years. Correspondingly, international tourist arrivals have increased from 25 million in 1950, to 940 million in 2010 (Schroeder & Sproule-Jones, 2012; United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2011): a figure expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020 (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998; World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 1997). These global growth rates are recorded to be outpacing other industries, highlighting tourism's potential as a development strategy (Rogers &

Atchison, 1998). Thus, concrete efforts are made by governments to develop tourism through the creation of institutional structures that promote market-driven strategies and policies, supporting growing service and consumption sectors (Benington & Geddes, 1992; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Mair, 2006; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2012). Despite the potential negative impacts and consequences on communities (cf. Brohman, 1996; Caton, 2012; Leslie, 2012; Mowforth & Munt, 2009), tourism is continuously promoted as an effective tool for development, an issue understood by Mair (2006) as the “conundrum of tourism” (p. 4). She critiques development strategies and the responsibility and role of the state, arguing that government policies and responses attempt to alleviate regional disparities by positioning tourism as a saviour: “a way for communities to survive when there are no other opportunities” (Mair, 2006, p. 31).

[Nepal](#), a landlocked country situated between the Chinese region of Xizang (Tibet) and India along the Himalayan range, has a population of over 28 million (World Bank, 2014). This nation is understood as having a low-income economy. In 1993, the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) placed Nepal in the 151st position of 173 nations for overall level of socioeconomic development, meaning forty to sixty percent of Nepal’s population was surviving on incomes below that of absolute poverty⁶. Nepal shifted to the 145th ranking position on the HDI in 2014; although there was an increase in socioeconomic development, this nation is still burdened with high levels of hunger and poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Nepal’s impoverished conditions, along with its landlocked geographical position, poor resource base, increasing population density, and low industrial and services output all

⁶ Although being contested more recently, since the 1990 World Development Report on Poverty the World Bank has anchored its international poverty line as “\$1 USD a day” (Ravallion, 2010).

contributed to the nation's need to identify opportunities for economic development (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Nepal, 2003).

Thus, by no surprise, tourism was embraced as the “saviour” – a core development strategy – since Nepal opened its borders to foreigners. Its rapid growth has transformed the nation in unprecedented ways (Nepal, 2005). These stories of development and progress align with those of other “developing nations”⁷ as international tourism is said to hold much promise. Claiming to provide a source of employment and foreign exchange opportunities, tourism is an attractive way to “create jobs for semi-skilled and unskilled labour, develop the arts, encourage handicraft and export industries, and subsidize the development of transportation infrastructure” for nations around the world (Richter & Richter, 1985, p. 202).

2.2 Compounding Ideological Influences on Nepali Tourism

A distressed economy and the realities of international tourism earnings provide insight into why tourism continues to be a development strategy for Nepal. However, as we evaluate Nepal's interest in tourism, it is useful to identify the global economic backdrop – economic growth theories and neoliberal globalisation – that seemingly underpin and influence the tourism plans and policies that have been, and continue to be, implemented in this nation. While this thesis is not directed at analysing the Nepali government's role or their policy decisions, it is important to reflect on some of the forces shaping tourism within developing countries. These forces arguably contribute to the complexities of Nepal's mountaineering industry, and can further provide a way of thinking about tourism and economic development in nations, like Nepal.

⁷ I use the words “developing nations” to refer to what some call, Lesser Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) or the Global South. The North-South divide is a socioeconomic and political division that is constructed between the wealthier developed countries, known collectively as the North and the developing nations known collectively as the South (Therien, 1999). My choice to use “developing nations” was made because the literature I reviewed referenced it this way consistently (e.g., Nepal, 2000).

2.2.1 Modernisation theory & economic growth

Popularised in the 1950s and 60s, and drawing upon the work of social theorists and economists (e.g., Rostow, 1960; Weber, 1930, 1978), the notion of “modernisation” can be understood as a socioeconomic development strategy that follows an evolutionary process from a traditional society to a modern one (Harrison, 1992; Sofield, 2003). In the context of modernisation theory, “traditional” societies tend to still adhere to cultural-based customs, and are perceived as exhibiting low social, economic, and political differentiation. On the other hand, “modern” societies are highly differentiated, with a high degree of specialisation and entrepreneurship, both of which are viewed as contributing positively to development (Friedman, 1980; Mbaiwa, 2011; Sofield, 2003; Weber, 1978). Walt Rostow (1960), an American economist and political theorist, established a simple yet influential economic growth model identifying five stages that a nation can pass through to attain a modernised state of development. Here, growth starts at the “Traditional Society,” in which agriculture and subsistence farming constitute the bulk of the given society’s economy. This nation then moves through the model towards the final stage, “The Age of Mass Consumption,” whereby a nation’s industries have diversified and consumption surges, allowing the society to find its place in the international economy.

As the governments of developing nations seek to increase employment, generate foreign exchange, and attract development capital, they turn towards tourism as an economic growth tool and development strategy (Mbaiwa, 2011; PiSunyer, 1989). For instance, the Nepali government began to include tourism-specific objectives in their strategic plans and policies (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998; Nepal, 2003; Nepal, 2010). Planning as an institutional process guided, and continues to guide, the economic direction of Nepal – a path of modernisation that the country

has pursued since 1956 with the launching of its first five-year plan aimed at economic growth and poverty alleviation (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Raj Panday, 1999; Rankin, 2004). With hopes to increase international tourist numbers, subsequent tourism plans included objectives such as: increasing foreign exchange earnings, creating employment opportunities, developing infrastructure, and broadening geographical distribution of tourist activities (Nepal, 2010; Pagdin, 1995; Schroeder & Sproule-Jones, 2012).

Moreover, in the Solukhumbu, tertiary economic activities stimulated by regional tourism contributed to some of the restructuring of the traditional Sherpa economy. This brought profound changes and played a critical role in reshaping employment and income opportunities (Adams, 1992; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Nepal, 2005, Ortner, 1999). For instance, livestock transhumance⁸ was repurposed. The movement of yak between seasonal grazing grounds became a means of transporting expedition gear and supplies, while crop production was increased to meet the growing demands of international mountaineers and trekkers. Additionally, the rise of tourism led to a growing number of local employment opportunities by providing various positions within these newly emergent industries (e.g., [porter](#), [kitchen boy](#), [Climbing Sherpa](#), [Sirdar](#)).

Brohman (1996) contends that as developing countries attempt to improve economically, they uncritically adhere to international tourism. Herein, tourism becomes a part of an “outward-oriented” economic growth strategy that encourages specialisation in exports (primarily non-traditional exports), rather than developing more sophisticated industrial sectors through state interventions (Brohman, 1996, p. 48). However, Brohman (1996), along with other critical tourism scholars call to question the usefulness of tourism as a sustainable development strategy

⁸ Transhumance is the practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle between mountain highlands in the summer and lowlands in the winter. Usually accompanying the livestock (Yak and Dzopkyok in the case of Solukhumbu) is their owner or a herder (Blench, 2001).

and economic growth solution, pointing to the problems that have arisen from increased tourism in the past (cf. Brohman, 1996; Harrison, 1992, 1996; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). These problems include the potential for foreign domination and dependency, socioeconomic and spatial polarisation, as well as the degradation of cultures and environments as they continue to be commodified as tourism “exports” (Brohman, 1996; Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1976; Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

Moreover, Harrison (1992) argues that the process of modernisation as a development strategy focuses on the process of westernisation, in which economic restructuring and development strategies encourage poorer countries to emulate Western societies and economies, and to advance from agriculture to industry and market-driven activities. Thereby, modernisation theory seemingly disguises the impacts of colonialism, as well as measures development and progress by the values and institutions emplaced by Western societies (Harrison, 1992; Nisbet, 1972; Telfer, 2002). Such top-down meta-theories are too abstract, and not applicable across diverse environments (Telfer, 2002). Accordingly, scholars suggest that tourism development calls for more local community participation, and active state involvement in the planning, with intentions to coordinate with broadly based national development goals (Brohman, 1996). This increased participation by the state, however, is challenged by the global ideologies that continue to influence economic development initiatives, a brief discussion that I turn towards next.

2.2.1 Neoliberal globalisation

Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices associated with the laissez-faire economic liberalism of the nineteenth century. It is an ideology that is often associated with the notion of “free market” as a tool for wealth distribution (Friedman 1962; Harvey, 2005). Under a neoliberal model, governments take a supportive, but less active role in a nation’s welfare,

whereby they reduce their influence in the market through deregulation, privatisation, and cutting public spending for social services (Friedman, 1962; Peet, 2003). Harvey (1989, 2005) suggests that from this capitalist way of thinking emerges a general consensus across national boundaries that cities and developments will benefit from an entrepreneurial stance to generating economic gains. Endorsed by President Reagan in the United States, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s and 80s, these political-economic practices were enacted in state after state (Finnegan 2003; Harvey, 2005; Williamson, 1990). Though contexts varied among different countries, Harvey (2005) argues that “neoliberalization” swept across the world like a vast tidal wave from which no place could claim total immunity (p. 23).

With neoliberal globalisation as the backdrop, technological advancements led to increased accessibility and connectivity worldwide. Mirroring this global change was the steady growth of international tourism demand. Therefore, in the late 1970s, Nepal saw a rapid increase of “bootleg operations” and “overnight entrepreneurs” (Bhattarai et al., 2005, p. 672; Nepal, 2010; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2012). The increasing number of small businesses in Nepal reifies the meta-narrative of neoliberalism, further sustaining the desire for modernisation and development. Although tourist arrivals in Nepal had risen to 70,000 visitors in 1970, Bhattarai and colleagues (2005) suggest that an “economic crises facing the country loomed large” during this time (p. 679). This crisis came to a head in the 1980s due to increasing national poverty, global price-hikes in petroleum, and fiscal insolvency due to external debt. Consequently, in 1984 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund intervened, stressing the need for a structural adjustment through export, and outward-oriented economic growth (Blaikie, Cameron, & Seddon, 1981; Bhattarai et al., 2005). Aligning with market-led mantras, Nepal quickly positioned tourism as “an instrument for the formation of generally place-specific geocapital by

commoditising the Kingdom's natural beauty...it was expected to generate employment, earn foreign currency, and bring some balance to existing uneven regional development" (Bhattarai et al., 2005, p. 679).

Neoliberal ideologies are further reflected in the Nepali government's role in the mountaineering and tourism industries. The government continues to attempt to mediate the political and economic environment that unfolds on Mt. Everest. This was apparent when Nepali authorities travelled to the Mt. Everest Basecamp in April 2014 to meet with Sherpas, aiming to avert a climbing strike after the deadly Everest avalanche (cf. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2014). Pasang Sherpa of the National Mountain Guides Association (NMGA) stated, "When the avalanche hit and rescue help was needed, there was little support from the government available at the basecamp" (CBC, 2014, para. 9). Ironically, days later, in an effort by the government to rescue the remainder of the commercial climbing season, officials met to discuss the demands of over 350 angry Sherpa climbers (CBC, 2014).

As governments continue to deflect primary responsibility, market-led neoliberal economic strategies are promoted through the development of consumption sectors (Benington & Geddes, 1992; Richter & Richter, 1985). Visions of stimulated economic growth rooted in ideas of globalisation and modernisation trickle down from government politicians and industry entrepreneurs to local communities who are looking for an answer to the threats of economic downturn and the plight of poverty (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998; Mair, 2006). As I previously mentioned, it is beyond the scope of this project to assess the government's role, and the various policies at play within these industries. Rather, the compounding ideologies of neoliberalism and modernisation were briefly unpacked to provide readers with additional political and economic contexts to consider, as we will later discuss in Chapter Seven the growing mountaineering

industry in Nepal and the Sherpas' roles within it. First, however, I turn to a literature review around the development of mountaineering, outlining who climbs as well as the ways in which this recreational activity is increasingly blurring with the emergent adventure tourism industry.

2.3 Mountains and Mountaineering

Mountains, which cover one-fifth of the earth's land surface, supply much of the world's population with vital resources (Godde, Price, Zimmermann, 2000). Unique biophysical characteristics such as significant shifts in altitudes and a variety of climates have resulted in rich and diverse ecosystems, which are sourced for some of the world's most valuable food, water, and medicine (Bandyopadhyay & Gyawali, 1994; Zimmerer, 1996). The significance of mountains, however, extends beyond ecological resources; it is understood that mountains house approximately one-tenth of the global population, composed of a variety of ethnicities and cultures (Godde et al., 2000). Due to remote and isolated locations, some of these mountain communities have maintained traditional ways of living. They experience less change (and development) than their counterparts in lowland regions; though increasing accessibility and globalisation have recently accelerated both cultural and environmental changes even in some of the most remote locations (Apollo, 2014, 2015; Fennell, 2014; Godde et al., 2000; Grotzbach & Stadel, 1997). This was certainly the case for the Solukhumbu of Nepal, whereby regional changes like acculturation and environmental degradation reflect the development of tourism and mountaineering in the Himalayas (cf. Nepal, 2000, 2015; Stevens, 2003).

Mountains are also understood as cultural receptacles. Much of the first mountain tourism was linked to religiosity and pilgrimages (Godde et al., 2000). Mountains can represent spiritual centers; places of power; houses of deities; a space to worship; and sources of inspiration, revelation, and transformation (Bernbaum, 1997). Historically, this was the case for Sherpas,

who understood mountains – particularly the Himalayas – as the home of their gods. Thus, when Sherpas engaged these spaces they did so with utmost respect, trying to refrain from polluting or profaning the mountains in hopes of keeping the gods happy (Ortner, 1999). According to anthropologist Sherry Ortner's ethnographic work on Sherpas' religious values, actions that constitute mountain pollutions include:

Going high on the mountain or stepping on the summit; killing animals or otherwise shedding blood on the mountain; dropping human excretions on the mountain; burning garbage on the mountain or otherwise creating bad smells; and finally, having women on the mountain at all, having women menstruating on the mountain, or having people engage in sexual relations on the mountain. (1999, p. 127)

Behaviours like these are said to increase the potential for angry gods, followed by negative consequences (e.g., sickness, back luck, accidents, death, etc.) (Ortner, 1999; P. Sherpa, personal communication, April 14, 2015). As early as the turn of the twentieth century, *lamas*, trained and authorised Tibetan Buddhism specialists, warned against climbing the peaks of the Himalayas (Ortner, 1999).

Regardless of religious affiliations, mountains have long been perceived as spaces for spiritual renewal, providing travellers with motivations to visit these high places (Cooper, 1997). They are recognised for their serenity, relative calm, and unspoiled nature, constituting a reprieve from the stresses of daily life and perpetuating notions of romantic idealism in urban-dwelling populations (Godde et al., 2000). Likewise, Monz (2000) suggests that mountains are powerful symbols of untamed natural landscapes, a rare commodity in our increasingly modernised world; in turn they evoke feelings of fear, reverence, and awe from individuals. The development of mountain tourism and mountaineering undoubtedly derived from these romantic and awe-

inspiring perceptions (cf. Hansen, 1995; Stephen, 1871). Let us now consider the individuals that visit these landscapes and engage in this type of recreation and tourism.

2.3.1 Mountaineers as explorers

Mountains, with their remote and majestic beauty, were sought after as destinations that foster reflection, but also as places that provide opportunities for stimulation, excitement, and adventure (Apollo, 2017; Beedie & Hudson, 2003). However, beyond local and native inhabitants, these landscapes were predominately preserved for mountaineers or alpinists: individuals who participated in mountain pursuits for recreation, adventure, and meaning, but did not consider themselves to be tourists (Collister, 1984; Beedie & Hudson, 2003). Mountaineering in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was conceptualised and practiced as an “elite” activity, based upon unmediated and unassisted (e.g., artificial oxygen, aid of a guide, porters, etc.) encounters between individuals and mountain environments (Apollo, 2017; Holt, 2008). In his 1911 review of *Swiss Mountain Climbs*, Abraham (1911) distinguishes “mountaineers” from mere “rock climbers.” Accordingly, “a mountaineer must be a good judge of climatic conditions, must be a pathfinder, must be skilled on snow and ice, but need not be a star performer on rock” (p. 177). Additionally, ropes and ice-axes are two essential pieces of equipment for negotiating high peaks and large glacial fields, and help to further define the terms mountaineering and mountaineer (Kelly, 2000).

In the early 1800s, mountaineers began to explore the craggy peaks of the European Alps (Guggleberger, 2015). Hansen (1995) argues that during these years the popularity of climbing mountains was deeply rooted in anxieties about masculinity and the British Empire. Many English men viewed British society as extremely wealthy but physically weak, and thus men joined one of the emerging national Alpine Clubs (e.g., the British Alpine Club), adopted

discourses of “exploration” and “adventure” from contemporary explorers, and transformed “the ascents of unclimbed Alpine peaks and passes into representations of British masculinity and imperial conquest” (Hansen, 1995, p. 305). Holt (2008) suggests that such acts were used to demonstrate a physical superiority.

Unsurprisingly, memberships to these Alpine Clubs were reserved for, and limited to, the professional middle class – “men of education, achievement and above all, significant financial means” (Holt, 2008, p. 13; see also Dangar & Blakeney, 1957; Guggleberger, 2015; Hansen, 1995). Correspondingly Guggleberger (2015) argues that mountaineering was (and to a certain extent still is) gendered. Up until the mid 1900s many women were excluded from membership to the majority of national alpine clubs, acted within the framework of traditional gender roles while climbing, climbed in the company of a male partner or guide, and belonged to all-female clubs and expeditions, which were introduced to gain access to mountainscapes (Guggleberger, 2015). These gender dynamics of mountaineering are certainly important to note, and I hint at them in this literature review, albeit a research focal point that lies beyond the scope of this particular project.

By 1865 the main peaks of the Alps had been summited and climbed, igniting motivation for European mountaineers to seek out the “blank spots on the map” and ascend the unclaimed mountains of Africa, the Arctic, and the Himalayas (Hansen, 1995, p. 315; see also Guggleberger, 2015). From this surge of exploration emerged a race to be the first to stand atop the world’s highest peak – Mt. Everest⁹, also known as Sagarmāthā in Nepali and Chomolungma in Tibetan. Among these attempts was the infamous and disputed summit by Sandy Irvine and George

⁹ In 1865, the world’s tallest mountain was given the English name, Mount Everest by the Royal Geographical Society. Andrew Waugh, a British Surveyor General of India, recommended the name to recognise his predecessor, the first surveyor general, Colonel George Everest (although George Everest objected this honour) (Nelsson, 2011).

Mallory¹⁰ in 1924. This ascent, along with many other first attempts, occurred from the north side of the mountain in Tibet, as Nepal remained in isolation while feudalism continued under the Rana reign until 1951 (Whelpton, 2005).

In the 1950s the Himalayas became the place to go for the global climbing elite. This was in part due to the re-opening of the Nepali border in 1951, but also because many of these mountains had yet to be summited. Frohlick (2003) connects the Himalayas, specifically Mt. Everest, with Löfgren's (1999) notion of the "global beach"; Everest has captivated the public's imagination as a "truly global iconography" (p. 215). Although there are countless beaches (mountains in the case of this research) a select few "capture the mind's eye as *the* quintessential beach" (Frohlick, 2003, p. 529, emphasis in original). As the tallest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest was and continues to be *the* mountain to climb, as well as an increasingly "popular vacationscape for 'extreme' adventure seekers" (Frohlick, 2003, p. 529). Guggleberger (2015) suggests, "the simple existence of the mountain challenges the individual's will to explore and discover the terrain and to make it to the top" (p. 601). "Because it's there," a famous George Mallory quote in response to the question "why climb Everest," still rings true for many mountaineers as they assess their own motivations to conquer some of the world's highest peaks (New York Times, 1923; Guggleberger, 2015).

Contemporary scholars critique the history of mountaineering for acts of conquest, their "heroic" characters, and performances of masculinity (Kelly, 2000). However, Kelly's (2000) dissertation research around alpine exploration in the Canadian Rockies (between 1885-1925), argues that such interpretations can oversimplify mountain climbing experiences. "Mountains

¹⁰ 1924 marked the third British Expedition summit attempt on Mt. Everest by Andrew "Sandy" Irvine and George Mallory. Both men are said to have died on the way down from the summit, and therefore their summit success has been contested (Odell, 1924). With no photographic evidence, the controversy of who summited Everest first (Mallory-Irvine or Tenzing-Hillary) lives on as investigations continue to look for Irvine's body because he is said to have the camera (cf. Chapman, 2010).

were not something looked at or even merely scrambled over, they were a place for self-expression and self-discovery” (Kelly, 2000, p. 272). Rather, mountaineering can also be understood as a leisure choice and a vehicle for individuals to insert meaning into their lives. Individuals are “searching for something within themselves” and it is through giving themselves up to the “vagaries of nature” that they may encounter realities that are not otherwise encountered (Palmer, 2004, p. 67). According to some sociologists it was the rapid structural changes in the public and private spheres of post-industrial Western societies that confronted individuals with new freedoms and uncertainties, and thereby a responsibility for constructing biographies and imparting meaning upon themselves (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). Although these ideas provide additional contexts for consideration, and in some ways illustrate why mountaineers might engage in climbing pursuits, the nuances of this discussion require additional time and space that extend beyond this present research project.

Traditionally, mountaineering and other Himalayan adventure sports have been constructed as being a step removed from tourism, a rhetoric that “implies that ‘tourists’ are those present in the mountains but who are not ‘doing’ mountaineering” (Bott, 2009, p. 289; see also Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Collister, 1984; Pomfret, 2006). Accordingly, some mountaineers (and adventure tourists) reject modernity, disassociate themselves from visible symbols of mass tourism, and assert “alternative” and romanticised identities (Dann, 1999; Elsrud, 2001; Meethan, 2001). However, work like Meethan’s (2001) and Pomfret’s (2006) challenges these individuals’ disassociation with tourism. For instance, Pomfret’s (2006) conceptual framework examines mountaineers’ motivations, but differing from earlier research, she began to acknowledge the convergence of tourism and recreation within an adventure setting. It is this

convergence I now discuss through a review of the ways mountaineering is beginning to be commercialised, and resembles notions of mountain adventure tourism, particularly in Nepal.

2.4 Commercialisation of Mountaineering

The boundaries between mountaineering and tourism are increasingly blurring, contributing to the ways that mountaineering is understood. Mu and Nepal (2015) report that the high-mountains, ranges like the Himalayas, are no longer reserved or restricted to “experienced” mountaineers. This is likely linked to increased accessibility; certainly this is the case for the Solukhumbu region of Nepal (Nepal, 2002, 2005; Rogers & Aitchison, 1998; Singh & Kaur, 1986). Singh (1980) implies that integral technological advancements, such as mechanised road networks and airline corporations, are what brought tourism activity into the “Himalayas’ wake” (p. 199). In addition to improved infrastructure, research suggests that the commodification of mountains and the commercialisation of recreation experiences have contributed to the rapid growth rate of mountain-based tourism (Apollo, 2014, 2017; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Buckley, 2006; Godde et al., 2000).

Decisions to travel to the mountains were significantly influenced by the widening range of outdoor pursuits and recreational sports available; adventure seekers saw mountains as opportunities to participate in new and popular activities such as hiking, trekking, climbing, mountaineering, and the like (Buckley, 2006; Godde et al., 2000; Williams & Lew, 2015). Moreover, many mountain areas are characterised by fragile economies and thus adventure and sports associated with these areas were quickly recognised as potential economic gains for governments, local mountain communities, and private companies and outfitters (Buckley, 2006; Snowdon, Slee, & Farr, 2000). This supply and demand contributes to the commodification and commercialisation of a destination’s ecological and geographical attributes, a concept Bhattarai

and colleagues (2005) call “geo-capital.” Here, tourism conducts trade through the selling of commodities – objects and activities that have been deduced to an exchange or use value – to a group of consumers (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Cohen, 1988; Frow, 1995, 1997).

Similarly, the term mountaineering – and the sport itself – has been subdivided, reinvented and redefined, reflecting mass tourism rather than elite recreation (Apollo, 2017; Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Johnston & Edwards, 1994). For some scholars, mountaineering now encompasses climbing (rock and ice), trekking, or scrambling up mountains (Apollo, 2017), while others include backpacking, hiking, skiing, indoor climbing, sport climbing, and bouldering in their definitions of mountaineering activities (Coalter, Dimeo, Morrow, & Taylor, 2010; Mitchell, 1983; Pomfret, 2006). The distinctiveness of mountaineering is arguably being subsumed by tourism and its broader consumer culture (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Chaney, 1996) as it can now be viewed as an industry incorporating and selling “soft” and “hard” adventure (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Hill, 1995, p. 63; Pomfret, 2006). Soft adventure refers to “activities with a perceived risk but low levels of real risk, requiring minimal commitment and beginning skills; most of these activities are led by experienced guides,” whereas hard adventure activities include “high levels of risk, requiring intense commitment and advanced skills” (Hill, 1995, p. 63). Adventurers and participants climbing with expeditions, rock climbing, or engaging in strenuous treks are each partaking in “hard” mountaineering activities (Millington, Locke, & Locke, 2001). Beedie and Hudson (2003) suggest that these “soft” and “hard” activities cater to diverse groups of adventure enthusiasts, which has helped to form a subcategory of mountaineering understood as “mountain adventure tourism” (p. 631).

2.4.1 Adventure tourism

Adventure tourism, a rapidly growing subset of tourism, brings together travel, sport, and outdoor recreation (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). Adventure tourists travel to some of the most remote and extreme environments in the world to satisfy the need for emotional highs, risk, challenge, and novelty (Williams & Soutar, 2009; Zuckerman, 1994). Adventure tourism, according to Muller and Cleaver (2000) is “physically bracing, adrenalin-driven, somewhat risky, with moments of exhilaration punctured by many opportunities to assess and reassess what has been done or accomplished” (p. 156). It emerged as a subset of sport tourism for consumers who wanted to engage in active holidays and sporting activities in different places around the globe, and is often characterised by its ability to foster high levels of sensory stimulation through physical and experiential challenges (Beedie, 2008; Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Muller & Cleaver, 2000). Adventure tourism is constituted by active explorations (Addison, 1999; Beedie, 2003). Beedie (2008) explains that the mere suggestion of “exploration” implies some kind of boundary or frontier. Here, frontier is likened to a place of extreme limit where people can assert their choices and individuality (Beedie, 2008). It is the excitement of new experiences, physical challenges, and confrontation with “otherness,” combined with the strains of being away from home, which create emotional territories or frontiers to be experienced in tourism (Beedie, 2008; Christiansen, 1990; Napier, 2006). Adventure tourists tend to be young, educated, affluent, and active thrill seekers (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003; Williams & Soutar, 2009).

Historically, adventure was a by-product of explorations wherein early travellers and explorers were challenged with unexpected, difficult conditions during their travel pursuits (Addison, 1999). Dickson (2004) reminds us that the word adventure is derived from Latin roots – *ad venio* – meaning “whatever comes.” Mountains are thus particularly attractive destinations

for adventure and its related tourism activities. The locations and settings themselves are steeped in “actual and symbolic representations of adventure” (Beedie & Hudson, 2003, p. 626). They are wild and rugged places, defined by their unpredictable weather patterns and objective dangers, making mountain recreation activities inherently risky but ultimately adventurous (Beedie & Hudson, 2003).

Mountaineers, and their desire for the meanings derived from their adventures, paved the way for other emerging mountain adventure tourism niches. According to Beedie and Hudson (2003), “mountain adventure tourism” can be understood as a complex set of social, economic, and cultural forces operating to facilitate the commodification of adventure experiences on mountains. Trekking is now the commercial foundation for mountain adventure tourism in Nepal, partly because it appeals to a broad range of adventurers (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Nepal, 2005). The country has commodified over 150 peaks in the Himalayas through a process of administrative control, requiring permit fees for individual ascents and trekking expeditions in more fragile environmental regions. These fees increase based on size, difficulty, and popularity of the mountain: the Nepali national treasury collects royalties as high as \$70,000 US dollars per climber (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Rogers & Aitchison, 1998). Accordingly, “Mountaineering expeditions are no longer the preserve of experienced mountaineers” (Beedie & Hudson, 2003, p. 632). A typical expedition up one of Nepal’s mountains today may include seasoned-mountaineers and tourists side by side; clients who are willing to spend significant amounts of money for the pursuit of adventure (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Williams & Soutar, 2009).

According to the 2013 Adventure Travel and Trade Association (ATTA) market study, adventure travellers are more likely to use guides and instructors, than non-adventurers. Guides

in adventure tourism are understood to be responsible leaders, guardians, and trustees of clients' safety (Beedie, 2003; Carnicelli-Filho, 2013; Pond, 1993). This higher use of guides may reflect the need for training, instruction, and special equipment as people are likely seeking new and thrilling destinations and activities (ATTA, 2013; Williams & Soutar, 2009). Although adventure tourism participants intentionally seek out fear and thrills, research continues to suggest that perceived personal safety is a critical determinant of destination choices (George, 2003; Gray & Wilson, 2009). Consequently, people are now shopping for the expertise and experience provided by adventure professionals, a strategy used to reduce risk to a reasonable level (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Pomfret, 2011, 2012). From the commercialisation of mountaineering and adventure tourism emerges increased risks on the mountainside, and thereby those who participate in these adventurous activities must be willing to take on such risks. Within the following section, I briefly define risk while also illuminating some of the motivations that underpin risk-taking behaviours.

2.5 Risks and Commercialisation

Risk can be conceptualised as “actual” and “perceived.” Actual risk is understood as a measurable estimation of the likelihood of an event, while perceived risk reflects an individual's perceptions, feelings, previous experiences, and awareness of dangerous situations (Bentley & Page, 2008; Carter, 2006; Ebert & Robertson, 2013). When risk is perceived as being higher than competence and skill, fear and anxiety can ensue. Thus theoretically, the level of risk decreases when competence is high (Carter, 2006; Martin & Priest, 1986; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Pomfret, 2006). However, Carter (2006) points out that the commercialisation of adventure activities and sports complicates this logic. According to Mu and Nepal (2015), “trekking groups are usually guided by trained Sherpas, trekking routes and stops are predetermined, and porters are hired to

help carrying trekkers' luggage" (p. 3). As adventure pursuits (e.g., trekking to [EBC](#) or attempting Mt. Everest's summit) introduce practices of standardisation and commercialisation, perceived risks may be minimised. Because the perception of risk diminishes, participation in mountain activities is likely to increase, giving rise to concerns around mountaineers' competency levels and the potential for actual risks to occur (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Pomfret, 2011).

2.5.1 Adventurous risk-taking

Dickson (2004) contends that with adventure comes uncertainty. Undeniably it is this uncertainty, and risk of personal harm (or even death) that generates excitement for individuals who pursue activities set in challenging and adventurous contexts (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Carter, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Robinson, 2004). The dangerous nature of mountaineering is admitted to be, by many mountaineers, part of the attraction to climb (Ebert & Robertson, 2013). Loewenstein's (1999) discussion around utility theory and consumption points out that participation in mountaineering is *not* about a pleasurable consumption experience, and thus individuals who climb are not necessarily materially-driven. Indeed climbing does come with rewards, such as arriving at the summit of a peak, feeling physically rejuvenated, bonding, and forming new friendships (cf. Ebert & Robertson, 2013; Ortner, 1999); however, Loewenstein (1999) argues that attention must also simultaneously be given to some of the hardships mountaineers might endure in their pursuits. For example, mountaineers risk experiencing [altitude sickness](#), [snow-blindness](#), exhaustion, frostbite, and in the most extreme and often unexpected instances, they confront death (Loewenstein, 1999; Pomfret, 2006). Death on the mountainside can be sudden and shocking – a slip off a steep precipice, a drop into a deep

crevasse, or the biggest killer in terms of numbers, burial by an unpredictable avalanche (Ortner, 1999).

Often mountaineers and adventure enthusiasts are critiqued for being reckless or even irresponsible for jeopardising their lives (Ebert & Robertson, 2013). Yet many mountaineers are aware of these dangers and consider them as acceptable risks that are “part of the game” and thus worth taking (Ebert & Robertson, 2013, p. 45). Ortner (1997) describes that risk of a serious or fatal accident produces a high payoff in meaning. She explains the meaning Western mountaineers, whom she calls *sahibs*¹¹, glean from the sport:

It’s about the moral fiber of the inner self, about the nature of bonding and friendship, about the peace and calm of high cold places against the noise and bustle of modern society. All of this makes the risk of accident and death worthwhile. (p. 139)

In her discussions of meaning, Ortner draws connections with Geertz’s (1973) notion of “deep play.” This term, borrowed from Jeremy Bentham, distinguishes games in which the stakes are so high it does not appear worthwhile to play. Yet people play anyhow. Geertz applied the idea of deep play to address the meaning of Balinese cockfighting, claiming the higher the stakes the more meaning attached to the fight, which ultimately provides insight into important dimensions of life (Geertz, 1973). Mountaineering, for *sahibs*, is a form of “deep play” whereby they engage in the game regardless of their odds – seeking a romantic, individualised, and self-affirming set of meanings (Ortner, 1999; Bott, 2009).

As discussed in Elsrud’s (2001) work on behaviours of backpackers, acts of risk-taking are used as tools for, and symbols of, distinction between self and others in efforts to “narrate

¹¹ Sahib is a Hindi term meaning “boss” or “master” or (in address) “sir.” Sherpas used this term to both refer to and address the international climbers, namely Western climbers, up until the 1970s. Thus, Ortner used this word throughout her work to identify the international climbers. She believed it signalled the lingering colonial influence, and the continuing inequality in the Sherpa-Climber relationship (Ortner, 1997, 1999).

identity” (p. 597). Bauman’s (1996) work on identity and culture proposes that the adventure tourist increasingly reflects postmodern conceptualisations of the “post-tourist.” According to Sherlock (2001), post-tourists “manipulate the multiple possible interpretations of the destination to suit their own desires...their holidays are often a pastiche of experiences, focusing on enjoyment as an end in itself and arranged around icons at tourism destinations” (p. 282). In this, tourists gain physical capital through their unique physical engagements, which can be exchanged for cultural capital and ultimately emboldens an individual’s “social distinction” (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 184; see also Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, adventure tourists and mountaineers alike attempt to distinguish *self* from the *self* of others, creating meaning through their risk-taking on Mt. Everest in an attempt to call themselves one of an elite few who have set foot on the world’s highest peak (Elsrud, 2001). Their tales of risk and adventure often highlight novelty and difference, contributing to individualised projects of self and the reproduction of social identities (Elsrud, 2001; Palmer, 2004; Rhinehart, 2003).

On the other hand, Ortner (1999) suggests that for Sherpas, those who are paid to support foreign climbers on Himalayan mountaineering expeditions, there is “nothing noble about the risk at all” (p. 139). Instead, she contends that the game is played with different motives: the primary one being money. Conversely, Bott (2009) challenges this claim, explaining that “suggestions that climbing Sherpas derive nothing but much needed financial reward from mountaineering, while their paying Western counterparts remain at liberty to explore an undulating geography of reflexive meaning, are unhelpful” (p. 299). These ideas oversimplify Sherpas’ positions on the mountainside. Up until now, there has been limited research that explores risk-taking as perceived by Sherpas or, more specifically, the risk/reward trade-off for high-altitude workers like Climbing Sherpas (a notable exception: Bott, 2009). Therefore, in part,

this study seeks to contribute to these discussions of risk. Additionally, findings help to illuminate how the simplification of Sherpas' roles on the mountain reinforces the problematic tendency in tourism studies to render tourism's "hosts" as static, immobile, and dependent (Frohlick, 2003). With this in mind, it is important to explore how Sherpas are currently being conceptualised and the power relations that seemingly exist on the mountainside.

2.5.2 Sherpas as risk-takers?

While some Sherpas continue to challenge the confines of the East/West, us/them, tourist/host binaries (cf. Frohlick, 2003; Guggleberger, 2015), perceptions of what it means to be a "mountaineer" and "Sherpa" on global peaks like Mt. Everest are still reflective of simplified oppositional symbolism between East and West. Recently, this is evidenced in Mu and Nepal's (2015) study, whereby adventure travellers and trekkers (from Canada, Australia, China, and Japan) were able to identify at least one renowned Western mountaineer (e.g., Sir Edmund Hillary, Scott Fischer, etc.) during their interviews, but famous Sherpa mountaineers (e.g., [Babu Chiri Sherpa](#), [Ang Rita Sherpa](#), [Apa Sherpa](#), etc.) remained unknown. Moreover, these participants perceived that Sherpas' did not risk their lives on Everest for glory or meaning, but rather climbed solely as a livelihood and for the monetary gains (Mu & Nepal, 2015).

Similarly, Frohlick's (2003) work describes the interactions between an audience member and Babu Chiri Sherpa, a panellist and professional climber, at a "peak bagging"¹² discussion hosted by The Banff Centre for Mountain Culture (CMC) in Alberta, Canada. During the Q&A period, Babu was asked if he had interest in "climbing mountains *other than Everest*" (p. 538, emphasis in original). In response to the inquiry, Babu replied to the audience member and the predominately white-Western mountain community, "I don't climb *only* Mount Everest"

¹² This phrase denotes that the principle intention for climbing a mountain is to attain a claim to its summit, or a set of summits (cf. Peakbagger, 2017).

(p. 538, emphasis in original). This exchange was embedded in presumptions that Babu had not already climbed beyond the Nepali Himalayas; the comment in and of itself rendered Babu as an “Everest climber” – a local mountaineer and global “Other” – rather than a “world-class mountaineer,” despite his countless international mountain summits (Frohlick, 2003, p. 537-8).

Perceptions and discourses resembling the aforementioned interaction likely echo the ways in which mountaineers and Sherpas were, and arguably still are, constituted and represented (cf. Lieu, 2016). According to Bruce Barcott (1996), mountaineering is the most literary of all sports. He argues, “a mountain climb is a ready-made narrative, perfectly suited to story” (p. 65). Therefore, as mountaineers and adventure enthusiasts tend to be highly educated, articulate, and affluent (Barcott, 1996; Hansen, 1995; Holt, 2008; Ortner, 1999), they return from their pursuits and compose and craft articles and books to share their gripping tales of adventure and self-discovery (Ortner, 1999).

Climbing accounts and novels date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Revered mountaineers used these writings to share their thoughts about their encounters with people, places, and culture, but also how they negotiated the meaning of their travels (Kelly, 2000). Kelly (2000) reminds us that these stories are “not mere description but an ideological mirror of the traveller’s [or mountaineer’s] culture” (p. 9). Thus, as authors describe self, they also construct the *self* of others on the mountain. For instance, Klavs Becker Larsen, a Dane who attempted to illegally climb Everest in 1951, wrote: “When confronted by real hardships and dangers [the Sherpas] have their tails down like the majority of primitive people with whom the conception of honour has not yet arisen” (Unsworth, 1981, p. 253). Here, Larsen’s portrayal of Sherpas denounces the masculinity, glory, and honour, which are characteristics traditionally presupposed to the sophisticated mountaineer. Furthermore, his words reinforce the notion of the

“Other” and the us/them dichotomy, whereby the “us” is the opposite of those traits of the Other, and therefore fundamentally superior (Frohlick, 2003; Said, 1978; Santos & Caton, 2008).

Ironically, Becker is said to have no previous mountaineering experience before this particular ascent (Kaiser, 2003).

Diverging from Becker’s description, other twentieth-century representations have circulated, including the “Tiger of the Snow,” a characterisation that positions Sherpas as fearless, courageous, and possessive of superhuman qualities and unlimited endurance (Adams, 1996; Neale, 2002). Adams (1996) argues that these qualities of strength have often been coupled with “a will subordinated to and bent in the service of Western desires” (p. 13). Accordingly, Sherpas’ adaptability to high altitudes contributes to their perceived physical strength on the mountain, while their will to cater to their paying clients position them as ideal employees for commercial mountaineering and trekking expeditions (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Ortner, 1999). From such representations, and their interpretations and understandings, arises a notion of subservience that is inherent in tourism in the developing world (Cole & Eriksson, 2010; Mowforth & Munt, 2009), a power dynamic I turn towards next.

2.5.3 Power & risk-taking

In the confines of commercial Himalayan expeditions, relationships on the mountainside are deeply rooted in power. Foreign mountaineers pay tens of thousands of dollars for the privilege of climbing Mt. Everest, and Climbing Sherpas are paid to help them reach its summit, acting as guides and porters (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Peedom, 2015; Rogers & Aitchison, 1998; Shaffer, 2013). Despite the dangers of the high slopes, expedition positions, such as “Climbing Sherpa” or high-altitude guide, are more desired than lower-level positions like a trekking position, that allow Sherpas to minimise the risk of death (Adams, 1992). The annual income

discrepancies between these two positions appear to be quite significant: two or three months' pay as a Climbing Sherpa is said to be equivalent to one year's salary of a trekking guide or porter (Adams, 1992). The salary earned by Sherpas who attain these high-altitude guide positions has been estimated to be more than ten times the annual per capita income quoted by the World Bank (Frohlick, 2003).

According to Brown (2013), due to tourists' economic advantage over local community members, tourists tend to have "control" over their encounters while travelling. Furthermore, they choose to see only what aligns with their original hopes and intentions of their trip, and thus silence the realities and complexities faced by local communities. This was apparent in Shriya Shah-Klorfine's climb, as a Canadian with "no climbing experience." Shah-Klorfine succumbed to Mt. Everest during the 2012 season. It was reported that her Senior Sherpa guide's warnings that attempting the summit "could kill herself and her Sherpas" were pushed aside by Shah-Klorfine, for reasons of money spent and personal goals (CBC, 2012; D'Aliesio, 2012). Schaffer's (2013) article "The Disposable Man" in *Outside Magazine* exposes other accounts of Sherpas' fatal realities, illuminating the severity and debilitating nature of the mountaineering industry as it "kills and maims its workers for the benefit of paying clients" (para. 9). When a paying client's life, such as Shah-Klorfine's, is essentially left in the hands of their Sherpa guide, freedoms appear to be challenged within this mountainside relationship. These freedoms are taken up in my discussion chapter as they are considered alongside experiences and encounters with death in mountaineering, but first I provide a brief review of how death is understood in our modern world.

2.6 Death in Mountaineering and Tourism

High-altitude mountaineering is one of the most dangerous sports on earth requiring technical, physical, and psychological preparation (Apollo, 2017; Ortner, 1999; Wilson, Newman & Imray, 2009). Though Mt. Everest is not the most technically difficult mountain to climb, it is understood to be one of the most life threatening, known for extreme altitudes (>5500m), fatal avalanches, hurricane-force winds, and the notorious [Khumbu Icefall](#) (Apollo, 2017). Medical research shows that the incidence of acute mountain sickness ([AMS](#)) or high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) is a likely occurrence (34%) when climbing over 5000 meters above sea-level; it accounted for 85% of all the medical diagnoses made by the Everest Basecamp Medical Clinic between 2003 and 2012 (Némethy, Pressman, Freer, and McIntosh, 2015; Vardy, Vardy, & Judge, 2006). Altitude sickness can be fatal if not treated by descending to a lower altitude or increasing the amount of available oxygen (Schoene, 2008).

In Apollo's (2017) discussion around the psychophysical accessibility of mountaineering he argues that the threats of the sport (e.g., avalanches, high-altitudes, death, etc.) are not only concerns for the high mountains, but also trekking activities. Trekking too engages unpredictable circumstances and rough trails, which are often located at relatively high altitudes (cf. Burke & Walker, 2014). Accordingly, there are eleven trekking deaths in Nepal per one million days of exposure, a statistic that is nearly five times greater than the total death rate on peaks in England and Wales, and two times greater than total deaths associated with climbing the Alps (Burtscher, Philadelphy, Nachbauer, & Likar, 1995; Mu & Nepal, 2015).

Early on in mountaineering history, nearly every expedition had an unpredictable accident that resulted in the death of climbers. Ortner's (1999) book, *Life and Death on Mount Everest*, provides an extensive list of Himalayan expedition deaths in chronological order, an

indicator of the stark reality of these recreational and tourism pursuits. In 2009, Bott reported that over 200 climbers have already died on Mt. Everest alone; a figure that represents the grave statistic of approximately one climber perishing for every ten climbers that make it to the summit (Bott, 2009; Davis, 2012). The annual death rate on Everest has increased in recent years (see Figure 1); to date, over 282 mountaineers have lost their lives attempting to climb the world's tallest mountain (Arnette, 2016; Mu & Nepal, 2015). This “loss,” according to Ebert and Robertson (2013), is a fundamental aspect of risk-taking in mountaineering (p. 46).

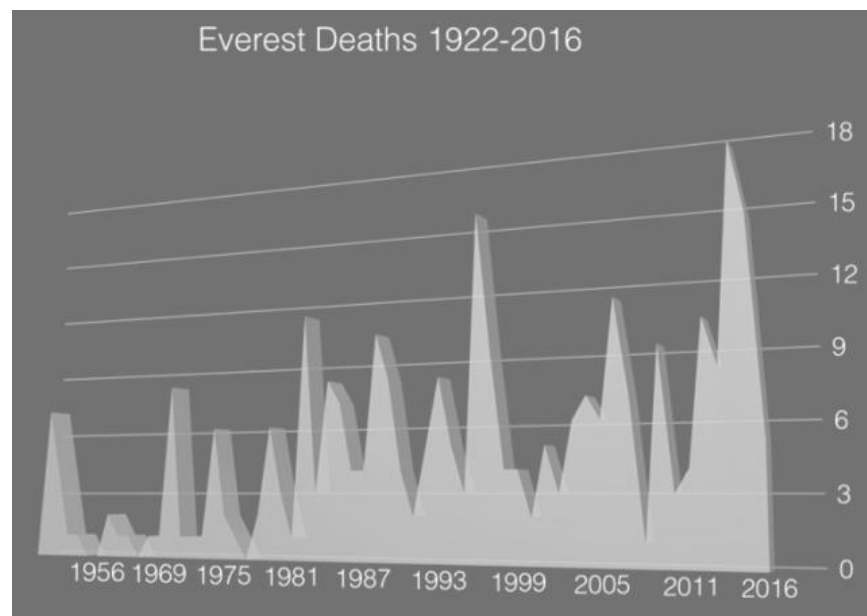


Figure 2: Annual Deaths on Mt. Everest (Himalayan Database, 2016 as cited in Arnette, 2016)

Ortner (1999) laments the misfortunes of Himalayan accidents: “There is no Sherpa at all – man, woman, or child, climber or nonclimber – who does not personally know a fellow Sherpa who was killed in mountaineering” (Ortner, 1999, p. 7). Bott (2009) talked to ten Climbing Sherpas to more deeply explore their experiences on the mountains. Nine indicated that they have experienced, at least once, bereavement of a close friend or family member lost to a mountaineering accident. Ortner (1999) reported that of the 115 climbers who died on Everest between 1950 and 1989, forty-three of them were Sherpas. More recently, the deaths of Sherpas

and other Nepali natives represent approximately 40% of all climbing deaths on Mt. Everest (Brown, 2014). However, according to Brown (2014), because Sherpas and Nepali mountain workers have died routinely within the last century, foreign tourists, guiding agencies, Nepali officials, and even some Sherpas themselves “gloss over the loss of any one particular life... death of any one Sherpa serving in this system is a kind of meaningless abstraction” (Brown, 2014, para. 3).

The imprecision and impersonal quality of statistics causes one to glance over existential conditions such as death. Walter (1984) discusses how the media contributes to this objectification, silencing the personal and embodied experiences of death through forms of voyeurism: “The deaths portrayed there [media channels], whether from war, terrorism or accidents, are typically impersonal, contextless and meaningless,” making it easier for audiences to willingly engage in viewing these deaths (Walter, 1984, p. 71). In the tourism and leisure discourses examples of voyeurism, what Walter (1984) calls “death pornography” or “enjoying death at a distance” (p. 67) include: visits to morgues and cemeteries (e.g., Seaton, 2002); Body Worlds exhibitions (e.g., Stone, 2009); holocaust or genocide tourism (e.g., Ashworth, 2002; Beech, 2009); and attractions designated to battlefields, war, or major disasters (e.g., Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Relevant to this study, voyeurism around death emerges in the ways in which media, and its consumers, find interest in tragedies like the 96’ Everest accident (e.g., books like *Into Thin Air* and *The Climb*, the film *Everest*, etc.) or the 2014 avalanche (CBC, 2014; Davis, 2014; Prettyman, 2014). The ways in which we catalogue death, and subsequently engage the topic matter, does not attend to the individual felt and lived experiences, but instead objectifies them. I turn next to a discussion of why this might be.

2.6.1 Death & modernity

Social scientists have traditionally focused on experiences, stories, and issues related to *life* and *living*, rather than with the subject of death (Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Perhaps this is because death has been largely removed from modernity. Existentialists and sociologists point out that contemporary societies have made it difficult to engage in talking about death: it is therefore suppressed from the public domain (Lee, 2002; Lewis, 2000; Stone, 2009; Walter, 1991). Death is isolated from the flow of human experience, and, according to Bauman, (1998) has become just another “problem” to be fit into mundane busy social schedules (p. 225). This is possibly due to scientific knowledge, which relegates death to a “medical nuisance to be silently and hygienically sequestered” (Varley, 2006, p. 179). Furthermore, disenchantment with death in modern times has deemed the subject matter taboo (Lee, 2002; Walter 1991); showing strong emotions towards death (or the idea of it) can be looked down upon (cf. Ortner, 1997). Thus, we continue to distance ourselves from it, and death is “muted,” or understood as “*unreal*” or “bad luck”, instead of universal and inevitable (Lewis, 2000, p. 60, emphasis in original).

From such silence arises the question: why are we avoiding discussions about death? According to existential psychotherapist, Irvin Yalom (2008), mortality has haunted individuals from the beginning of history. Yalom tells of a Babylonian story in which the hero Gilgamesh endures the death of his close friend. This tragic event is said to have created an immense fear of death for Gilgamesh ever since. In the present day,

For some of us, the fear of death manifests indirectly, either as generalized unrest or masqueraded as another psychological symptom; other individuals experience an explicit and conscious stream of anxiety about death; and for some of us the fear of death erupts

into terror that negates all happiness. (p. 284)

This fear, regardless of its guise, can be defined as “death anxiety,” “mortal terror,” or “fear of finitude,” all of which speak to the awareness of the fragility of our beings (Yalom, 1980, p. 42). It is the culmination of smaller fears such as: death (and its process) as a cause of grief, for oneself or others; the termination of participation in “life projects”; feelings of isolation and meaninglessness; and an uncertainty about what comes after death (Choron, 1964; Diggory & Rothman, 1961; Sartre, 1948; Yalom, 1980). Yalom (1998) understands that these anxieties are “ubiquitous and of such magnitude that a considerable portion of one’s life energy is consumed in the denial of death” (p. 192).

The exclusion of existential aspects of existence, like death, raises fundamental moral dilemmas for human beings (Giddens, 1991). When confronted with death, in particular one’s own death, individuals may suddenly be exposed to dread, fear, or heightened anxieties. Consequently, an individual’s perceived personal meaningfulness and rational order begin to erode (Stone, 2009) – an erosion of what Giddens (1991) would refer to as “ontological security.” Sociologists and philosophers of thanatology recognise that *being* and one’s ontological security rely on order and continuity, which aid an individual’s ability to make sense of and provide meaning to their life and daily experiences (Giddens, 1991; Stone, 2009). Berger (1967) believes that choosing to overlook death is to ignore one of the universal parameters in which both collective and individual self is constructed. Thus, he encourages societies to address this unavoidable condition.

2.7 Engaging and Addressing Death

Within the acts of conquering the summit, guiding wealthy foreign mountaineers, choosing to walk away from clients or other climbers, and dying (or sustaining injury) in an

unpredictable avalanche, lie depths of existentialism. Tourism and leisure scholars (Lewis, 2000; Stone & Sharpley, 2008), sociologists (Bauman, 1998; Berger, 1967; Shilling, 1993), and existential philosophers (Sartre, 1948; Yalom, 1980) have indicated there is something to be embodied, experienced, and perhaps learned through re-incorporating and reflecting on death and other existential concerns as an aspect of living. Lewis (2000) believes that by bringing death back to life we may encounter new possibilities for our existence, while Berger (1967) suggests that questions of death enable individuals to critique and re-consider “cognitive and normative operating procedures” of contemporary life (p. 24).

As Yalom (1980) declares, “though the physicality of death destroys an individual, the *idea* [emphasis added] of death can save him” (p. 159). Death becomes a catalyst that moves one from one state of being to a higher one, lifting the veils of progress or preoccupations (Yalom, 1980). Perhaps, this is why encounters with death have begun to appear within leisure and tourism experiences through undertakings such as dark tourism, or death-related activities and attractions (Blom, 2000; Foley & Lennon, 1996; Rojek, 1993; Seaton, 1996; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Although at first glance they can be perceived as “voyeuristic,” the aims of these activities and attractions are not to simply distract tourists or participants, but rather to inform and foster reflection (Rojek, 1993, p. 168). This was witnessed by the trekkers in Mu and Nepal’s (2015) study who indicated passing through memorial sites and graves during their trip up the mountain inspired them to reflect on the meanings of life and death.

Questions of existence do not appear to be at the fore of our modern tourism and leisure narratives (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Instead, with no easy language to discuss death, discursive contexts of society continue to impersonalise death and its meanings, silencing active, embodied, and subjective narratives of death and other existential aspects of living. It is time for tourism

scholarship to engage directly a *discussion of death*. As confrontations with death enact a vast influence upon existence (and our conduct), I argue that Sherpas' stories of living and dying provide scholars with an entry point to build deeper understandings of how freedoms are enacted in mountaineering on the Nepali mountainside. Furthermore, by contemplating existential concerns as they relate to power, we may begin to re-consider the Mt. Everest industry, and the ways we have come to know and understand development and modernity, and their effects more broadly. To provide a framework for these existential conversations, I use the next chapter to review literature around existentialism and Foucault's notions of power, and to introduce van Genep's ideas regarding liminality.

Chapter Three: Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

As hinted in the literature review, Climbing Sherpas' stories and experiences of death can provide tourism and recreation scholars with an entry point into exploring the way freedoms are practiced on the Nepali mountainside, and within the relationships of commercial mountaineering expeditions. Confrontations with existential concerns like death and freedom are "an inescapable part of the human being's existence in the world" (Yalom, 1998, p. 172). However, individuals likely experience these existential conditions differently, as you will see throughout the discussion of the findings; the Sherpas' navigations of death, and subsequently the way they exercise their freedoms, vary within the conscripted contexts of high-altitude mountaineering. Moreover, it is also critical to recognise the effects of structures and power relations on Sherpas' experiences. Therefore, to support the purpose of this research, I have chosen to briefly review ideas of existentialism, as well as Foucault's notions of power. Both of these philosophical and theoretical perspectives help to position the Climbing Sherpas' encounters with death that are presented in Chapters Five and Six, and are unpacked further in the discussion chapter. Furthermore, the theoretical web or framework presented in the next few pages has potential application beyond the context of mountaineering, and thus I have chosen to provide this discussion separate from the literature review.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of existentialism as understood by Jean Paul Sartre and Irvin Yalom, outlining what Yalom (1998) calls the "the givens" of existence. A brief examination of these existential concerns help to situate the findings – the Sherpas' stories of living and dying in mountaineering – as well as our future discussions of the concepts of death and freedom. Next, I draw attention to Foucault's notions of power, briefly reviewing the effects of disciplinary power. I contend that these understandings allow for the exploration of another

layer of the Sherpas' stories, as there are power dynamics continuously at play in the commercial mountaineering industry that arguably shape how Sherpas navigate their existential confrontations on the mountain. To add to this complex conversation, I briefly recognise the tensions between existentialism and poststructuralist thought. Finally, with existentialism and Foucault's notions of power as a philosophical backdrop, I introduce *liminality*. Liminality, an anthropological concept developed by Arnold van Gennep (1960), is used as an apparatus or concept for investigating how Sherpas' navigate their encounters and experiences with death. To begin this conversation, I first turn towards understandings of existentialism and existential consciousness.

3.1 Existentialism and Existential Consciousness

Existentialism, within a subjectivist realm, is centered on the pursuit of personal authenticity and what it is like to exist as a human being (Sartre, 1949). Championed by French intellectuals and public activists like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), existentialism denounces ethical theories such as teleology, which relates our decision-making to our flourishing, and deontology, which attributes our moral behaviour to rules and principles (Fennel, 2009; Follesdal, 1981). Instead, existential thinkers accredit agency and free will to individual consciousness. Thus, existential philosophers are suspicious of the influences society has over our authentic pursuits, claiming that individuals are self-determined, free and responsible acting agents within the world (Sartre, 1943, 1949).

Moreover, this philosophical position emphasises the existence of an individual person as free and responsible for determining her or his own development. Sartre (1943, 1949) proffers that we as individuals have unlimited freedom and responsibility for everything, describing humans as the creators of their worlds. In this conceptualisation of human as creator, freedom

and creation become one and the same. For instance, as Sherpas construct their own values, the decisions and choices they make on the mountain are based upon their own subjective value sets (Sartre, 1943). Similar sentiments are expressed in the work of Yalom (1998) who indicates “the existential position cuts below this subject-object cleavage and regards the person not as subject who can, under the proper circumstances, perceive external reality but as a consciousness who participates in the construction of reality” (p. 181). Further, due to the architecture of the human mind, we are also the creators of the structure of our external realities, of the very shape of space and time (Yalom, 1989).

Moreover, as Giles (1999) points out, it is through existential consciousness that we perceive the world about us and our relation to others, but also how we “think, contemplate, undergo emotions, and struggle with our ethical concerns” (p. 9). Indeed, it is in this idea of self-construction – the freedom to choose and create – where anxiety dwells. This appears to be the case for some of the Climbing Sherpas’ who sometimes make life threatening, and life sustaining, choices on the mountain. In the face of danger, many Sherpas confront “the givens” of existence, and often struggle as they contemplate their decisions to continue to climb wherein their choices affect more than just themselves. I now turn more fully towards Yalom’s scholarship to outline the “givens” of existence, namely death and freedom, and to further understand some of the undercurrents of existentialism on the mountainside.

3.1.1 The ‘givens’

According to Yalom, an American existential psychotherapist, all human beings face four “ultimate concerns”: death, isolation, meaninglessness, and freedom (1998, p. 172). These concerns, what he calls “the givens” of existence, are each a “fact” of life, part of the existential dynamic to be confronted by individuals. In Yalom’s words, “...if we reflect deeply upon our

‘situation’ in the world, upon our existence, our boundaries, our possibilities, if we arrive at the ground that underlies all other ground, we invariably confront the givens of existence” (1980, p.

8). Accordingly, he proffers that the givens of existence include:

The inevitability of death for each of us and for those we love; the freedom to make of our lives as we will; our ultimate aloneness; and finally, the absence of any meaning or sense to our life. However grim these givens may seem they contain the seeds of wisdom and redemption. (1989, p. 4)

An individual’s awareness of the givens of existence is catalyzed by “urgent” experiences or “boundary situations.” A boundary situation, or what Berger (1967) calls a “marginal situation,” may be understood as, but is not limited to: “one’s own death, some major irreversible decision, or the collapse of some fundamental meaning-providing schema” (Yalom, 1980, p. 8). Such situations are said to propel an individual to contemplate their existential position within our material-physical world. Moreover, it is the confrontation of the givens through these marginal or boundary situations that radically challenges social constructions and “objectivated” definitions of reality, and how we come to understand the world, others, and self (Berger, 1967, p. 44).

Standing on these boundaries brings about new perspectives of death, but also of living. Thus, as was articulated at the end of the literature review (Chapter Two), I contend that through an exploration of Sherpas’ confrontations with death – meeting their boundary situations – we might glean insights into complex tourism and leisure experiences like mountaineering. Furthermore, the possibilities that emerge from Climbing Sherpas’ boundary situations and their awareness of death aligns closely with liminality and its transformative potential, an idea I return to at the end of this chapter. However, it first is imperative to more deeply review the ways in

which death and freedom, as the givens of human existence, are understood by existentialists and sociologists.

3.1.1.1 Death

Death remains the great extrinsic facet of existence, an unavoidable condition that all societies must inevitably address (Berger, 1967). To Giddens (1991), “Death becomes point zero: it is nothing more or less than the moment at which human control over human existence finds an outer limit” (p. 162). According to Josselson (2008), overshadowing all of the ultimate concerns, “the awareness of death, our inevitable demise, is the most painful and difficult” (p. 59). As this “pain” takes form as a fear of death, playing a major role in our internal experience, “...it haunts as nothing else does; it rumbles continuously under the surface; it is a dark, unsettling presence at the rim of consciousness” (Yalom, 1980, p. 27). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this fear can also be understood as “death anxiety,” “mortal terror,” or “fear of finitude.” It speaks to an individual’s awareness of the fragility of one’s own being, representing a culmination of smaller fears, such as the grief death might cause for oneself or others, but also, more distressingly, the meaning(lessness) of one’s life (Choron, 1964; Diggory & Rothman, 1961; Yalom, 1980). These understandings of fear and “death anxiety” remerge in the discussion chapter (Chapter Seven). Moreover, they are drawn into conversation with Sherpas’ navigations of risk and death, which further help to analyse Sherpas’ performances of strength on the mountainside.

According to Yalom (1998), an individual dreads, or develops an anxiety about, losing one’s self and becoming nothingness. This distress can be made manifest from an individual’s awareness of “my death,” which tends to illuminate one’s existential isolation (p.173). Death is one of the loneliest human experiences: no one can die for another (Yalom, 1980). As Yalom

argues, “the existential conflict is thus the tension between awareness of our absolute isolation and our wish for contact, for protection, our wish to be part of a larger whole” (1998, p. 173). Consequently, isolation creates a dialogue of denial in which we convince ourselves that “I am not alone” as we try to construct a sense of self through fusion, or belongingness, with another individual, group, cause, or project (Yalom, 1980, p. 378). Therefore, although a glimpse of death illuminates the mutability of human beings and likely re-establishes existential isolation, these experiences of death can enact a vast influence upon existence and our conduct, through which we can understand our being and becoming – the way we live and grow.

Death and life are interdependent; the recognition and acceptance of death can create a sense of poignancy to life (Yalom, 1980). As it becomes apparent in the findings of this research, death has various effects on individuals’ practices of freedom, including shifting priorities and meanings in life. Thus, an exploration of Sherpas’ confrontations with death helps to further our understandings of freedom within mountaineering contexts. Thereby it is necessary to briefly consider the ways in which freedom is conceptualised.

3.1.1.2 Freedom

Freedom, as a “given,” might appear quite the opposite of death: while we dread death, we might consider freedom to be unequivocally positive (Yalom, 1980). However as discussed above, in its existential sense, freedom refers to the absence of external structure, as individuals are entirely responsible for their own world, life design, choices, and actions (Sartre, 1946; Yalom, 1998). Sartre (1946) contends that humans are condemned to be free. Adding to this claim, Yalom (1980) states, “the universe is contingent; everything that is, could have been created differently, and...the human being is not only free, but is doomed to freedom” (p. 220). Living in a universe with no inherent design positions individuals as the authors of their own

lives, and consequently responsible for the choices they make. Therefore, freedom in this sense has terrifying consequences, meaning that “beneath us there is no ground – nothing, a void, and an abyss. A key existential dynamic then, is the clash between our confrontation with groundlessness and our wish for ground and structure” (Yalom, 1980, p. 9). In Chapter Two, I discussed how this wish was reflected as the need for “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991).

In these conceptualisations of freedom lies Sartre’s (1943) notion of “authentic freedom.” Sartre describes, “I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification” (p. 259). To exist is to be freely engaged in the world, constituting it in any number of ways. Existential philosophers believe that authentic freedom is indeed a genuine possibility, and a matter of responsibility for each citizen (Fennell, 2009; Sartre, 1943; Yalom, 1980). Moreover, bearing this responsibility in mind, Yalom (1980) reminds us that an individual is responsible “...not only for one’s actions but for one’s failures to act” (p. 220). As you will see later, acts of “authentic freedom” are talked about in the Sherpas’ stories about death, an insight that reveals a connection between death and freedom.

Inextricably bound with this freedom is *will*. As a psychological construct, *will* has been claimed to be a faculty or guiding organisation. Occurring between insight and action, concerns of *will* underlie one’s capacity to implement and make choices. These choices are then experienced as effort or determination (Yalom, 1980). According to Farber (1966) there are two realms of *will*: the unconscious and the conscious. Within the first realm, one does not experience *will* consciously during an act; rather, it is inferred after an event. Here, it is experienced as pure propulsion – ideas that resonate with the psychological phenomenon of flow: an unconscious internal logic in which there is little distinction between self and environment (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Mitchell, 1983). However, as external and internal

conditions change, an individual may become more aware of their *will*, thereby aligning with Farber's (1966) second realm of *will* – a force consciously experienced during the event. This second realm is utilitarian in character and is approached through “exhortations and appeals to will power, effort, and determination” (Yalom, 1980, p. 299). For Yalom (1980), the construct of *will* is the springboard for action, as a mental agency that transforms awareness and knowledge into action; indeed it is through *willing* that freedom is enacted. *Will* as a guiding faculty appears to be at work as Climbing Sherpas exercise their freedoms on the mountain, although they never directly refer to it as what propels them to successfully reach the summit of a mountain, turn back when faced with dangerous climbing conditions, or even walk away completely from a lucrative industry position.

Conversely, individuals who might be unable to exercise *will*, and subsequently cannot assume responsibility for their choices, might be struggling with “existential guilt,” a condition arising from a deep awareness that one is not living to one's full potential (Yalom, 1980). Connecting with this idea of guilt, Sartre (1943) writes about “shame.” Differing from his notion of *being-for-itself*, a realm of consciousness that emphasises total freedom because everything we do is a matter of choice, *being-for-others* invokes shame, whereby consciousness becomes “a self” only when “acquiring personal identity by means of the gaze of another” (Levy, 2002, p. 38). Sartre (1943) provides a phenomenological description of this shame in his influential text, *Being and Nothingness*, asking us to imagine an individual bent over looking through a keyhole: “suddenly I hear a footstep. I shudder as a wave a shame seeps over me. Somebody has seen me. I straighten up. My eyes run over the deserted corridor” (p. 369). Sartre contends that with the gaze of another (or even the thought of someone else) present, an individual shifts from being a freely acting agent to an object in the world – within another's world – thus *being-for-others*.

These experiences of guilt and shame disrupt the idea of existential, authentic-freedom. Moreover, in some regard, Sartre's notion of *being-for-others* hints at the interplay between freedom and power: in the case of the abovementioned example, the power of a potential observer.

Hence, I turn next to a brief discussion of Michel Foucault and his notions of power. I believe that these additional theoretical pieces help make sense of the mountainside complexities, specifically the power relations that exist between those who *pay* and those who are *paid* to climb, as well as how they relate to existential concerns of death and freedom. I begin this conversation with a quick overview of Foucault's philosophies and how they differ from those of existentialist philosophers. I then outline how Foucault understands power more generally, and finally turn to the concept of disciplinary power, which helps to analyse and assess the inescapable power relations that exist on the mountain.

3.2 Michel Foucault and Power

French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984), was one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of the post-World War II era – an intellectual context dominated by Marxism and existential phenomenology (Downing, 2008). Notorious for his rhetoric regarding “self” and “subject”, “power” and “knowledge”, much of Foucault's corpus explains how we are both subjects to and the subjects of the workings of power relations (Downing, 2008, p. 2). Highly suspicious of universal or authentic truths, like those purported by existential philosophers, Foucault believed there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding beyond history and society. Rather, knowledge is a result of power, which shapes discourse, affirming what can and cannot be known to be “true” within a given society (Foucault,

1978). Many of Foucault's works, starting with *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), were concerned with this exercise of power in society (see also, Foucault, 1973, 1977, 1978).

Although subtle traces of existentialism can be found buried within the intellectual philosophies of Foucault, they are often expressed in forms of critique or resistance (Downing, 2008). Instead, Foucault styled himself differently than the existential philosophers of the 1950s and 60s by diverging from understandings of universality to those of specificity. Foucault did not believe he could pose as a “master of truth and justice” and convey general profundities to the masses; rather he identified how power relations contribute to “truth,” and thus how we must be politically sensitive to ways in which knowledge is locally configured (Downing, 2008, p. 4). As Rabinow (1984) has posited, Foucault's main tactic was to historicise grand abstractions and those broad conceptual markers such as “life” or “human nature,” which he believed had little importance in the internal changes of scientific disciplines (p. 4). Therefore, Foucault was not concerned with existence directly, but instead with “social functions that such concepts [like human nature] have played in the context of practices (e.g. economics, politics, sociology)” (p.4). Therefore, the absence of structure proposed in existential notions of freedom contradicts the philosophies of poststructural thinkers, like Foucault, who reject possibilities of effacing power relations and returning to a true, just, and free condition (Foucault, 1994; Hodgson, 2010).

Rather, Foucault (1978) posits that, “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (p. 93). Moreover, *power relations* practiced through action of the self, on the self, and on others contribute to freedom (Foucault, 1994). For Foucault, freedom is not a state we occupy, but rather a practice we undertake. During an interview, Foucault drew a parallel between intentionally throwing the interviewer's tape recorder to the ground, and the relationship between power and freedom. He explained:

[I]f... that is to say, I'm not forcing you at all and I'm leaving you completely free – that's when I begin to exercise power. It's clear that power should not be defined as a constraining act of violence that represses individuals, forcing them to do something or preventing them from doing some other thing. But it takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects, and this relation is unbalanced, so that one can act upon the other, and the other is acted upon, or allows himself to be acted upon. (Foucault, 1980 as cited in Taylor, 2011, p. 5)

Thereby, power is fluid and never exclusive to one body or actor; it should not be considered static or entirely possessed by any one institution. Furthermore, power is not necessarily a negative force, used only to oppress and subjugate, but power can also be productive, constructive, and used as resistance (Foucault, 1978).

For Foucault, power relations are continuously shifting. According to Taylor (2011) then, it is no accident or surprise, that Foucault believes freedom is “ongoing work” (p. 6). Therefore, the focus of understanding power relations, and subsequently freedom, should be on *how* power moves within society: “We must seek, rather, the pattern of modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process” (p. Foucault, 1978, 37-38).

According to tourism scholar Keith Hollinshead (1999), Foucault's notions of power can lend to our understandings of what kinds of power and authority may flow within or across “host” and “Other” populations and communities, and what the dynamics of those powers might look like.

Findings presented throughout this critical narrative inquiry reveal that power is inextricably linked to freedom, adding to the complexities of Sherpas' stories of death on the mountainside. Thus, power dynamics in mountaineering are vital to consider. The differentiation between the paying and the paid, and the inherent power imbalance presupposed in such working

relationships emerged frequently throughout the Sherpas' stories. As is made clear in the discussion of the findings, Sherpas talked about this presence of power, and often insinuated its effects even through their subtle uses of words and phrases (e.g., "I have to"). Moreover, these discussions more clearly illuminate the industry dynamics and the ways in which Sherpas' are disciplined by such power. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a very brief overview of Foucault's notion of disciplinary power as one way to understand the ever-shifting power that shapes relationships on the mountainside.

3.2.1 Disciplinary power

Foucault's renowned *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* was first published in 1975 as a means to articulate the differentiating and distinct nature of disciplinary power from the practices of sovereign power (Rabinow, 1984). Power, in both respects, is concerned about the body. However, unlike sovereign power in which the body becomes an object of violence and honour, disciplinary powers endeavour to meticulously and continuously control the actions of the body (Foucault, 1977). By targeting bodies, disciplinary power produces and constitutes individuals. According to Foucault, "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific techniques of a power that regards individuals as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (1977, p. 170). The methods used to control or correct operations of the body are understood as "disciplines," and the effects of this power finds momentum and success through several basic techniques: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and examination, which at times comes together under one mechanism of control understood as surveillance (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault claims, "the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which techniques that make it possible to see induced effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are

applied clearly visible” (1977, p. 170-171). Central to this observation are ideas of surveillance and a corrective gaze, a practice of discipline that evolved along with observatory technologies. Influenced by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham’s architectural figure of the panopticon, Foucault suggests that surveillance was, and still is, used as a modality to exercise disciplinary power that is both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere, and discreet, functioning permanently and largely in silence (Foucault, 1977; Rabinow, 1984). Indeed, the omnipresence of an “observer” contributes to the way one behaves, “as if they are being watched”; discipline and punishment become internalised, and eventually behaviour becomes self-regulated (Downing, 2008, p. 82).

Foucault’s ideas of disciplinary power and surveillance challenge the way freedoms are practiced, and how we understand how individuals constitute themselves. Rather than behaviours and decisions being products of existential freedom and acts of will, Climbing Sherpas’ actions and decisions on the mountainside are reflective of induced effects of power. Moreover, to Foucault (1973), the gaze “is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting, at the same time, a supreme mastery: the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates” (p. 39). The power induced by the gaze, the presence of someone else, was also indicated in the above discussion about existential freedom, whereby an individual acts differently as they become aware of the potential of being watched. Thereby, disciplinary power in this sense exposes complexities of acting with authentic freedom. Yet what happens when death is brought back into the conversation? What becomes of power and consequently freedom? In the discussion to follow, I introduce the idea of death as a liminal moment, illuminating some of the previously discussed tensions and paradoxes between freedom and power.

3.3 Death as a Liminal Moment

It is the condition of death that “makes it possible for us to live life in an authentic fashion” (Yalom, 1998, p.187). As existentialists and sociologists suggest, individuals who have broached their boundary situation may begin to question the meaning of their own existence, through the nonpareil and inevitable nature of death (Berger, 1967; Yalom, 1980). Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2011) suggest that *liminality* allows an individual to actively consider the possibilities for constructing new cultural resources and altering strategies of action. Drawing on van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner’s (1969) understandings of liminality, I argue that encounters with death, and near-misses, on the mountain can be conceptualised and understood as liminal moments. In these moments of uncertainty, Climbing Sherpas may begin to exercise freedoms differently.

3.3.1 Liminality

Liminality, an anthropological concept introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1960), and further conceptualised by Victor Turner (1969), may be regarded as a cultural apparatus, characterised by heightened reflexivity, in which individuals are able to reflect on and critique the normative social structure, as well as explore new possibilities. Here, moments of liminality can be defined as “suspensions of quotidian reality, occupying privileged spaces where people are allowed to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily life” (Turner, 1987, p. 102). Hence, liminality becomes adaptive and transformative as individuals and communities use these moments to appraise their lives, taking stock of their meaning and significance.

The notion of liminality first appeared in van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage*, what he understood as “rites that accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age” (van

Genep, 1960 as cited in Turner, 1969, p. 94). These rites were often enacted within tribal initiation rituals, provoking “transition” through three distinct phases: separation, margin, and aggregation (or reincorporation) (Turner, 1969). Turner further developed understandings of the second “margin” phase, what he called a “liminal period,” recognising that the characteristics of an individual undergoing the ritual become ambiguous as she or he “passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (1969, p. 94). In these moments it is as though individuals are reduced to a universal or uniform condition to be transformed, emerging from their symbolic ceremony with “additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (p. 103).

The term liminal derives from the Latin word “threshold” and those who enter into these thresholds find themselves “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Therefore, liminal moments are likened to: being in the womb; bisexuality; wilderness; the eclipse of the sun and the moon; and, most significant to this research, death (Turner, 1969). An extreme conceptualisation of liminality is evident in Lewin’s (1947) “cultural islands” as purposeful isolation that is used to change undesired behaviours or ideologies of a smaller group within a larger cultural setting. Correspondingly, liminality is regarded as a “symbolic realm in which possibility and the ambiguous— the simultaneous presence of the familiar and unfamiliar, the existing and new—not only prevail but are heightened” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011, p. 525). Analogous to the subjunctive – a conditional tense – liminality is full of potency and possibility (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Turner, 1979).

More recently, ideas of liminality have been adopted from cultural studies and applied in disciplines such as consumer sciences (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015; Elliot, Harris, &

Baron, 2005; Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, & Lacey, 2012), organisational studies (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), and disaster studies (Jencson, 2001; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999) to explore the impacts of social and structural disruption. According to Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (1999), “Disasters take a people back to fundamentals” (p. 1). In these devastating moments, “victims” expand their sense of self, community, and purpose-revealing experiences of transformation and survival (Jencson, 2001). Cheung and McColl-Kennedy (2015) suggest that during periods of disaster and displacement, a strong collective bond is formed. In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I illuminate how Sherpas’ encounters with death can be understood as moments of liminality. In these moments, individual Sherpas actively consider counter possibilities as they thoughtfully deliberate what is truly important and meaningful to them and their communities (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2011; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). Additionally, from the ways in which Sherpas story their navigations of death, we glean further insight about freedom.

3.4 Freedom, Power, and Liminality

Underpinned by existentialism and Foucault’s notions of power, explorations of Climbing Sherpas’ stories of death afford thoughtful deliberations of complex experiences on the Nepali mountainside. Such investigations contribute to understandings of power and freedom, and the interplay between them, in commercial mountaineering contexts. Further, liminality as the final piece of this theoretical web provides a useful conduit to conceptualise Sherpas’ navigations of death, revealing space for freedom to be enacted despite existing power dynamics. Liminality, as it is taken up in this project, reveals new insights into the paradoxes between freedom and power as they relate to development. I argue that death as liminal moments can shifts the effects of power, imparting opportunities for new freedoms. Thereby scholars may begin to re-consider the development of risky industries, their inherent power structures and their

effects more broadly. In the next chapter, I review the narrative and visual methodologies that informed my research approach as well as the various decisions made while in both the field and editing room.

Chapter Four: Visualising a Critical Narrative Inquiry

My critical narrative approach has been shaped by philosophical and theoretical positions underpinned by existentialism, as well as Foucault's notions of power. Existence is defined by phenomenological experience; accessing and subsequently representing such depths is a complex task. Thus, it was important for me to align with these experiential notions, implementing a methodological approach that would foster opportunities for the Climbing Sherpas and I (and eventually our audiences) to embody, live in, feel, and sense as we created meaning together (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). More specifically, visual and sensorial methods were applied to attend to the multilayered, relative, and particular narratives of Sherpas' experiences on Mt. Everest (Crotty, 1998; Richardson, 1997).

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology, the processes that underpinned my project, and the particular methods that I implemented (Crotty, 1998). I provide an overview of narrative as the overarching methodology, and discuss how visual and sensorial methodologies (e.g., Pink, 2013, 2015) align with many of the narrative tenets that guided research fieldwork and data collection. I then offer a brief description of the specific methods used for data collection and analysis, and narrative construction, before finally describing my decision to represent the Sherpas' stories using "narrative conversations" and a short documentary film.

4.1 Telling About and Knowing Of the World Narratively

Narrative inquiry as an epistemological practice was in place well before authors and researchers began charting and mapping its boundaries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), intersections (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), and border crossings (Bhattacharya, 2013). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) remind us that, "Human beings have lived and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as

long” (p. 35). Narratives, oral or written, are short topical stories. These stories could include an encounter with another individual, longer extended stories about a significant aspect of one’s life like working on Mt. Everest, or an account of life from birth to present (Chase, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Narrative research approaches have been around since the 1920s and 30s when Chicago School sociologists were collecting personal documents and life histories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). The methodology gained increasing traction during the liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s, when feminist researchers took interest in the stories of marginalised groups. These feminists recognised research “subjects” as active narrative agents, and their personal stories as more than merely “informational” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 2; see also Riessman, 2008). In accordance with some of these early critical scholars, I acknowledge the significance of individual narratives as windows into new or silenced historical, cultural, personal, and social processes.

Despite some of the notable foundations of narrative, “researchers new to this field will find a rich but diffuse tradition, multiple methodologies in various stages of development, and plenty of opportunities for exploring new ideas, methods, and questions” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Holstein and Gubrium (2012) contend that the popularity of narrative extends from these multiple, broad, and inclusive definitions and parameters. Nonetheless, what many narrative researchers do hold in common is an understanding that *stories* account for *human experience* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Coles, 1989; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988). Polkinghorne (1988) indicates that narratives are human experiences organised in sequenced, meaningful episodes. Seen as both a method and the phenomenon of study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006; Chase, 2005), narrative is influenced by hermeneutics and attempts to make sense of reality: reality according to the lived and told experiences of

individuals (Creswell, 2009; Daly, 2007).

Narratives contribute to the means by which individuals come to know their own cultural practices and epistemic statuses, their beliefs and justifications of what they think they know. People make sense of what has happened and is happening around them by attempting to assemble these happenings within one or more narratives (Daly, 2007; Somers, 1994). In turn, these lived and told stories, and the “talk about the stories” are ways in which we fill our world with meaning, and “enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35). Narrative for Coles (1989) is a *conversation* and a sharing of information back and forth, in which similar experiences and events have potential to bring people closer together. Cole’s understandings of narrative are of particular relevance to my approach, whereby the conversations that unfolded between the Climbing Sherpas and I, contributed to our understandings, and eventually my representations, of the complex stories of the Nepali mountainside.

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterised as a fusion of interdisciplinary analytic lenses and approaches, drawing from both traditional and innovative methods and strategies (Chase, 2005; Lieblich, Mashiach-Tuval, & Zilber, 1998; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In trying to capture what narrative researchers do, Chase (2005) explained:

In one way or another... narrative researchers listen to the narrator's voices – to the subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities – within each narrator’s story. This process usually includes attention to the “narrative linkages” that a storyteller develops between the biographical particulars of his or her life, on the one hand, and the resources and constraints in his or her environment for self and reality construction, on the other. (p. 663)

Richardson (1997) describes narrative inquiry as “both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation. People can ‘apprehend’ the world narratively and people can ‘tell’ about the world narratively” (p. 118). Further, she discusses how narratives allow us to contemplate the effects of our actions, which can alter the directions of our lives.

Narrators and storytellers may be guided to act, narrate, and re-present in certain ways, and not others. Somers (1994) suggests that this is based upon the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiple, but ultimately limited, repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives. Accordingly, researchers that engage in narrative are cautioned because stories and events are not necessarily chronologically ordered, nor do they necessarily assert the speaker’s perspective or standpoint (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Indeed, social contexts, discursive resources, and communicative circumstances condition stories, which include: group culture, organizational or institutional settings, social locations, and formal and informal relationships (Chase, 2005, 2011). Many of these contexts and circumstances emerged during my fieldwork in Nepal. For example, my inability to speak Nepali or Sherpa led to continuous navigations of culture and language differences, but also contributed to the “conditions of narrativity” for the Climbing Sherpas, many of whom insisted on speaking English despite their level of proficiency (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 8) – a discussion point I expand upon later in this chapter. However, next I introduce ideas of *sensoriality* (Pink, 2009) and the use of visual methods as ways to engage critical narrative inquiry. I tend to the relationships between images, words, and knowing. Additionally, I discuss the use of audio-visual methods as a way of accessing and representing elements of experiences, and the memories and imaginaries related to them (Pink, 2011).

4.2 A Sensorial-Narrative Approach

Anthropologist Sarah Pink (2009, 2015) contends that stories are apprehended through our interconnected and interrelated sense organs, which inform the narratives that we live, experience, tell, and re-tell. Accordingly, multisensorial experiences are integral to both, the lives of people who participate in our research, and to how we as researchers practice our craft (Pink, 2015). Departing from classic anthropological observation approaches (cf. Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2008; Geertz, 1983), sensorial approaches to research use reflexive and experiential processes to engage understandings and ways of knowing, and have theoretical commitments to ideas and practices such as place, memory, and imagination (Pink, 2015). For instance, Irving's (2010) anthropological research explored the experience of New Yorker, Alberto, being diagnosed as HIV positive. As Alberto retraced his steps through the city, re-storying the day of his diagnosis, Irving audio-recorded their conversations while also taking photographs of key locations encountered during the walk. Irving's intention here was not to re-tell Alberto's narrative or interpret the exact relationship between the images and the text; rather, his work relied upon Alberto's words, and the audiences' (readers and viewers) imagination to understand how people experience space and time, and the world in which they live (Irving, 2010). Similarly, Pink (2015) stresses this situatedness of knowing, and argues that neither humans nor knowing are static. She draws on Harris' (2007) understanding that "knowing is continuous and processual, it is situated and it is bound up with human engagement, participation and movement" (p.4). Such notions underpin the "walking with video" methods Pink has implemented, which have allowed her to "move *through* and be *in* and part *of* an environment with a participant" (2011, p. 273, emphasis in original).

Many researchers and anthropologists of the senses, draw on philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on embodiment and the phenomenology of perception. They believe that perceptions begin in the body and are interconnected, rather than differentiated (Geurts, 2003; Ingold, 2000; Pink, 2011). These ideas reject empiricist models that suggest external objects stimulate our internal organs, and further supports the notion that the modern western five-sense sensorium is a cultural construct (Howes, 2005). According to Ingold (2000), "the eyes and ears should not be understood as separate keyboards for the registration of sensation but as organs of the body as a whole, in whose movement within an environment, the activity of perception consists" (p. 268). Further, Pink (2011) suggests that working with these ideas requires individuals to go beyond observation, and to reflexively draw on their own existing biographical experiences (as researchers, research participants, and film viewers). Here, previous experiences are used to comprehend the sensory process. For instance, when I reviewed video clips of Tashi Sherpa climbing up a mountain during a snowstorm, or in my discussions around fear with Phuri Sherpa (both Sherpa participants interviewed in this study), I inevitably returned to some of my own experiences of risk-taking. In doing so, I was able to recognise my sensory embodied responses to the participants' stories, and the textures, emotions, and situations with which they engaged. Consider the following excerpt from my reflexive journal, a space I used to contemplate my understandings throughout my fieldwork and analysis processes.

March 31, 2015 – I could sense fear

Phuri performed and communicated details of climbing the mountain, which more clearly illuminated the fabrics of fear within his story. “It’s very dangerous. Look, we have to put the ladders to cross,” Phuri indicated, bridging his arm between the bench and the table that sat before him. Quickly bouncing his right knee up and down, he continued, “Due to fear, sometimes our body is a little bit shaky too!” His active engagement with objects in the room, hand gestures, depiction of the sense of shaking, and raw emotions created an emplaced and sensorial narrative for us to experience and embody together. My heart thumped quickly, as I envisioned Phuri trying to calm the shake of his legs while forging across an aluminum ladder laid over hundreds of meters of black abyss in the notorious [Khumbu Icefall](#). Understanding what this shakiness feels like, I began to empathise with Phuri – thinking to my own previous climbing experiences, perched high on a precarious ledge paralysed by the trembling that consumed my body. This shared emplacement fostered an opportunity for me to deepen my understandings of Phuri’s story by encouraging me to imagine his situatedness. In these moments I could feel and sense the fears that eventually led him away from his position as a high-altitude Climbing Sherpa.

Illuminated above, *sensoriality* was central to how my participants and I made sense of their stories and experiences. According to Pink (2007) “...sensoriality is fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people’s lives... and is increasingly central to academic and applied practice in the social sciences and humanities” (p. 7). Narrative projects that engage sensoriality foster space for narrators (e.g., Sherpas, researcher) and audiences (e.g., academics, mountaineers, policy makers, etc.) to re-conceptualise stories and experiences through the senses. Within these sensorial-narrative approaches lies an understanding that senses are interconnected, and the focus is on the role of subjectivities and experience.

As part of sensorial encounters, visuals bear an important relationship to written or spoken word within knowledge creation and theoretical discussions (Pink, 2007, 2015). Accordingly, tourism researcher and visual methodologist Carolyn Scarles (2010) suggests that

we must “reposition visuals as pathways *to* and *of* multisensual encounters: tools for complementing, reinforcing and sharing the visualities of the practices and processes of both their production and consumption” (p. 921, emphasis in original). Oriented by these epistemological leanings, I implemented audio and visual methods such as video, photography, and audio recordings throughout data collection, analysis, and representation processes. These methods were implemented to invoke alternative ways of engaging, responding, and reflecting on the Climbing Sherpas’ narratives and their sensuous, emplaced, and embodied meanings. Before providing a detailed discussion of the methods used in this study, I first highlight how visual methodologies are conceptualised, and how apprehending visuals aligns within my sensorial-narrative approach.

4.2.1 Visuals as part of sensorial experiences

Images are everywhere, permeating our everyday lives and inhabiting our imaginations, and therefore are “inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, time, space, place, reality and truth” (Pink, 2013, p. 1). Thus, visuals are an inevitable part of the experiential environments we engage in research, and integral to how we experience, learn, and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge (Pink, 2013; Prosser, 1998). In John Berger’s (1972) book, *Ways of Seeing*, he illuminates the importance of the visual in our knowing of the world. “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak” (Berger, 1972 p.7); for many individuals this holds true.

These complex relations between visuals and knowledge date back to the evolution of humankind and ancient cave drawings as a means of communication (Prosser, 1998). More recently, this relationship can be linked to the contexts of Western modern science, in which the

world was understood as a seen phenomenon and observable data was the basis of knowledge (Jenks, 1995; Harper, 2000). However, according to Prosser (1998) images are not only used to represent the objective world, but also to communicate some of our deepest feelings. Studies of these images, and their systems, have long been taken up in anthropology, encompassing a wide range of visual forms including: film, photography, “tribal” art, television, cinema, and digital media. All of these visual forms are united by their material presence (Banks, 1998).

A shift in focus in anthropological studies and the production of ethnographic films in the 1960s led to a new experiential emphasis in these films, whereby they increasingly became valued for their insights into lived experiences of other cultures (Banks, 1998). Abandoning notions of objective science, anthropologists, like Pink (2013) and MacDougall (1998, 2005) argue that visual images should be regarded as equally meaningful elements in ethnographic work. Pink (2013) contends there is no essential hierarchy of knowledge or media representation, rather both the written and spoken word, and visuals, complement each other as types of knowledge that may be experienced and represented in different ways. Scarles (2010) argues “where words fail, visuals ignite” (p. 921); images may convey what words cannot, providing alternative methods to more deeply explore and share participant understandings (Banks, 2007; Rakic & Chambers, 2010). Furthermore, over the last two decades, video cameras have become increasingly affordable, smaller and more portable, and easier to operate (Collier & Collier, 1986; Morphy & Banks, 1997; Pink, 2013). Thus, by the late 1990s researchers from varying social science disciplines began to engage with video, recognising the benefits of film and the increasing accessibility of digital video technologies. Digital cameras and smart phones continue to open up new possibilities for reflexive uses of video recording, and visuals, within research production and dissemination. This phenomenon, understood as a “pictorial” or “visual” turn, is

evident across many disciplines and fields of study (Feighey, 2003; Mitchell, 1994; Rakic' & Chambers, 2010), such as geography (e.g. Crang, 2003) or sociology (e.g. Harper, 2005); however, for the purpose of this dissertation I briefly tend to the “visual turn” as it pertains to the interdisciplinary studies of tourism.

4.2.1.1 Visuals in tourism studies

The ocular-centric nature of tourism is widely recognised by tourism academics as well as by tourists and locals (cf. Urry, 1990). Early work on visuals in tourism by Albers and James (1988) and Cohen (1993) drew attention to well-rehearsed methods of content and semiotic analysis of tourist media; however, Feighey (2003) argues that much of tourism research does not reflect the significance of the visual. Despite images being described and criticised (c.f. Cohen, 1993), many forms of visual evidence available to tourism researchers are not engaged, and are even less represented within tourism studies literature (Feighey, 2003; Scarles, 2010). Perhaps this is in part because using visual methodologies is an implementation and representational balancing act, and a potential site for post-colonial critique. For instance, Banks (2001) critiques the evolution of *visual anthropology* cautioning, “while in some ways very different positions – film as science, film as experience – there is an underlying commonality between them. Both positions hold film to be a tool, something that allows ‘us’ to understand more about ‘them’” (p.10). I expressed many of these concerns throughout my fieldwork (cf. Miller, 2016), as I was continuously apprehensive about taking out my camera. The following reflection illuminates some of the concerns I had, while in the field, about using my camera as a tool to understand, and subsequently to re-tell and re-produce knowledge.

April 5, 2015 – Gazing in...

I lie along the perimeter of Rinchen Sherpa's one-room house on a cushioned bench amongst him and his family, all who still sleep soundly. I peer across the room. Concerns of Othering and the "gaze" spiral in my consciousness as I begin to write. I can't seem to bring myself to take out my camera to "capture" some of the unique (to me) experiences I've been experiencing throughout my stay. While I believe recording imagery and video footage of people, their lives and behaviours, is important in telling the Climbing Sherpas' stories I am continuously apprehensive and conscious of where and when I point my camera. Among the varying socioeconomic situations of my research participants, I often feel discouraged or guilty of my own privileges, walking around with a big DSLR camera swinging from my neck. Much of the time, I find myself only taking my camera out in interview settings. While in Sherpas' homes (like Rinchen's) or trekking from village to village, I pass my camera off to my Sherpa guide Ngima, who loves photography and often asks to use it. I think underpinning this apprehension is my hope to avoid sending the message "I'm a tourist, here to document my encounter with the 'Other'" But as a white-female-North American-tourist-researcher-amateur filmmaker using visual methodologies, I can't help but think was this in some fundamental way, what I was indeed doing...?

Visual methodologies have been critiqued for colonial underpinnings, where cameras render the researcher/filmmaker active and the film subject, our research participants, almost entirely passive (Banks, 2001). In light of such critiques, much debate and research has been generated around questions of ethics in visual research (e.g., Banks, 2001; Clark, 2012; Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2013; Rowe, 2011). This literature provides researchers (including tourism researchers) who would like to take up visuals and filmic practices in their work, with a starting point to evaluate the ethical implications of such methods. I explore some of my ethical deliberations in the section entitled, "Methodological Considerations & Responsible Border Crossings."

In addition to the ethical and colonial considerations of visually oriented researchers, Feighey (2003) believes that tourism scholars are less engaged with visual technologies due to

limited training in the production and analysis of visual data in tourism studies. Correspondingly, there are even fewer avenues for disseminating image-based research, and visual representations are perceived to be harder to publish than traditional text-based work (Feighey, 2003; Rakic' & Chambers, 2010, 2012). As I wrap up my own dissertation, this has become a concern for me as well, leading to some of my deliberate choices to supplement my visual research findings with written text. Nonetheless, despite the aforementioned hesitations and concerns of tourism scholars, I think we have indeed entered our “visual turn” – visual methodologies are increasingly gaining traction throughout tourism research. In the last decade or so images have been engaged in various ways including: analysis of postcards and photography (e.g., Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Caton & Santos, 2008); photographs as a means for elicitation in interviews (e.g., Cederholm, 2004; Garrod, 2007; MacKay & Couldwell, 2004); online visual blogging (e.g., Dwivedi & Yadav, 2009; Muldoon & Mair, 2016) and visitor guide books (e.g., Noy, 2008); visual autoethnography to explore embodied performances of tourists' experiences (e.g., Scarles, 2010); and, most relevant to my work, academic filmmaking (e.g., Rakic' & Chambers, 2010) and video narratives (e.g., Griffin, 2015).

Film and video productions, particularly documentaries, about tourism are not necessarily a novelty (cf. Pegi Vail's (2014) *Gringo Trails*); however, Rakic' and Chambers (2010) note that such representations seem to be created by artists and production companies and later used for educational purposes (cf. Peterson, 1996). Thus, they argue academics engaged in tourism research are likely to be better equipped to lead visual tourism research, and thereby encourage more “academic filmmaking” within the tourism field. Academic filmmaking is “an innovative visual research technique, which can be used alongside more traditional research methods to approach research topics in a new way and, importantly, to create tourism knowledge which can

be made accessible to wider audiences” (Rakic’ & Chambers, 2010, p. 380). Although this approach to research can rely on both “research-found” (e.g., participants’ photographs and videos) and “research-created” visual data, academic filmmaking primarily aligns with the creation of visuals through audio and video recordings, to capture narratives of experience (Feighey, 2003, p. 81-82; see also Rakic’ & Chambers, 2010). Visual data “created” during the research process can be used for the analysis and interpretation of findings, complementing or sometimes substituting text (Rakic’ & Chambers, 2009); this allows for new and multiple meanings to be conveyed within research representations. Additionally, according to Griffin (2015), videos can serve as an engaging medium to elicit stories, contributing to a broader co-construction of knowledge.

It is through these visual methods that participants of research have more opportunities to represent themselves, and more importantly “it allows the visual and verbal presence of the ‘respondent’ rather than the mediation of the researcher” (Feighey, 2003, p. 82). Furthermore, filmic approaches can illuminate the inevitable interplay between the researchers and the researched, as researchers may choose to appear in their films (Rakic’ & Chambers, 2010). In the case of my short documentary representation, *Climbing Sherpa: Stories form the Solukhumbu*, I have maintained a subtle audible and visible presence throughout, to provide a more reflexive account of the research process. Visuals were collected as part of multisensory encounters during my fieldwork. They foster the potential to move the Climbing Sherpas’ narratives into emplaced and multi-dimensional spaces, creating possibilities of new fragmented stories with which audiences can view, engage, embody, and sense (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pink, 2015).

4.3 Methods for Sensing, Embodying, and Storying Experiences

Cultural studies scholar Jim McGuigan recognises, “most good researchers know, it is not unusual to make up the methods as you go along” (1997, p. 2). Indeed, particular projects are interwoven with theory, with our own biographies as researchers, and are ultimately shaped by the participants’ situations (Josephides, 1997; Pink, 2013). For these reasons, Josephides (1997) implores, “we have to construct our theories of how to do field work *in the field*” (p. 32, emphasis in original). This same sentiment is applied to multimedia technologies and visual methods, which are not necessarily transferred from one project to the next. Rather they evolve from project to project, sometimes inspiring new methodologies and practices (Pink, 2013). In accordance, procedures for conducting narrative research do not always follow a lock-step approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As narrative and visual research processes are fluid, at times unpredictable, and relational in nature, I entered the field under the assumption that some of my proposed methods would shift and change. Although the basis of the procedures remained the same, many were creatively developed as I ascended the mountain (and further into my data collection). I turn next to discuss these methods. At times I offer brief excerpts from my reflexive journal, outlining moments of pause as I navigated the shifting terrain of my project, and the mountainside. Moreover, the following sections outline how I engaged participation and observations (e.g., trekking, pujas, etc.), conducted emplaced interviews, elicited sensorial narratives, and used audio-visual media to document these multisensory stories and encounters (Pink, 2009).

4.3.1 Mapping out my fieldwork

After consultation and approval from the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) at the University of Waterloo, I began to map out my fieldwork and research process. My own personal

relationships in Nepal, the individuals I met during my visit in 2013, and my North American friends who have connections with Sherpas and the mountaineering industry of Nepal, influenced the beginning stages of fieldwork. One such relationship led to a fruitful conversation, and spiralled into an emergent recruitment process. I was introduced to Ang Tharkay Sherpa¹³, who expressed interest in my research. Although now a resident of the United States of America living in Michigan, Ang Tharkay had previous experience as a Mt. Everest [Climbing Sherpa](#), and maintained connections with a trekking and mountaineering expedition company operating in Kathmandu, Nepal. Ang Tharkay initiated a conversation with me on February 25, 2015 via email after a mutual Canadian friend introduced us.

My priority at the time was finding a guide and interpreter who could communicate and translate in English, Nepali, and Sherpa languages as I ascended into mountain villages within the [Solukhumbu](#) region. My correspondence with Ang Tharkay, led to introductions to the co-owners and managers of [Mega Adventures International](#) in [Kathmandu](#), Nepal, and eventually a young Sherpa man, [Ngima](#), to act as my guide and interpreter. As there are hundreds of expedition and guiding services to Mt. Everest, many of them operating out of the same tourist hub commonly known as [Thamel](#), I was relieved to have a direct point of contact in Kathmandu upon arrival.

4.3.1.1 Recruitment of Climbing Sherpas

Recruitment of the Sherpas for this study took place between March and April of 2015. It should be noted, however, that I had originally proposed to contact nine to twelve high-altitude [Climbing Sherpas](#) who **previously held** guide or porter positions for Everest expeditions and were **no longer working** for a commercial company or organisation. My plan was to recruit

¹³ This is a pseudonym for anonymity purposes. Pseudonyms are only applied occasionally throughout this document, when permission was not received to use original names for people or companies. I continue to indicate when pseudonyms are used.

these research participants once I arrived at the villages within the Solukhumbu region, building rapport and connections with Sherpa community members. My rationale behind this recruitment strategy was based upon two main assumptions. First, I assumed that because this project was unable to maintain participant anonymity due to the use of visual methods, there might be foreseeable risks for Sherpas who rely on expedition positions as their primary source of income. Therefore, they may be unwilling to share certain aspects of their stories or experiences during an interview, or might be tempted to manipulate details due to their reliance on the industry. The other reason I sought to originally recruit retired climbers was because I assumed that commercialised companies may not agree to grant me access to their employees, as these organisations will inevitably lose control of what may or may not be said about their company. However, after in-depth conversations with several organisations and companies (including Mega Adventures International), along with the insights received from current and active Climbing Sherpas, my recruitment strategy and “predetermined criterion of importance” shifted (Patton, 2002, p. 238).

Contrary to my initial thoughts, many of the younger climbers, whom I met at Kathmandu’s local indoor-rock climbing gym, were very interested in sharing their stories and did not think participation would affect their own, or other Sherpas’ current (and potential future) employment. This is perhaps because many climbers work as freelance guides and climbers, and though one company will employ an individual for multiple years, climbers “go where the work is,” which is often distributed to individuals based upon familial or relational ties (P. Sherpa, personal communication, March 3, 2015). Further, video recording was not a deterrent, as I originally assumed. One individual expressed that filming these stories seemed very necessary, and critical. Perhaps this was because there had been some grassroots movements for better

working conditions and insurance policies for active Climbing Sherpas. Many young Sherpas believed that these visual narratives (particularly the stories of younger/newly employed guides) would provide a platform for different perspectives on such complex issues.

Thus, during by the second week of March 2015, I submitted amendments to the University Waterloo's ORE, modifying my research participant sample criteria. The new criteria for participation in my study included: employed and retired climbers, being of Sherpa descent, and those currently working or those who have worked as a porter and/or guide on an Mt. Everest expedition. By including both employed and retired Sherpas' stories in this research, I would have a greater understanding of some of the historical changes within the mountaineering industry in addition to the ways varying demographics (age, employment status, etc.) might play into narratives of death and freedom. As long as climbers met the aforementioned criteria, the study was open to both men and women of varying ages and stages within their careers. It should be mentioned, however, that although many climbers within Nepal's mountaineering industry are not of Sherpa descent, I chose to focus only on Sherpas because this particular demographic of climbers make up a large population of mountain workers.

As I wanted to recruit climbers from a range of experience levels (e.g., young climbers, senior climbers, retired climbers), I used purposeful-snowball sampling techniques, which helped to expand the number of Sherpas who met the criteria (Patton, 2002). First, I settled into a temporary home in Kathmandu to establish rapport with the owners and managers of [Mega Adventures International](#), [Dinesh](#) and [Tendi](#), and my interpreter and guide Ngima. In a series of meetings, we discussed the intentions and hopes of my research. I provided them with a recruitment letter and letter of introduction, which served as informational letters about the project, to be passed on to individual Sherpas who work or have worked as guides or porters on

Mt. Everest (See Appendix A). The recruitment letter was written in English, and was first distributed to several of the Mega Adventures employees, and from there additional participation was recommended by friends of friends. The letter was orally translated for individuals who could not speak or read in English, and subsequently oral consent was obtained by willing participants. With the assistance of Dinesh and Ngima, I met with two participants while still in Kathmandu, both currently employed within the trekking and mountaineering industries. Further recruitment of participants occurred while in the mountains, which was a considerably more emergent process.

By establishing a trusting relationship with Ngima, Mega Adventures, and the initial Sherpa participants, I was referred to other Sherpas who might like to share their own narratives and climbing experiences. Among these participants were friends and family of Ngima and Tendi (co-owner of Mega Adventures). These potential participants live and work throughout the [Solukhumbu](#) region, which necessitated that Tendi contact some of them via telephone on my behalf. Individual contact was done to gauge interest but, more importantly, to confirm location and availability (e.g., some Sherpas were: retired and at home, working in other regions, prepping for upcoming expeditions, etc.). Of the five Sherpas Tendi called, he was able to reach two by telephone. Initial interest was confirmed which provided Ngima and I with an entry point into the mountains, a place to start our fieldwork trek. [Chyangba](#), a rural and remote settlement in the [lower Solu](#) was the first village we visited. From there we travelled northeast, entering other villages to meet with Ngima's family and friends and recruit other potential participants. Eventually our route converged with the more traditional trekking trail leading to Mt. Everest. Along the way to [Namche Bazaar](#) we had met and interviewed four Sherpas, and during our stay there we met three additional participants who also agreed to an interview.

From Namche I set off on my own before meeting my second guide and interpreter, [Pemba Sherpa](#). This guide changeover was deliberate in that Pemba was from the village of [Phortse](#), located in the [upper Khumbu](#), and spoke the Sherpa language and local dialects, which Ngima told me he could not speak fluently. Further, Pemba had a greater understanding of the terrain in this region and more connections to retired climbers from Phortse, as well as active climbers, many of whom were already at or en route to the [Everest Basecamp \[EBC\]](#). The last Sherpas recruited for this research resided in Phortse or very nearby; we also interviewed one climber at EBC. I interviewed thirteen participants in total. There was an intention to interview two or three more, but my fieldwork came to an abrupt halt due to the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal on April 25, 2015.

4.3.1.2 Methodological considerations & responsible border crossings

Even good intentions discipline us to ignore certain truths, and are never without their silences or modes of Othering (Grimwood, Yudina, Muldoon, & Qui, 2015). Grimwood and colleagues' (2015) paper illuminates how norms associated with certain discourses of responsibility in tourism operate, arguing the need for critical and meditative appraisals of what "responsibility" in tourism *does* or *can do*. According to these authors, reflection on philosophical underpinnings is deemed necessary for tourism *to be* or *become* responsible. Guided by this same critical vision, I believe that as a tourism researcher that worked in cross-cultural contexts it is necessary for me to evaluate how "responsibility" took shape in my own research processes, reflecting on its real-world effects in the communities with whom I worked.

Barton (2004) advises, "the ethics of narrative inquiry involves being in relationship with human beings, which requires accountability and responsibility" (p. 523). Therefore, as a responsible and accountable qualitative inquirer, a "goodness" criteria must be established,

including: decentering the researcher authority; safeguarding narrators' rights, interests, and sensitivities; communicating project aims; and protecting the privacy of narrators, avoiding exploitive practices (Barton, 2004, p. 523). The "goodness" criteria in this project were established with hopes to safeguard the interests of the Climbing Sherpas, enacting responsible research while in Nepal (Barton, 2004, p. 523).

It was important for me to adhere to participants' local and cultural practices. To do this, I hired local guides and interpreters to accompany me through the mountains, acting in some capacities as *cultural brokers* (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; Michie, 2014). Michie (2014) understands the broker as someone who facilitates a border crossing of another person or group of people from one culture to another: a go-between. A reoccurring and prevalent border crossing in my project was language differences. My limited capability to speak Nepali or Sherpa, two primary languages used in the [Solukhumbu](#) region, required me to relinquish some control, and trust in my guides' translations and interpretations. However, in some cases the Sherpa participants insisted in speaking English over Nepali or Sherpa, which at times required patience due to the level of English language skills. Despite the new challenges this posed, I invited these participants to proceed in conveying their stories, and make meaning of experiences in whichever languages or ways that made sense to them.

As previously mentioned, during my fieldwork I worked alongside two separate interpreters, and both acted as my trekking guides. [Ngima Sherpa](#), a recent graduate of Kathmandu University in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, was twenty-four years old when he accompanied me throughout the lower mountain regions. Ngima had a continued connection to the Solu region. Much of his immediate family still resides in the village of [Dandakaharka](#), which ultimately provided many recruitment opportunities and immersive

experiences. Further, his experience as a trekking guide and his proficiencies in both the English and Nepali languages contributed to his abilities to assist me as an interpreter/guide. [Pemba Sherpa](#) of the village Phortse, was twenty-three years old when we met. I was first introduced to him at the rock-climbing gym in Kathmandu, while he was in town for a meeting. At the time, his mother had forbidden him to climb Mt. Everest in the coming 2015 spring season due to fatal predictions in the Tibetan calendar (cf. [National Geographic](#), 2015), so he was looking for temporary work in the mountains. I offered him a position to act as my guide/interpreter starting in the second week of April until I concluded my fieldwork. Pemba's experience in the mountaineering industry, his understandings of the high-mountain geography, his ability to speak Sherpa fluently, and his extensive networks all contributed to him being a great asset throughout this project. I agreed to compensate Pemba and Ngima the average per/day trekking guide rate (about \$25.00), plus additional money for interview translations and translated transcriptions.

Trust was fundamental to the relationships I created with Ngima and Pemba as they helped navigate our physical environments, recruit new participants, or mediate the unfolding conversations between the Climbing Sherpas and myself. However, trust is reciprocal in nature and presupposes feelings of risk (Giddens, 1991). Both Sherpa men had to actively foster space to trust me as well as I with them. Thus, I continuously cultivated trust within our relationships by creating time to connect beyond "the work" of this research, initiating conversations about family, school, life in Canada and Nepal, and connections to mountaineering. During my first week working with Ngima, I recall my panicked researcher "self" attempting to hold on to the budding "trusting" nature of our relationship as we interviewed Mingma Sherpa (whom only could speak in Nepali). Directly after this interview, I wrote in my journal the following

experience regarding: Ngima's and I first interview with a Climbing Sherpa, but more significant to this discussion the first Nepali-English translated interview.

March 15, 2015 – Cultivating trust?

The speed of my scrawling hand, cannot keep up the spiralling concerns of my panicked mind... These interviews might be more difficult than anticipated, requiring a greater degree of trust from me. Although language differences were border crossings I anticipated navigating, seeing the effects of them in an interview was an illuminating, and certainly nerve inducing, experience. Complexities were abruptly revealed as I slowly felt like I was losing control and direction of our conversations. "It's the first interview" I continued to reassure myself as I gripped onto the trust I instilled in Ngima's abilities to communicate Mingma's story to me. My stomach knotted, I was anxious because I no longer felt that I had a role in the interview process. Although I was the one asking the questions, I felt like a bystander as I listened to the string of Nepali words pour from Mingma's mouth. Conversations between Mingma and Ngima were lengthy, but the translations felt short.

As Mingma explained his experience of being engulfed by 2014 Mt. Everest avalanche, Ngima jotted down abbreviated notes onto the lined-notebook he gripped in his left hand. I sat there patiently waiting for a Nepali word I recognised, hoping that Ngima would request a pause and provide me the meaning of his scribbles. He finally turned toward me to explain what felt like the "Cole's notes" version of what Mingma said; I couldn't help but think that I missed lots of the story. Was it naive to believe that I could maintain a conversational narrative-style interview with an interpreter marshalling the dialogue? Perhaps, it's up to me to guide Ngima, reminding him to repeat full thoughts more frequently, but also it's up to me to trust in him to ask "follow up" questions to engage the story when I cannot. Perhaps, Ngima and I should develop a semi-structured interview guide together, so he feels confident in prompting stories and conversations in the Nepali oriented interviews.

My decision to hire guides and interpreters was done to assist with safeguarding the interests of Sherpas and help navigate local and cultural practices, however, there were also moments of challenges as illuminated above. At times this required a level of "letting go" or re-negotiation of research methods and procedures, as I quickly learned that translation and interpretive work are crafts, involving more than language proficiencies, particularly within an interview context.

Additionally, I took steps towards protecting the privacy of Sherpas and tried to avoid exploitive practices. According to Chase (2005), narrative inquiries may facilitate a heightened sense of empowerment among research participants, whereby the act of narrating and reflecting on a significant life event can facilitate positive change for that individual. Nevertheless, quite the opposite can ensue. Given the “taboo” and “sensitive” nature of the interview and conversation topics, like death, there were times this sensorial-narrative inquiry called upon negative embodied experiences or memories within Sherpas’ past or present. For instance, one participant Da Gelje began to cry as he discussed the death of his sick father. He repeatedly apologised for his emotions and I could sense his discomfort. In that moment, I was presented with a moral dilemma: Do I continue to audio-visually record our conversation?

Throughout my fieldwork, I reflected on these negotiations and ways to minimise risk of unintentional harm or discomfort among participants as part of a continued ascetic practice. In many circumstances, I met Sherpas with empathy, sharing some of my own experiences, but I also reminded them that they are not required to answer questions or share sensitive information. In the case of Da Gelje, I paused the video recording, only turning it back on when he indicated it was okay. In moments like these, power was shared as we navigated border crossings, whereby Sherpa participants took control of what I could and could not access through the lens of my camera. Similar to Sarah Pink’s (2007) participants who steered away from “private spaces” during video-tours of their home, Da Gelje navigated away from the sharing of some personal and “private” emotions on video.

My duties as the researcher, in terms of privacy and confidentiality also included the obligation of safeguarding information entrusted to me (Government of Canada, 2010). Because confidentiality of participants could not be guaranteed due to the visual nature of this project,

Sherpas were given the option to opt out of the video-recorded interviews and, if desired, could choose a pseudonym that would be used throughout the data analysis, interpretation, and representation phases of this project. Each participating Sherpa received a research information letter and consent form (See Appendix B), which outlined the expectations of study. Often the stories shared in our interviews were central experiences to participants' lives, and thus they felt it was important for their true identity to be used in the reporting of research. However, five of the thirteen Sherpas chose to not be video-recorded, but consented to have audio clips, photographs, and their full names used throughout the visual and written-text findings. Of the Sherpas I still maintain contact with, an opportunity to choose pseudonyms was articulated one more time prior to the final write up of this dissertation and the creation of the short documentary representation. Lastly, if Sherpas felt that they needed to discontinue for any circumstance, they were free to withdraw themselves or any of their stories from this study at any time without penalty.

4.3.2 Emplaced learning through participation and observations

It is understood that researchers might become sensuously engaged through participation in practices, rituals, and environments they share with others (Pink, 2015). Furthermore, moments of sensory learning and knowing are not always prearranged processes. Rather, as Pink (2009) implies, learning moments with the senses are “often unplanned instances whereby the researcher arrives at an understanding of other people’s memories and meanings through their own embodied experiences and/or attending to other people’s practices, subjectivities and explanations” (p. 65). Through participation and observation, I came to know the emplaced contexts of the Sherapas’ stories as well as the immersive encounters and relationships that were being played out on the Nepali mountainside. For instance, I gathered many insights while

walking to and from locations within villages or en route to adjacent villages.

The dirt trails of the mountains are the highways of the Solukhumbu linking one community to the next, and the commute between villages and beyond, is common practice among the local population. From accompanying young Sherpa children on their short journeys to school to longer encounters with porters and other commuters while trekking for several hours to a new community, I began to understand participation and observation differently. Here, participation took on new meaning through my feet, increasing heartbeat, and shortness of breath. Walking along side Ngima or Pemba and others produced multisensorial ways of knowing, in which visual observations were not necessarily privileged (Pink, 2009, 2015). In turn, learning in the field for me became embodied, emplaced, sensorial, and empathetic (Pink, 2015): a notion understood by Wenger (1998) as “knowing in practice” (p. 141).

Relatedly, when researchers participate in other people’s worlds through the engagement of practices and routines, sensory effects are created and embodied knowledge emerges (Grasseni, 2004); and although we might not actually be able to fully achieve the exact techniques or skills associated with a local practice, we begin to assume a role of an apprentice (Grasseni, 2004; Pink, 2009). Ingold (2000) notes that new ideas are learned and exercised through “*systems of apprenticeship*, constituted by the relationships between more and less experienced practitioners in hands-on contexts of activities” (p. 37, emphasis in original). For example, such teaching-learning relationships were created between Ngima, an older Sherpa man, and myself on our way to a village called [Takasindu](#). We met “Old Pemba” (the way Ngima and I referred to the older gentleman), on the way out of [Salleri](#), just outside of the [Phaplu airport](#). He befriended Ngima and I, and was keen to walk with us to Takasindu as he was already heading in that direction for a Government Sanitation Recognition Program, which was

honouring all of the residents of the Taksindu, [Village Development Committee \(VDC\)](#) – for the installation of sanitation means within their homes. Within this three-hour trek, I was able to make meaning beyond what my eyes could observe, and instead learned about Sherpas and their worlds through the “sensory skills they depend on” (Downey, 2005, p. 28). I articulate this instance in the following field journal excerpt, which I wrote retrospectively after my encounter with Old Pemba.

March 31, 2015 – Heavy on my shoulders

Old Pemba’s worn, but soft right palm enveloped my hand. The feeling of his leathered skin spoke to his age, while the incomplete pronunciations of English words, and his mountain knowledge, hinted at his involvement with tourism and trekking industries. When asked, he said he worked for over 35 years as a porter, cook, and guide. Now 66, he no longer works. Regardless he still managed to recollect his English, which he assured us, was solely learned through his service in mountain positions. It was obvious to me that he had worked as a porter or guide, as he estimated the amount of kilograms on my back. Tugging at my heavy pack he insisted on carrying it for the duration of our walk together. “I am capable to lug my own weight up the mountain,” I asserted but Old Pemba would not hear any of my excuses. “You are our guest, and a woman...” he repeatedly implied. As he took the pack from my tight and knotted shoulders, I felt a moment of relief; Ngima and I encountered Pemba nine days into our research-trek. Though it was nice to have Pemba’s assistance with my bag, it seemed that he no longer had the strength of his youthful trekking days. Concentrated on his feet, his pace slowed significantly. Pemba gave me his one-kilo knapsack to carry in exchange, which bounced and swayed effortlessly as I unknowingly quickened my steps. I think he was quite surprised by the actual weight of my pack. Slinging it over his shoulder he complimented me, “You, very strong,” while he assessed my stature with the weight of the bag that stacked high above his head.

Thinking about yesterday’s emplaced and immersive encounter with Pemba, I sit here reflecting on the “roles” porters and Climbing Sherpas assume, but also the privileges of “guests” in the Solukumbu. Generally, I would not have packed such a heavy bag, but with this project on the go there is a need for my computer, camera, various chargers, and cords... Isn’t there? Was it necessary for me to bring all this gear? I rarely use my computer, unless I’m by myself...

... as I continue to make my way up the mountain, the weight of my privilege will sit heavy on my shoulders.

Although my participation in the field did not consist of extensive ethnographic fieldwork, the ideas of “sensory scholarship” and “ethnographer as apprentice” resonate with my experiences, whereby I came to understand the activities and environments by engaging in first-hand, often unplanned, practices with community members like Old Pemba (Pink, 2009, p. 70). In addition to unplanned instances, I also participated in varying activities within my research participants. With informed consent, I stayed in the homes of three different retired Climbing Sherpas, experiencing their various daily routines and cultural practices. From these observations, I created field texts, implementing two approaches adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000): 1) Passive recording, in which as researcher I recorded events or activities without interpretation; and 2) Active recording whereby I reconstructed an event with interpretations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As observation field texts can be created from the many fragmented experiences and stories, I outlined a set of observation guidelines and questions to guide this process (See Appendix C). Due to the potential for collecting an immense amount of data, these guidelines were set in place to help shape my reflexive journal and the participant observations I chose to record. However, I also understood that insights and moments of knowing in the field are not always pursued in a structured way, and I remained open to the emergent unfolding of events (Pink, 2009). An example of a guiding observation question I used in the field is, “How do Sherpas navigate ideas of death and dying?” From this prompt, I recorded the following field experience.

April 3, 2015 – An offering to the gods

I teetered close behind Rinchen as he led me down the winding trail to his cousin's house on the other side of the village. His cousin, a Climbing Sherpa, was preparing to depart for Everest in the morning. Pushing through the stiff fabric that hung along the wooden doorframe, we entered the home. The climber's family and close friends sat on the benches that lined the perimeter of the room. The aroma of butter candles and incense filled the air. His wife was hosting a puja ceremony to wish him well, making offerings to the gods for a safe trip, and return home. Pujas are hosted prior to larger journeys or "farewells" or intermittently for individual family members for luck, good health, and wellbeing. They usually take place in a "prayer" room (but not always), where an alter table, statues, and other Buddhist and/or Hindu relics adorn the space. Three lamas, swaddled in red robes sat cross-legged on the bench on the climber's right, while his wife and children sat on the left. I've now attended four different pujas, each of them having their own unique practices and subtle differences. Common to them all have been the rhythmic chants of Tibetan scripture usually performed by the head lama. Small-unleavened pastries were passed around. I relished the sweet treat; I haven't tasted sugar in weeks. Thirty minutes into us being there, Rinchen hinted that he wanted to leave. Before, offering my salutations and good-bye I managed to talk with the climber, asking him how many times he'd been to Everest. A huge grin swept across his face, as he excitedly responded it was his third summit attempt.

As Rinchen and I made our way back up the side of the mountain to his house, he critiqued his cousin for returning to Everest. Rinchen chuckled, "He said, 'I never go again.' The last time he scared, sick, almost fell," while deliberately staggering as if he had "sea-legs" and couldn't find his balance. Rinchen teased, "He was carrying 30 kilo. Sugar, 30 kilos. He no.. no can cross the ladder." Rinchen recalled witnessing his cousin's uneasy traverse during his last expedition. He let out a chuckle at the irony of his cousin's return to Everest.

I recorded thoughts and observations, out of the sight of my Sherpa participants, attempting to decrease the perception of the "gaze" if I was to be intently writing down details of our interactions. Once alone in a quiet location, shortly after "unique" encounters, I took notes by pen and paper or audio-recorded my thoughts around the interactions between people,

environments, and sensory details. Within these field notes, I discussed what happened, the senses engaged, how it made me feel, and offered interpretations of what I experienced, sensed, and observed. Many times I decided to audio-record my thoughts through a small hand-held recorder rather than write because I could articulate my ideas more quickly verbally. My use of reflexive audio-recording processes allowed me to discuss events and experiences as I remembered them, permitting a stream of consciousness. Additionally, I occasionally experienced exhaustion at high-altitudes and the physical act of holding a pen felt taxing.

Lastly, it was my original intention to visually record with GoPros and my DSLR camera some of the emplaced and immersive experiences with aims to collaboratively capture and produce visual texts of movements, images, and sounds, which may have contributed to representing Sherpas' stories of everyday practices including but not limited to eating, drinking, trekking, and other forms of mobility (Pink, 2009). Further, it was also my hope that the Sherpa participants and I would share narrator and director roles for these visual texts. However, as I expressed earlier in this chapter, I was apprehensive about taking out my camera, and even more so around capturing imagery of people, therefore affording limited use of my camera within participation observations. Additionally, many of the Sherpa participants were extremely busy, therefore giving them my camera to capture footage and imagery from their own lens became challenging. Before I arrived in Nepali, I perceived this "busy-ness" to be the case for the individuals who still worked in the mountaineering field, but I gave less consideration to the actual availability of the retired climbers, who had many daily responsibilities like tending to their crops and cattle. Nonetheless, there were times Ngima and Pemba occasionally took control of my camera to capture the cultural and physical landscape throughout my fieldwork.

4.3.3 Understanding sensoriality through interview conversations

As previously discussed, the silences within the media and academic canons have indicated that Sherpas' voices are not being heard. According to Hesse-Biber (2007), in-depth interviews can create the needed space to access subjugated knowledge(s), by speaking with people whose voices have been marginalised. Moreover, an in-depth interview "is the most common way to collect narrative data, largely because stories are so common to most conversations" (Glover, 2003, p. 154). I used a type of in-depth interview understood as reflexive-dyadic interviews. Within reflexive-dyadic interviews, the focus is primarily on the participants, but there is also emphasis around the conversations that unfold between the researcher and participant (Ellis, 2004). Additionally, my interview practices aligned with active interviews. Active interviewing, as described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), seeks to balance the "hows" of social processes and the "whats" of lived experience by maintaining focus on what is being asked in interviews and what the participants are conveying. Both, reflexive-dyadic and active, interview styles are conversational in nature with a primary concern to cultivate participants' stories (Ellis, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

In entering each interview, I tried to foster an inviting and safe space through reflexive dialogue, whereby the Sherpas and I could share our experiences with one another. Aligning with the characteristics of reflexive-dyadic and active interviews, I conducted interviews face-to-face, with less structure, and conversational in style (Ellis, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007). It is important to note that the conversational-style I intended for this inquiry was sometimes hard to maintain within the Nepali and Sherpa translated interviews due to my position as an English-speaking interviewer. Instead, in these interviews, my interpreters would take lead in the facilitation of the conversation, prompting Sherpas to narrate stories in their preferred language, and then would

relay the experiences to me. As I felt connections with a story, I would offer my own experience in English, which was then translated back to the Sherpas. When the interviews were conducted in the English language, I approached them with less structure, in which I assumed both researcher and narrator roles, sharing experiences and stories throughout the interview process (Ellis, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Although talking undeniably plays an integral role in interview processes, and face-to-face conversations do foster an intimacy between researcher and participants, Pink (2009) argues that inquirers who are situated within a sensory paradigm must approach interviews as "...a social encounter – an event – that is inevitably both emplaced and productive of place. It has material and sensorial components" (p. 82). Therefore, in addition to Sherpas' spoken words, I also apprehended understandings through gestures, touching, sharing scents (e.g., perfumes, incense), sounds (e.g., playing music), images (e.g., showing photos), and even tastes (e.g., sharing of food or tea) (Pink, 2009). For instance, in some interviews I was invited to indulge in the salty-sweet taste of [Sherpa Tea](#), or the thick-milky texture of rice beer (known as [chhaang](#)), which are both local beverages consumed when people gather together. Additionally, imagery and personal photographs were displayed with pride by some of the Climbing Sherpas, and briefly discussed during interviews. Items like Lhakpa Dorji's photograph atop Mt. Everest's summit, or Dorchi's climbing certificate received from Nepal's Tourism Ministry were visual items that contributed to eliciting stories and experiences, while sometimes aiding in the construction of knowledge within the interview.

Correspondingly, sounds in interview settings imparted moments of situated knowing within the interviews. Adding to Ang Phurba's personal account about his brother's death in the [2014 avalanche](#) was our emplacement at [EBC](#) one day prior to the tragic disaster's anniversary.

Within this I began to experience and know the complexities of living and dying on the mountainside differently. In the interview I could “feel” the devastating nature of these accidents through silences – the pauses in Ang Phurba’s speech as he recalled his brother’s death – while, the additional sounds of kitchen boys busily washing dishes and the loud chopping sound of a rescue helicopter propeller further created a “world of experience” for me to feel, sense, and live in, serving as a reminder of the commercial, yet risky and stark realities of these high-altitude positions (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 431). With consideration of this shared emplacement, I used my own resources of empathy and imagination to learn and know in multiple ways about the Sherpas’ experiences, stories, and situatedness (Pink, 2009).

Finally, Pink (2009) encourages researchers to treat the interview as a route to understanding others’ emplacement through reflexive and collaborative explorations. Reflecting tenants of reflexive-dyadic interviews, researcher disclosure of personal stories and emplaced experiences has the potential to deepen understandings. Such disclosures encourage “cognitive and emotional reflections of the researcher, which add context and layers to the story being told about the narrators” (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p.162; see also Ellis, 2004). For instance, when appropriate and for the purpose of connecting around conversations of death, I would disclose stories of personal circumstances, such as the loss of a boyfriend at a young age and the grieving that consequently occurred. Thereby, Sherpas could appraise some of my own subjectivities, and how my own personal investments connect to reasons for conducting this study (cf. Miller, Grimwood, & Arai, 2015).

Each participating Climbing Sherpa was provided with an Information Letter and Informed Consent form (Appendix B), which described my research intentions. After informed consent was obtained, we determined specific interview times, locations, and contexts that best

suited the Sherpas' schedules and needs. Due to the emplaced, embodied, and sensory considerations of this research, I did not bind our interview conversations by specific times and implemented a very basic five-question interview guide (See Appendix D) as departure points. Departure points included questions such as: "Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?" "Within your expeditions, can you tell me of any problems or challenges you might have encountered?" Additionally, sensory aspects of these interviews were directly engaged through sharing in moments of listening to the wind, sipping tea together, or looking out at a mountainous landscape. These departure point topics served as guideposts, but throughout the interview I continued to remain flexible, to allow for emerging subject or topic changes as the interview progressed. The majority of the Sherpas shared their stories with me through a 40 to 80-minute conversation (or mediated conversation), which was audio and video recorded. The intent of video recording these conversations was to produce subjective texts that would contribute to re-presenting Sherpas' stories as multimedia, multisensorial presentations (Pink, 2007, 2009). The next section describes the process of setting up the camera, briefly touching upon the power of the camera in data collection.

4.3.3.1 Within the frames: Picturing the interviews

Rahn (2007) recommends avoiding interviewing from behind the camera. If a researcher's intention is to video-record interviews for use in a larger visual representation, it may be tempting to ask interview questions from behind the camera as this position will capture a more comprehensive shot with participants looking forward and attentive. However, researchers implementing such practices warn this can be an obstruction within interview conversations (Griffin, 2015; Rahn, 2007). More critical to this positioning, is the distance and the additional felt "objectification" it might produce for participants, ultimately taking away

from the “trust” and “respect” within an interview setting, and researcher-participant relationship. Although in some very ways research, including the use of visual methods, reifies the colonial tenant of “us” trying to know and understand more about “them” (cf. Banks, 2001), I argue that the conscious placement of the camera (and ourselves as researchers) may be able to reduce such colonial effects.

The intentional placement, of both the camera and myself, created a dialogical presence within the frame. Throughout the video-recorded interviews, I made intentional framing decisions with the Sherpas (and the value of respect) in mind. First, I positioned myself in front, and to the right or left side of the camera. The majority of the time I sat diagonally to the Sherpa participant, and at times close enough to be captured within the frames (e.g., this is very apparent during my interview with Da Gelje). The diagonal position still captured a comprehensive shot of the Sherpas, while my proximity to each participant lent for the camera to be “forgotten” about as we began our conversations (albeit some exclusions include Rinchen and Lakpa’s interviews, each of whom frequently focused on the camera and chose to sit further back from it).

In terms of the artistic presentation of the shots, I set up the original framing ratios, however, once the interview got underway my interpreters/guides (i.e. Ngima and Pemba) took control of the camera. At times they would zoom in and out, or modify the shot completely, altering which setting contexts would be captured within the shots. Although in the initial few interviews this frustrated me, I quickly realised that having Ngima or Pemba control the camera mediated some of the participants’ perceptions around my “researcher gaze.” Moreover, it allowed me to be less worried about the technology and more attentive and in tune with the individuals, who generously gave me some of their time.

Finally, as mentioned earlier when the Sherpas no longer wished to be captured by the camera, I turned it off. This only occurred twice throughout my interviews: once with Da Gelje as he discussed his father's death, and again with Lhakpa Dorji because his dinner arrived earlier than expected. In moments like these, the framing power was shared between us, whereby the Sherpas chose what was pictured or not. Indeed, the Sherpas had opportunities to choose to disengage with this visual data collection process, removing themselves from the gaze of the camera. However, it should be noted that the final visual sequence represented in the documentary film has been primarily constructed by me – methodological and representational discussions that I revisit below. First, I review the processes of data analysis and interpretation engaged in this project, which informed these final research representations.

4.4 Analysis and Interpretation

There are varying tools, techniques, and approaches for analysing and interpreting narrative data (cf. Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollernshaw & Cresswell, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). One of the most foundational distinctions made about analysis approaches within narrative inquiry was by Donald Polkinghorne, a professor of Counselling Psychology and practicing psychotherapist. Polkinghorne (1988) first introduced the idea of “narrative” to the human sciences through his text, *Narrative Knowing in the Human Sciences*. Later, he went on to differentiate the processes of *narrative analysis*, which focuses on individual participants' stories, descriptions, and experiences that are often then reconstructed into one coherent narrative, and the *analysis of narratives*, that explores narratives told by participants through a thematic process in an attempt to categorise them (McCormack, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995). Although these approaches tend to differ in focus and outcomes, my own process for analysis and interpretation reflects, in some ways, both: Polkinghorne's (1995) *narrative analysis*, as well

as his *analysis of narratives*. For instance, I re-story cohesive stories of my conversations with individual Climbing Sherpas in Chapter Five, while I also provide what I call “collective stories” in a short documentary film and the discussion chapter (Chapter Seven), illuminating insights and themes as they relate to all of the Climbing Sherpas’ experiences.

That being said, important to my analysis approach were the ways the Climbing Sherpas actively shaped or constructed their narrative realities – the *whats* of their stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). With the *whats* as a focal point, I analysed the content of Sherpas’ personal narratives within our conversations, focusing on the relation between their stories and the qualities of their experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). According to Chase (2005), a personal narrative refers to a representation in oral or written form, that covers a specific (often minor) event, a significant aspect of one’s life, or a complete biography. An approach with narrative *whats* in mind investigates substantive meanings of stories, and is more thematic in the analysis approach (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Riessman, 2008).

Additionally, although my research set out to illuminate the experiences of the Climbing Sherpas, I also wanted to consider the familiar, linguistic, social, cultural, and institutional narratives through which these individuals’ experiences were shaped, articulated, and depicted (Clandinin, 2013). Correspondingly, significant to my narrative approach were also the *hows* of the Climbing Sherpas’ narrative production. Analysis from this perspective still attended to the content of stories, but with a primary interest of how experiences and events were storied, assembled, and conveyed by Sherpas (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Sometimes understood as a structural approach, analysis of the narrative *hows* considers performance, asking to whom a story might be addressed, in what circumstances, and for what purpose (Riessman, 2008). With an emphasis on both the *whats* and *hows* my hope was to capture the interplay of the

Sherpas' stories and their narrative environments, which would further expose the complexities of living and dying in mountaineering in Nepal. To reiterate an earlier point made by Chase (2005), "This process usually includes attention to the 'narrative linkages' that a storyteller develops between the biographical particulars of his or her life, on the one hand, and the resources and constraints in his or her environment for self and reality construction, on the other" (p. 663). Thereby, through the inclusion of the Sherpas' personal narratives or the "small stories," and the simultaneous situating of these narratives within the wider social contexts – the "big stories" – some of the complex and often contradictory experiences that are reiterated through narrative might then be revealed (Gregg, 2011, p. 320; see also Phoenix, 2013; Spector-Mersel, 2010).

To illustrate the ways in which I merged these aforementioned analysis approaches, I outline four procedural steps taken as I conducted data analysis and interpretation of the Climbing Sherpas' stories. My process was iterative and cyclical in nature, and therefore the steps I outline below should not be valued as a lock and key process or linear in approach. Rather, these narrative steps overlapped at times, while at other times I did not necessarily realise I was "analysing" until I remerged on the other end of the data. I describe the steps below, and also offer working titles for each phase to reflect the primary tenets in each step.

4.4.1 Iterating active immersion

I began data analysis while still immersed in fieldwork in Nepal between March and April 2015. Immersion in the analysis and interpretation processes took form in a few different ways over time, and therefore, I describe the first step in my approach as "Iterating active immersion." First, after each interview, I would write interview notes into my reflexive journal, a space for me to reflect upon both the *whats* and *hows* of the narratives that transpired in each of

my conversations with the Climbing Sherpas. Indeed, these immediate reflections of the immersive interview contexts afforded opportunities for consideration around the potential environmental constraints that contributed to the Sherpas' constructions of themselves and their mountaineering pursuits, as well as my own perceptions and interpretations, which at times were mediated by translations (e.g., my journal entry about "trusting" Ngima) (Chase, 2005).

Active immersion also occurred while I began transcribing each of the audio recordings from the interviews. I transcribed many of the interviews, particularly the ones needing Nepali or Sherpa translations, while I was still in the mountains. During our down time in teahouses along our data-collection trekking route, my interpreters (i.e. Ngima or Pemba) and I would transliterate the interviews together; I would type out any of the English-speaking parts, while the Nepali and Sherpa conversations were translated to English transcriptions by Ngima and Pemba. Transcribing together, gave me a chance to ask my interpreters about culturally-specific information (e.g., the meaning of being the "only son" in Sherpa culture, Buddhist beliefs, etc.) that emerged, but also at times brought to my attention the understandings that I "missed" during our real-time interviews, usually due to the mediated and translated communication. Additionally, within the electronic copies of the interview transcripts, I left brief notes in comment cards along the margins. This process of note taking in the margins can be understood as an initial analysis phase, during which I discussed major ideas or storylines, my interpreters' and my own reflections, and possible connections to literature and theory.

Finally, when I returned to Canada in May 2015, I finished transcribing the last of the English interviews. Here, I engaged in the same above-mentioned immersive processes, but added one additional iterative procedure. That is, I returned to each typed transcript and read them from start to finish, focusing on one Sherpa conversation at a time. As Bochner (2001)

reminds, “to respect the story and the human life it represents,” we must “stay with a story, refusing the impulse to abstract...” (p. 132). I revisited the individual transcripts in their entirety to honour each of the Climbing Sherpas individually. Reading each transcript several times over, I immersed and re-immersed myself into the raw interview conversations, intentionally watching for overlooked storylines or insights.

4.4.2 Visualising the complexities

The next step in my overlapping analysis approach was watching each video-recorded interview. This step assisted with visualising the complexities of the Sherpas’ stories, by allowing me to: recall emotions, expression, and gestures that accompanied our conversations; hear tone and emphasis of words, in addition to environmental sounds; and to reacquaint myself with the nuances of the interview settings (e.g., noisy tea house, interview bystanders, windy disruptions, etc.). Additionally, I listened for these same complexities within the audio-recordings of the five Sherpa interviews that were not visually recorded. My engagement in these multimedia formats provided another analysis layer: sensorial spaces to embody, experience, and glean insights around the Sherpas’ narratives. As Pink (2007) suggests, visuals (and other sensory information) bear an important relationship to written or spoken word within knowledge creation. Thus, while watching and listening to the interviews, I began to write and craft the individual Sherpa stories, what I call “conversations,” that are presented in Chapter Five. Next, I outline how I began to construct these individual stories – a process that overlapped, and should not be seen as separate from, the “Visualising the complexities” phase of my analysis process.

4.4.3 Re-storying conversations

In this step, I began to construct narratively-written conversations from each individual interview. Although, in part this is directly linked to representational decisions and procedures

for this project, the construction of these conversations also represent the *narrative analysis* part of my approach. Here, I began to pay attention to the “narrative linkages” within each of the individual stories, and crafted them into their own cohesive conversations, which began to reveal new meanings (Chase, 2005, p. 663; see also Polkinghorne, 1995). As Polkinghorne (1995) explains, in isolation two events will become propositions describing two independent happenings. Stripped from the other words and contexts, stories’ meanings – the connections, interactions, and intersections – may be lost. For instance, he illustrated, “the king died; the prince cried” (p. 7). Yet constructed into a “whole” story, a new level of relational significance may be gleaned (Polkinghorne, 1995).

I shaped thirteen individual short stories from the verbatim transcription of the audio and video-recorded interviews. During this re-storying process, the use of video became integral to adding situational details and contexts into the stories, which offers readers a sense of “wholeness” to each story; though I recognise that these interpretations and constructions of events are my own, and can always be otherwise (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In saying that, I decided to label each of the stories as a “conversation,” and I inserted the date into the sub-heading along with the Sherpas’ name to convey that these were stories shared with me at specific moments in time, rather than reflecting a static truth about the individual’s life. As the Climbing Sherpas took the role of storyteller within in their respective interviews, they were able to shape their narratives in ways that were meaningful to them. Nonetheless, it is important to consider “conditions of narrativity” (cf. Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p.8): that is the contexts, voices and, in the case of this visual project, the gazes – namely the camera – that inevitably contributed to Sherpas’ individual tellings. Therefore, each story begins with a description of the setting, who or what is present, and some of my own research understandings and interpretations

to provide readers with additional narrative contexts. Each of these smaller stages within this re-storying process assisted with the final step in the analysis and interpretation of this data.

4.4.4 Reading and seeing across stories

In the final step of my analysis process, I explored all of the re-storied conversations together. Here, my approach aligned more with that of *analysis of narratives* (Polkinghorne, 1995), whereby my intention was to look across the Sherpas' narratives for "themes," or common ideas and occurrences within their experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate that narrative is also about reconstructing experiences in relation to both the other, and social contexts. In this sense, I wanted to create "collective stories" that would conceptualise and speak to the varying fragments of Sherpas' experiences of living and working on the Nepali mountainside. To show the interconnectedness of many of these fragments, I weaved the dissertation discussion (Chapter Seven) together with three primary "through-lines," which include discussion points around three to four emergent storylines, or "sub-themes." The three through-lines represent the overarching themes, which emerged during this final "Reading and seeing across stories" analysis phase. The through-lines include:

- Climbing to the Top: Narratives of Development, Conquest, and Pride
- Encountering Death: Narratives of Risk, Strength, and Fear
- Choosing to (Dis)continue: Navigations of Power, Death, and Freedom

Tracings of each through-line within the discussion can be seen and heard throughout the others, as well as within the short documentary film representation. Additionally, imbedded into each of these through-lines and their sub-themes are the personal narratives of the Climbing Sherpas – the "small stories" (Gregg, 2011, p. 320).

This stage of analysis was not quite as straightforward as the above description suggests,

and took the most time (and energy) of all the steps. Thus, the next few mini phases articulated here should not be understood as a chronological list of actions, but rather as ongoing and unexpectedly organic. I began this process by returning to the Sherpas' individual stories. I read through each of the re-storied conversations (created in the previous step) for "narrative passages with an open mind, searching for ideas that strike the ear as especially salient, recurrent, surprising, or potentially revealing..." (McAdams, 2012, p. 18). Reading each conversation in its entirety, I highlighted key ideas, dialogue, and larger narrative passages that seemed of interest or importance to the research questions guiding this study. At times, I would type additional analysis notes into the margins of the electronic documents, drawing connections across Sherpas' conversations and to literature and theory. I moved through each of the thirteen re-storied conversations in this manner; I often moved back and forth between them, amending my highlights as necessary. Through these techniques, I began to see overarching thematic ideas across many of the Sherpas' narratives, which eventually were constructed into the discussion through-lines.

At this point, I came to understand each of the re-storied conversations as "scripts," and the Climbing Sherpas as "characters" or "narrators" with highlighted speaking parts. The Sherpa roles had not yet taken shape, and thus their speaking parts were not yet linked or relating to the same scenes. As I began to connect the varying plotlines and ideas across the stories, this filmic metaphor became critical to help move me in and out of Sherpas' narrative descriptions with hopes to bring to life the fragments of their collective stories. Moreover, because I am a visual learner, before writing the discussion I turned to film editing and construction processes to continue to analyse, think about, and begin to create the visual version of the collective narrative. *Final Cut Pro X*, a video editing software, afforded me a physical space where I could fuse

together the varying “speaking parts” of the Climbing Sherpas. The “timeline” feature in *Final Cut* can be understood as a digital and linear film roll, but it also has capabilities for viewing and hearing additional visual and audio layers simultaneously, which helped me to see the complexities of the mountainside more clearly. Within these layered timelines, I initiated my visual interpretation process. However, Prosser and Schwartz (1998) remind us that making sense of visuals is also dependent on the kind of social explanation or intellectual puzzle one’s study is trying to answer. Therefore, with my research questions in the back of my head, I began to clip, merge, and edit video and audio recorded interviews; “B roll” footage that was captured by Ngima, Pemba, and I within the fieldwork trek; stock soundtracks and sound effects purchased through *Pond5.com*; and photographs and footage donated to the project by Sherpas and mountaineering friends. It should be noted that this film construction process occurred in collaboration with Filmmaker, Teryl Brouillette, who assisted with editing and postproduction procedures.

Finally, with a rough draft of the short documentary film in place, I returned to the discussion chapter to write and further unpack the three original through-lines and their various interconnecting layers: a step that was quite integrative with my filmmaking and representational decisions. The dissertation discussion section, (Chapter Seven) and the short documentary film are each, in many capacities, iterations of analysis and interpretation that mirror one another. With this in mind, I now highlight in more detail the representational choices I made that helped to constitute the final film, but also the findings in Chapter Five – the re-storied conversations with each Climbing Sherpa.

4.5 Re-storying Sensorial Experiences on the Mountainside

Existence is related to experiencing. Therefore, as mentioned in the outset of this chapter, representing existential depths becomes a complex task. With these epistemological understandings guiding me, I set out to engage a means of representation that would reflect the experiential aspects of existence. As I continue to be inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre, I looked to his work for answers. “French philosopher” and “existentialist” are often labels ascribed to Sartre, but his corpus is far more comprehensive, and much more intriguing than the mere philosophical ideas he put forth. Playwright and novelist are other identities given to Sartre (Cohen-Solal, 1988; Levy, 2002), and in 1964 Sartre was even awarded (though he refused to accept) the Nobel Prize in Literature (Nobel Prize, 2017).

Sartre’s novels and plays like *Nausea*, *No Exit*, and *Age of Reason*, are rich with ideas of existentialism – conveying short stories, albeit fictional, with protagonists that “experience” aspects of existence in order to comprehend their effects. For instance, Sartre’s (1943) philosophy of *Being and Nothingness* is encapsulated and illustrated in his novel *Nausea*. The main character, Antoine Roquentin, is confronted by the sheer fact of existence in the form of a chestnut tree, whereby freedom and the pure contingency of meaning are revealed (Levy, 2002). Sartre (1938) writes,

There it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished; the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder – naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness. (p.127)

It is literary works like these, from which I drew my representational vision. It was important for me to land on a medium that would foster space for audiences to “experience” Climbing Sherpas’ stories of death and freedom, while still honouring the various layers and complexities of the mountainside. Therefore, the methodological and representational choices of this project reflect my hopes for audience engagement in the dissemination of my research findings.

For Pink (2009), *sensoriality* is fundamental to how we learn about, understand, and represent other people’s lives. Moreover, experiencing is not merely concerned with thinking and acting, but also with emotions, embodiment, and one’s sensorium (Macquarrie, 1972; Pink, 2011). Thus, rather than audience members becoming “a detached spectator...a head, cut off from...body and emotions,” I have fused descriptive storytelling practices and multidimensional filmic spaces to create a “world of experience” for them to feel, sense, and live in (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 431). Accordingly, through engaging notions of sensoriality in multi-layered and multi-media outputs, it is my belief that audiences (readers and viewers) may be able to embody, experience, and glean insights around the existential concerns of this research, while at the same time consider the multiple, complex, and provisional nature of the Climbing Sherpas’ narratives (Ellis, 1999; Josselson, 2011). The following sections outline these representations: first, I discuss the thirteen narratively written conversations, and then I provide my intentions behind the creation of the short documentary film, *Climbing Sherpa: Stories from the Solukhumbu*.

4.5.1 A re-telling of lived stories

To reiterate the ideas of Robert Coles (1989), narrative is a conversation. It is a sharing of information back and forth, fostering opportunities to bring people together. He writes, “...their story, yours, mine – it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each

other to respect our stories and learn from them” (1989, p. 30). To honour and respect each of the Climbing Sherpas that were interviewed during the spring of 2015, their narratives have each been individually re-storied as findings in Chapter Five. As hinted at above, this chapter – “A Re-Telling of Lived Stories in Emplaced Conversations” – presents thirteen short stories in the form of conversations between the Sherpas and myself.

As I wrestled with different forms of representation, I gave much consideration to the Sherpas’ lived and told stories, my own story and experience, and the relationship that existed between them. The Sherpas shared their stories with me through casual conversations, interviews that were audio and video recorded, and longer immersive visits while I was a guest in their homes. These instances constitute a large portion of my own “fieldwork narrative” and although I believe it is not the most important story to be told, it was through my own experience and subjectivities that I came to know the narratives of Sherpas like Mingma, Tashi, Phuri, Lhakpa Dorji, and the others. Thus, inspired by the data and my own experiences, I intertwined the Sherpas’ stories with my own narrative, presenting our encounters and conversations in the chronological order in which they occurred.

From a narratively-oriented position, I implemented storytelling practices to create space for each individual Sherpa to be a teacher and narrator, as well as for readers to be active and engaged audience members. Although the conversations are told from my narrator perspective, the use of direct quotes and the focus on each Sherpa individually provides an opportunity for Sherpas to be narrators and storytellers in their own right. The Sherpas’ narratives were not always presented in a chronologic order during the audio and visually recorded conversations. Chronology and the identification of various narrative components can help guide the reconstruction of narratives as well as provide insight around the meaning of experiences

(Glover, 2003). Thus, many of these stories have been weaved into a chronological progression (e.g., starting from childhood to present). Yet it is important to note within these chronological narratives there is no affirmative end or beginning. Instead, the conversations are structured around dialogue of specific events or incidents, and are not cohesive or full stories; here "...the reader is invited into the dialogue in mid-conversation, to eavesdrop in a sense, and then must exit the conversation prior to its completion" (McKeown, 2015, p. 78).

There were concerted efforts to encourage Sherpas to shape their narratives in ways that were meaningful to them through face-to-face interviews that were reflexive and conversational in nature. However, as mentioned in the analysis step "Re-storying conversations," individual circumstances and environmental contexts inevitably contributed to the construction of stories. Therefore, there was a deliberate inclusion of setting descriptions. The inclusion of these settings not only provides readers with research and narrative contexts, but also further illustrates the "emplaced" nature of each of the thirteen conversations, accounting for the interrelationship of body, mind, and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment (Howes, 2005; Pink2015). In this sense, readers can acknowledge the emplacement of the Sherpas who contributed to these conversations, but also my emplacement as an individual part of specific research contexts. Lastly, with the importance of contexts and complexities at the fore, I have italicised phrases, throughout the Sherpas' individual stories, to emphasise the omnipresence of power, which we talked about in Chapter Three. This power was apparent throughout Sherpas' interviews through particular linguistic phrases and word choices (e.g., we *had to go*; doing well *for* our clients, etc.). I also repeat this process throughout the discussion section of this dissertation: Chapter Seven.

4.5.2 Visualising stories from the Solukhumbu

“Depiction, picturing and seeing are ubiquitous features of the processes by which most human beings come to know the world as it really is for them” (Fyfe & Law, 1988, 2). Fyfe and Law (1988) suggest that the visual is the most fundamental of the senses. However, these components of sensorial experiences are lost when we transform those experiences through written language (Stuhlmiller, 1996). Accordingly, the incorporation of visuals can be seen as enabling researchers to provide richer representations of embodied and emplaced multisensory experiences. To this end, I created a short, twenty-three minute documentary film, *Climbing Sherpa: Stories from the Solukhumbu*, as part of the research findings. The composition of layered storylines in this film exposes fragmented, collective narratives, affording multiple truths to be refracted. The relationships created between visual imagery, interview recordings, and additional soundscapes foster a multidimensional space to move audiences through a sensory experience of representations that may open space for dialogue around the complexities of the mountainside.

Visual technologies increasingly form part of many individuals’ everyday experiences, thereby forging new channels and ways of knowing (Feighey, 2003). As Pink (2007) suggests, there is no essential hierarchy of knowledge or media for representations, but visual representations bear an important relationship to written or spoken word within knowledge creation and theoretical discussions. In accordance, the construction of film was not only a means to represent findings, but occurred simultaneously with the analysis and interpretation phases. This process of reading and seeing across the individual Sherpas’ narratives helped to illuminate the interconnecting through-lines of this research: Climbing to the top; Encountering death; and Choosing to (dis)continue. Using the re-storied conversations as my starting point, I

edited and constructed the collections of audio and visual clips with video-editing software.

Assuming both narrator and director roles in this editing process, I became conscious that creating and directing multimedia representations is a position of privilege and consciousness. During this creative process, I held the power to present Sherpas and myself in a variety of ways. In this regard, the film maintains the verbal and visual presence of Sherpas, providing opportunities for them to represent themselves, their cultures, and experiences within the adventure tourism industry of Nepal (Feighey, 2003). Additionally, to emulate the dialogical-nature of the interview conversations, I have also chosen to include my voice within the composition. As previously mentioned, my presence extends transparency, and positions me within this work and subsequently the interpretations of the findings. Indeed, the director and narrator roles proffer powers to edit and omit, systematically selecting what stories are *scene*, and heard (Albers & James, 1988; Banks, 2001, 2007; Pink, 2007, 2015). Therefore, it was integral for me to remain reflexive throughout the film construction process questions like, “What is being represented (or not) within the frames, and why?”

4.6 Sharing the Climbing Sherpas’ Stories

The Climbing Sherpas have a vital role to play in Nepal’s mountaineering and adventure tourism industries, and thus it is imperative to consider their voices and complex stories. Therefore, from philosophical and theoretical positions underpinned by existentialism and Foucault’s notions of power I shaped this critical narrative approach. Narrative methodologies and audio-visual technologies fostered opportunities for Climbing Sherpas to share their stories with me, as they represented themselves, their relationships, and experiences in our emplaced interview contexts. I re-storied them into representations of narratively-written conversations and a short documentary film, which I then shared with each of the Sherpa participants to get their

feedback, opinions, and any suggestions for changes. The Sherpas' enthusiasm for the work was encouraging, with many of them sending back email correspondence voicing their approval and excitement around the final manifestations of the written and audio-visual representations. I include some of their responses below:

– *“Dear Maggie, Thank you so much for sharing the story. It is very good, very detailed and precise. My wife liked it too, she especially liked the portion where you have described my hair and smile. You have worked really hard on this, I appreciate your work! ... [We also] loved watching [the video]. It came out very well. We appreciate your hard work and dedication in bringing out our stories through the video... Thank you once again!”* – Kaji Sherpa

– *“Namaste Maggie, Thank you very much for sending me the link of the video. It's very good movie you had made... Thank you.”* – Tashi Sherpa

– *“Namaste Maggie! I showed the video to father and he was too happy that he saw himself for the first time in film, and too excited that he saw it time and again.”* – Mingma speaking on behalf of his father, Kami Sherpa

– *“Namaste Maggie, We both (Da Gelje & me) read the attachment and can't thank you enough for such fantastic writing... Please send us the link once your video is completed. And also, if you permit, we would love feature your video in our webpage. Thank you.”* – Pasang Sherpa speaking on behalf of his father, Da Gelje Sherpa.

After hearing from some of the Climbing Sherpas regarding my interpretations of their stories, I finalised each of the representations to share with you as our readers and viewers. The two chapters that follow present the complex individual and collective stories of living and dying in mountaineering. Chapter Five depicts the thirteen individual conversations that occurred

between each Sherpa and myself, whereas Chapter Six presents the audio-visual representation of the collective stories, illuminating experiences and insights as they relate to all of the Climbing Sherpas' narratives. Following this audio-visual representation, Chapter Seven is used to unpack the analysis and interpretations, as well as the through-lines that underpin these stories.

Chapter Five: A Re-Telling of Lived Stories in Emplaced Conversations

“People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others...” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). The pages that follow represent lived stories, *my story* of researching (and travelling) in Nepal, but more importantly Sherpas’ stories of life and death, which were graciously shared with me along the way. In including the Climbing Sherpas’ stories, told in their own words and voice, new plotlines, contexts, and complexities emerge, which add to, modify, and at times disrupt the privileged tales of foreign mountaineers, social science researchers, and sensationalising media. From these new stories, I am hopeful that readers and viewers may glean new understandings and ways of knowing about living and working on the mountainside, as well as insights around death, and what it reveals about freedom in the adventure tourism industry of Nepal. As you read these stories, I encourage you to keep in mind the original research questions that guided this project: How do Climbing Sherpas story life and death on the Nepali mountainside? What do these stories reveal about how death is navigated? What do Climbing Sherpas’ navigations of death reveal about freedom?

Prologue

An unanticipated anxiousness consumes my body. My stomach tightens as blood pumps through my veins at unimaginable rates. Only twelve hours before my research fieldwork departure, I am filled with fear, apprehension, excitement, and eagerness. This swirling mix of energy quickly turns into adrenaline as I attend to my mental checklist. I cram an extra pair of wool socks and a Black Diamond headlamp into my enormous blue 70L Osprey backpack. Bulging at every seam, I cinch the pack tightly. Peering at the overstuffed luggage teetering back and forth on my apartment floor, thoughts of doubt infiltrate my consciousness: Am I really prepared to go to the Himalayas to collect Climbing Sherpas’ stories? In this moment of hesitation I force myself to pause and reflect on the immensity of my doctoral endeavour (Personal Journal Entry, February 18, 2015).

A Conversation¹⁴ with Mingma Sherpa on Sunday – March 15, 2015

I cross the fingers of my right hand tightly and stick them into my pocket, hoping that I am wandering down the correct alleyway in the chaos that is [Thamel](#). Thamel is a commercial borough of [Kathmandu](#), recognised by many as the center of the city’s tourism industry. Distinguished by narrow, crowded alleys with few street signs and countless shops, cafes, vendors, and tour offices, it’s easy to take a wrong turn here.

Aha, that’s it! I think with relief as I peer up at the four-story building in front of me. I ascend the three flights of stairs to the entrance of the [Mega Adventures](#) office. My palms begin to sweat. I was up half the night imagining the outcome of my first Nepali-English interview. I have always believed that Sherpas are the true heroes on the mountain, so like an avid movie fan meeting a Hollywood celebrity, my stomach twists with knots of anxious excitement. I press the palms of my hands onto the front of my jeans and wipe the sweat from them. I slip my shoes off at the doormat and, taking a deep breath, I enter through the heavy wooden door.

“[Namaste](#).”

“Namaste, Didi.” A chorus of Nepali greetings welcomes me as I pass into the office.

Clasping my palms together in the middle of my chest, I bow gently and quietly respond, “Namaste.”

[Ngima Sherpa](#), my Nepali-English interpreter, sits silently in the corner of the worn leather couch. I met Ngima once before at a café tucked amid the vibrant textile and souvenir shops of Thamel. I perceived him to be quiet, kind, and polite, characteristics that are often attributed to Nepali people, and Sherpas in particular. At the time of our initial meeting, Ngima was with his boss, who appointed him to accompany me through the [lower Solu](#) region, acting as my guide and language interpreter.

Squeezing past the makeshift cubicles, I walk towards Ngima. He seems different, younger than I remembered. As I draw closer, my gaze connects with his dark brown eyes.

“Namaste, Ngima. How are you feeling today?”

“Good, Miss,” he whispers.

Awaiting Mingma’s arrival, Ngima and I shuffle through the paperwork and ethics documents that will be distributed to each Sherpa participant at the start of our interviews.

“Maybe just shorten this.” Ngima suggests kindly, pointing to the long interview preamble I had prewritten for ethics approval.

“Do you think?” I ask with uncertainty.

“It’s too long, and a bit confusing. What’s this word mean?” he asks.

Although I agree with him, I cannot help but think of the strict ethics policies and guidelines I already agreed to in order to conduct these interviews. I swallow my apprehension and jot down bullet points of the most important parts.

“This should cover it.” I say to Ngima, pointing to the new list of items that I hope he can convey clearly in Nepali to Mingma.

¹⁴ This conversation occurred in Nepali, with Ngima acting as my Nepali-English interpreter. I used translated English transcriptions to construct the story.

Mingma finally walks into the office. “Namaste” he greets everyone and gently bows his head towards Ngima and I. Although slightly behind schedule, I’m pleased he showed up, as he cancelled yesterday. He expresses to Ngima in Nepali that he needs to leave in a timely fashion because he is very busy preparing for his upcoming 2015 Everest Expedition. Ngima hastily leads us to a quiet side room.

Mingma sets his motorcycle helmet near the door, and finds a seat on the brown sofa. His black leather jacket, white v-neck shirt, and rope necklace adorned by a green stone give him a relaxed air. This coolness is enhanced by his hair, a style I see on many young Nepali men that is feathered around the edges and a bit longer in the back.

Ngima explains the consent form we revised. Mingma’s face is expressionless during this process. I’m not sure if he is indifferent about the project, or was somehow talked into being here by Mega Adventures, but he’s here now.

“Ready!” Ngima exclaims, giving me a thumbs-up.

I set up the microphone and audio-recorder on the table in front of Mingma. Firmly pressing the red record button, I begin.

“Thank you again, I really appreciate your participation in this study. Again you can stop at anytime, and this will only be audio-recorded as you requested. Is this okay?” Ngima translates my words into Nepali, reconfirming Mingma’s participation.

With a smile Mingma nods his head yes, and we begin.

“Just my parents and me, myself. I am the only son”

Mingma clears his throat and says, “Gaurishankar, it’s around 4000 meters. Maybe between 3000 to 4000. I was born there, but I grew up in Kathmandu. It’s not [Solukhumbu](#), but the [Dolakha District](#).” Mingma clarifies that he did not originate from the Solukhumbu district like many other Sherpas that work on Everest. “And, when I was small I went to the Gumba¹⁵ in Pharping.”

“Pharping, it’s just around the valley, this Kathmandu valley. A bit out of the area, but it’s near to Kathmandu.” Ngima translates Mingma’s quick Nepali responses to English for me, supplementing them with additional geographical context. I nod my head and look back toward Mingma, who sits stoically on the brown leather loveseat.

“Due to my house and family problems as I’m the only son, I stayed in the Gumba until I was eight years old,” he remarks. “And after that *I had* to look after my parents. So I went into trekking and then slowly into the mountaineering field.”

“So, how big is your family?” I ask for clarification.

“No one. Just my parents and me, myself. I am the only son.” Mingma reiterates.

Ngima looks to me ensuring I understand the dynamics of Mingma’s family situation “He’s the only...”

“Son.” I finish Ngima’s sentence, while recognising the implications of this fact. Being the youngest or only son in a Sherpa cultural context comes with the unspoken responsibility of

¹⁵ Gumba in this case is how Mingma refers to the monastery he attended as a young child with hopes to become a monk/lama.

caring for aging parents and maintaining their properties. Perhaps this was what motivated Mingma to leave his Lama education at the local Gumba to pursue a position on the mountain.

“I started to work as a [kitchen boy](#) for one year. In 2010, I worked as a [Climbing Sherpa](#). I was around eighteen or nineteen years old when I got involved in this [mountaineering] industry.” Mingma chops his right hand repeatedly down into the palm of his left, while describing his progression through Nepal’s adventure tourism industry. As a kitchen boy, Mingma aided the principal cook in the trekking and mountaineering groups, and was usually expected to carry all of the cooking equipment, food, and gas necessary for the duration of the expedition. “I did this for the one year, one season. After that I got interested in being a [Sherpa](#), then climbing peaks, and Everest and so on.”

“What’s this job like?” I ask curiously about his Climbing Sherpa role.

“My work is to set the [Basecamp](#). As soon as we finish the Basecamp then we go to work at [Camp I](#), [Camp II](#), and so on. We take the clients’ luggage, food, tents, oxygen, etc., up. We work to manage these.” Preparing the camps before clients arrive becomes a priority for many Sherpas, the equipment and supplies transported from one camp to the next on their backs. “After the camps are set, we then fix the ropes along the way. Finally we work to target the summit.” Mingma looks over to Ngima and back to me. He clarifies “Fixing the rope around Everest is different. There will be [Doctors](#)¹⁶ for the [Icefall](#)¹⁷ and others who fix the ropes on the way. Our work [on Everest] is just to carry the things and to set the camps.”

“Why did you want to become an assistant guide or Climbing Sherpa?” I ask rather bluntly, eager to find out what contributed to his decision to work in this role.

“Uhh... I have *financial problems* at home.” Mingma pauses momentarily, and then confesses, “Also it is the tallest mountain too.” A twinkle gleams in his eye. “We feel proud when we climb the highest mountain of the world! That’s why it is good for me too. We not only meet people from the same region, but people from all different regions, and foreigners too. *To help all these others is our responsibility*,” Mingma declares as he continues to explain some of the benefits of his job. “The foreigners come to climb the mountain with a high investment. It’s good because during the season without our money, but the foreigners’ investments, we get the chance to climb 7000 meter, 8000 meter peaks. We get the chance to work along with the foreigners; I feel good to see the mountains and hills too!”

I reflect on this silently, considering the importance of this perspective.

“I got new life, a second chance, being a survivor of the disaster”

The pitch of Mingma’s voice rises as he excitedly lists his successful summits. “I went three times to [Dhaulagiri](#), once to [Ama Dablam](#) and [Manaslu](#), and two times to Everest.”

¹⁶ Mingma’s use of “Doctors” refers to “Icefall Doctors” an elite team of local guides and climbers, typically of Sherpa and Nepali descent, who are charged with securing and maintaining the popular South Col route up to the Mt. Everest summit. These doctors are primarily responsible for navigating the hazardous terrain of the Khumbu Icefall, fixing ropes and securing aluminum ladders over deep crevasses in the ice (cf. Heller, 2016).

¹⁷ The Khumbu Icefall, located at the head of the Khumbu glacier, at an altitude of 5486 meters, is one of the most dangerous sections of the well-traveled commercial routes on the south side of Mt. Everest (cf. Kaplan, 2015).

“So till now he has been on six expeditions, and again he’s going.” Ngima tallies the climbs, and reminds me that Mingma is set to attempt Everest again this coming 2015 Spring climbing season.

“When were your Everest expeditions?” I interject.

Sitting tall with his shoulders pulled back into the cushion, Mingma replies, “My first was in 2013 and I summited. In 2014, while going unfortunately...”

Brinngg... brinngg... brinngg. The loud ring of the office phone cuts Mingma’s sentence in half. We pause our conversation until the phone falls silent.

“He first summited on Everest in 2013.” Ngima begins our discussion again. “And the second time he was going in 2014 and there was a tragic accident.”

I shake my head knowingly in response to Ngima’s translations. I turn my attention towards Mingma who waits patiently for another question.

“I’ve heard about the [2014 accident](#) in the [Khumbu Icefall](#) I was wondering, what are your thoughts about this tragedy?”

Mingma leans forward, shifting his elbows onto his knees. Now looking at Ngima, he speaks in rapid Nepali. “Our Camp II was set, and we were about to take the equipment to the upper camp. I woke up at 3:00am and at around 6:00am the ladder on the way was broken.” It is well known that aluminum ladders are necessary for climbing Mt. Everest; they are used to cross the treacherous crevasses and ever-shifting ice blocks of the Khumbu Icefall.

“There were lots of people,” Mingma recollects. “Some of the climbers repaired the same broken ladder and passed by. The place was congested. And all of a sudden an avalanche came. If the avalanche came fifteen minutes or thirty minutes before then it would have killed around sixty or seventy people. It came from above, when the repairing team passed by. We were in the middle. At that time I heard the noise and saw it coming from above. After that I was buried by the snow, I could not remember what else happened there¹⁸.” As Mingma continues to tell his tale, I try to imagine his predicament on the mountain.

Mingma looks up to the ceiling. “When it was bright enough to be seen, I saw friends, who were behind us buried by the avalanche too. I wanted to help others, but I had a fractured hand and needed eight stitches on my head. While [we were] returning some friends were hurt, and some were difficult to take out of the avalanche. I didn’t see anyone at first, but finally saw someone. My friends helped by pulling him out. After that we came to the Basecamp. I had so much pain on my head so I was taken to [Lukla](#) from Basecamp via Helicopter. From Lukla, I was taken to Kathmandu by airplane to the B & B hospital. My family was contacted from the Basecamp by the leader.”

I sit in silence, but the pounding of my heart is almost audible as Ngima relays the details of Mingma’s accident. “Oh my gosh, I can’t even imagine!” I announce in disbelief. “When this happened, what were you thinking?”

¹⁸ Please note: due to the use of two separate interpreters within this project, Ngima who assisted with the interview transcripts and a Canadian-Nepali friend who finalised the subtitles for the film, there are subtle differences among the transcribed text here and Mingma’s subtitles that appear in the film.

“I was moving from Basecamp to Camp II at the Khumbu Icefall. The avalanche was below Camp I around the dam, around 6000 meters. At the time when the avalanche was coming, I was thinking of where to run and how to save my life. Nothing else was in my mind.” Mingma describes to Ngima and I the desperation of his actions triggered by such a disaster.

“We were lucky enough that it was just the force of wind.” Mingma and his teammates were not entirely engulfed by the avalanche, but rather swept by the forceful wind and some falling ice. His gratitude and relief is tangible as he further rejoices in the positive outcome of such a grim situation. “At the time I thought, ‘I got new life, a second chance, being a survivor of the disaster.’ When I got hurt on the head, I was afraid that the pain on my head would be dangerous, but after the check-up, the results were good and positive, which made me happy.” Mingma smiles from ear to ear as he reveals his fate.

Ngima and I are also relieved by the happy ending for Mingma, and swap glances to reassure one another.

“I don’t know much because I was at [the hospital in] Kathmandu at that time, but lots of Sherpa died on same day so everyone decided not to continue.” Mingma sadly acknowledges some of the consequences of the avalanche. “The main reason is that the place where the avalanche came was not safe. Since that route was not safe, we were not ready to risk our life,” Mingma states matter-of-factly. “Many Sherpas died and some say it was to mourn and pay respect,” he explains with his eyes turned towards the floor. “On that day, only Sherpas were buried there. At that time, if the [clients’] target was Camp II, then imagine how many foreigners would have died there.” Mingma points out that the death toll could have been much greater because the avalanche occurred at the beginning of the season, when many clients were not yet on the mountain.

“If I’m happy then I go, if I’m not happy then I just stay away from the mountain”

Returning to Mingma’s comments on receiving a ‘new life’ or ‘second chance’, I voice my concerns to Ngima. “I’m very interested to know about this idea of receiving a ‘second chance’ and his feelings about continuing to climb, even if it’s dangerous.” As the words unconsciously slip from my mouth, I reveal my own fears and perceptions of risk. Ngima nods his head and then relays the question to Mingma.

“Well, I am lucky that I got a second life.” Mingma affirms. Falling silent for a moment, he looks out the office window. Beyond the chaotic, tourist-packed streets of [Thamel](#) lies a distant silhouette of the world’s largest mountain range on the horizon.

“But this time [2015 climbing season] it’s a new route.” Mingma affirms confidently. “Accidents will not occur all the time, this is in fate, so I don’t think it’s always the same over there in the mountains.” Mingma nods his head in the direction of the window. “Also it is my profession to climb the mountains too.”

“Your profession,” I echo.

“His profession to work, to earn, and to run the family.” Ngima chimes in with his own interpretation.

“Being a mountaineer by profession we *have to* take care of how to do hiking, safety,

etc.” Mingma puffs up his chest, explaining the integral role he plays in a client’s summit attempt. “We *have to* watch and help them either by teaching and training; teaching them the way of walking, how to wear the clothes, and how to use the gear. It’s *our responsibility* from Basecamp onwards. Also, it’s our main role *to take them* to the summit and descend down to Basecamp safely. If the client’s condition is not fit and good then we will tell them and request them to return back. If the clients have got the energy and are fit then we help them to top and then descend down safely.” He adds, “In this, money is not the big thing but life is very important.”

“And if the clients are not fit?” I inquire.

“They [clients] can get angry if they are not supported physically [bad health due to altitude]. But, they cannot be forceful,” he says sternly. “If they do it [proceed to climb] forcefully then tomorrow’s mistakes will be ours. In this matter, if he [the mountaineer] is forceful then we will not be responsible.” Mingma declares. Throwing his hands into the air, Mingma asks rhetorically, “What can we say if he is not physically fit and wants to continue climbing?”

My frustration grows as Mingma depicts the determination of aggressive clients. “Are international climbers’ skills and their limited experiences contributing to the accidents that have been occurring on the mountain?” I inquire, asserting some of my own assumptions.

“It’s not due to experience, it is natural.” Mingma points out the inevitable nature of avalanches. “How much experience you have as a mountain guide cannot guarantee when an avalanche will come. Nobody knows if an avalanche is coming today. It’s natural.”

Ngima expands on Mingma’s ideas: “It’s due to the nature and the weather. It’s unpredictable, you can’t say it will rain or snow. Anything can happen at any time.”

“Sherpas, our fathers and grandfathers, used to work in this profession. It’s not always the same on the mountains. And it is our will to climb the tallest mountain, helping the foreigners.” Pausing for a short breath, Mingma continues to say sincerely, “If I am happy then I go, if I’m not happy then I just stay away from the mountain.”

A Conversation with Tashi¹⁹ Sherpa on Tuesday – March 24, 2015

Tashi peers over the railing, looking down at the crowded streets of [Thamel](#). *Beeeeeeep, beeeeeep*. The sounds of impatient taxi drivers ring clear, even from the fifth-story rooftop. With such a commotion of pre-expedition prep in the [Mega Adventures](#) office, Tashi recommended that we record the interview up here. The decrease in the noise level is debatable, but the warm weather and view of the Kathmandu Valley is an inviting space for the discussion that I hope will unfold.

[Kathmandu](#) is now Tashi's permanent home.

"Over there is the Everest region," Tashi exclaims, pointing northeast to the snow-covered peaks strung across the horizon like sleeping giants.

"Oh, wow!" I allow myself to be captivated by the distant beauty for a moment, and then direct Tashi to the collapsible campstool that [Ngima](#) has set up for him in front of the tripod. Tashi settles into his seat, smiling towards the camera. I take a deep breath in and begin. "Tell me a little about yourself."

"I might also be counted as the famous one"

A small beam of light reflects off the pink lenses of Tashi's knock-off Ray-Bans that push back his shiny, black hair. The camera refocuses as he shifts slightly in his seat. "I'm from [Namche Bazaar](#)," he begins. Like many from the high mountains, Tashi refers to the height of his village. "I live in the altitude of 4400 meters." Considered the central hub of the [Upper Khumbu](#), Namche is known for its museum, military outpost, and large weekend bazaar, and is a must-see on most tourist and trekker itineraries.

"And my mama from Rolwaling..." Clasp his hands together, Tashi explains that his mother moved to Namche to marry his father. "I have a brother and a sister." Softening his gaze, a smile stretches across Tashi's face. "My sister is now studying grade twelve, and my brother is a monk. He studied in Kathmandu, ten years here. He is right now in India. He's going to try for the Gishi. Gishi is the Master." Tashi's brother's move to India and dedication to become a Gishi is not surprising; this is a common vocation for many Sherpa men. Tashi switches the topic of conversation hastily.

"I started the expeditions since 1982"

"1982?" I question.

"Ninety-eight," he corrects himself.

I want to steer Tashi back into divulging a bit more about his family situation. '*What was life like on the mountain? What caused them to move?*' I ponder to myself.

"And before the expedition what did you do?" I ask aloud.

¹⁹ More about Tashi's climbing achievements can be found at the following website: firstascenttashi.com.

“My age is twelve, I live in the valley. I studied [in] the valley.” In a distressed tone, Tashi continues, “The problem for school in the valley is that the teacher is sometimes coming, sometimes not coming, and not good communication in the valley.”

No longer residing in Namche, Tashi describes how his family moved to Kathmandu, Nepal’s capital, in part due to this inefficient educational system. He quit school in 1992, and decided to pursue a position with a trekking company. “When my age was maybe ten or twelve, that time some of my valley people were going on an expedition.” Quite concentrated, he stares beyond where I am seated as though shuffling through distant memories. “When I grow the ages then I want to try the mountain, I’m thinking that. Then I request from my family. They give me the job.” With few opportunities in the mountaineering industry at the time, Tashi relied on his family relations to find work during the early stages of his career. “I carried the load also.” Raising his right hand, Tashi rotates his wrist gradually creating larger and larger circles as he describes that one must work one’s way up to the position of [Climbing Sherpa](#). “You know first I started as helper for the cook. They call it a [kitchen boy](#),” he says, laughing. Although uncertain of what triggered this outburst, I laugh along with him. “For five or six years, I worked the trekking.” He continues to recount the trajectory of his career. “In 1998, then one of my uncles gave the expedition for me to [Cho Oyu](#)²⁰.”

Tashi’s family history comprises a long lineage of work in the mountains. “My father is [climbing]. People told me my grandfather, Phura Kipa Sherpa, climbed before with [Edmund Hillary](#) and [Tenzing Norgay](#)!” Tashi boasts.

“No? Really?!” My eyes widen in astonishment at this connection. Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary are mountaineering legends, being the first people to ever set foot on Mt. Everest’s summit. Ngima, standing just left of the camera, chuckles at my reaction.

“Yeaah.” Arms crossed in front of his chest, Tashi nods yes, drawing out his affirmative response.

“Your grandfather?” I repeat, still awestruck.

“Yeah,” Tashi proudly states. “My grandfather...[he] made the [Khumbu Icefall](#) way. My grandfather told me he’s worked eight to nine years in the Khumbu Icefield. He stayed as an [Ice Doctor](#) until he passed away two years before. He passed the knowledge to Ang Nima, he’s from Tingboche, for how to make the Khumbu Icefall.” I can sense Tashi’s pride in the re-telling of his grandfather’s story.

Tashi begins to recite more of his family’s achievements.

“My father has climbed like 6000, 7000 meters...and my uncle has done Everest. My grandfather too, he climbed Mt. Everest. I also climb...” Tashi chuckles at the thought, “...and after maybe my son.”

“So it’s almost a family business?” I inquire.

“Yeah, family business. I’ve done it nine times!”

“Nine times!” I echo in excitement.

²⁰ The world’s sixth tallest mountain, Cho Oyu stands at 8201 meters above sea level.

“Actually, I already have done thirty-five expeditions. Everest, I went fifteen times, but nine times I’ve done the summit. It’s my dream when I’ve done ten times, then I stop. I’m thinking that.”

Tashi pauses for a moment, and then confesses why he continues to work in the mountains. “If I done it ten times,” Tashi turns his face towards the sky and laughs, “I also might be counted as the famous one.” He elaborates on how he believes this decision will affect his fourteen-year old son and ten-year old daughter. “Then maybe in future, I can easily tell my story for my sons and daughters. Then they get good school, freedom, everything. Before in my time it’s not there, in the valley.”

Tashi shifts in his seat. “My plan is that last year, that if I’ve done, then I’d stop.” Shivers slowly creep down my spine. The “last year” Tashi is referring to marks the tragic avalanche on [Mt. Everest in 2014](#). Ngima and I sit still for a moment, allowing Tashi’s words to sink in. I peer towards the snow-clad peaks of the [Himalayas](#), thinking, ‘last year could have been his tenth climb.’ The murmur of traffic and barking street dogs brings me back to consciousness. I do my best to let go of the assumptions and speculations that swirl through my mind.

“Somebody’s life is gone there, but why you do like that?”

“So then, what was your last expedition on Mt. Everest?” I probe.

“Last expedition was 2013. I did summit.” Tashi responds. “Andddd,” uncrossing his arms, he draws out his speech and leans forward to say, “2014 I also had plan, but you know the accident in Khumbu Icefall.”

“Yeah, the accident” I repeat. “What happened?”

“Most people [...] who are running from the Khumbu Icefall, they make the way for the Lola face.” Tashi points out that those whose lives were in greatest jeopardy were the mountain workers, who were diligently fixing ropes through the Khumbu Icefall beneath the Lola face and it’s hanging glacial ice structures known as [seracs](#).

“They were searching for ways for which region was a safe place.” Tashi recalls. “Who knows there’s coming an avalanche?” He reflects on the unpredictability of such mountain hazards.

“Those individuals died in the mountains?” I chime back in.

“They died, yeah.” Tashi’s brief but sombre response lingers for a moment. Tension from his brow line is released, he relaxes his face as he methodically nods his head yes.

With a deep breath in, I prepare another question. And although I am already aware of the answer because of previous coverage in the media, I ask it anyway. “So that occurred in beginning of the season before anyone summited?”

“That time I was on my way...” Tashi begins, explaining that due to the timing he had not yet reached [Basecamp](#). “The other, my friends, all of them did meet for a meeting, then after, all of the expeditions quit.” As Tashi speaks, I recall the news clippings I have read. They reported the Spring 2014 climbing season on Mt. Everest was officially cancelled due to safety concerns, ongoing negotiations for improved insurance and compensation from the Nepali government, and as a way to honour and respect those who were killed. Tashi reveals a new and complex

feature of this story. “Somebody told me that after all of the teams quit, the one Chinese team went there,” He explains. Through laughter Tashi confesses, “I heard. But, is it right? I have not any answers.”

“Do you think people were angry about this?” I reply.

“Actually you know she [the Chinese climber] chartered for the heli to pick up from the Basecamp to [Camp II](#), then after Camp II up to the summit. Somebody told me that she wanted to challenge for the seven summits²¹.” Tashi describes the extreme measures the Chinese climber took to climb Everest that year. Her aim was to secure the record of climbing all of the “seven summits” – a mountaineering phrase signifying the highest mountain peaks on each of the seven continents.

“What I am telling to her...” Tashi says as if he hopes to relay a message to the Chinese climber. “...she is not respectful to the accident teams, but you know in the mountains we make all of the teams like family, but somebody’s accident and somebody still climbing is not good. It’s good for her, but actually no respect the other persons.”

I nod in agreement. “Yeah, it’s disrespectful for the dead and those who’ve tried to climb.”

“Yeah, somebody’s life is gone there, but why you do like that?” Tashi questions the climber’s intentions.

“So is it the idea of not crossing over the bodies, and paying respect?” I ask for clarity, trying to understand what he means.

“Respect, but you know that we give some sharing to the heart of the family, we give some talking good, maybe some doing help, maybe somebody’s doing the help for their families, like making fundraise... Do help is best.” These are the measures Tashi and his fellow climbers might take to honour the loss of a life in the mountains. I think about how Tashi’s description resembles the ways in which my own culture and family navigate death: sharing memories and pictures of our loved ones, speaking kindly of them through funeral eulogies, and cooking dinner for distressed family members.

“I don’t know what they think,” Tashi chimes in again. “She [the Chinese climber] is going for the challenge, but from my side this is not good.”

“It’s actually not our job, but we’re born in the altitude place”

Tashi straightens his back, and with a deep breath in pushes his chest forward a bit. His gaze, once connected to mine, shifts to the right of the camera as he begins to speak. “The feel is good.” Tashi describes the sensation of being on the world’s highest mountaintop. “But right now in that, I can’t see any happenings for me, but my sight is also *doing well for* my clients,” he admits. “Which kind the clients want, it’s his dream. I want to *give to* him... sharing to him, his dream to make it successfully.” Tashi acknowledges the sacrifice and commitment of his clients:

²¹ Tashi is referring to a world record known as the “Seven Summits,” which is obtained when an individual successfully summits the highest peak on each of the world’s seven continents.

“Some clients told me, ‘I work many years, then I have to make budget, then I came to climbing,’ like that. Yeah, but if he can’t succeed, then his whole goal is dumped. What they want I *have to* do from my side too, to fully support to him. I want to do like that.”

“So you fully support.” I repeat Tashi’s previous sentiment. “It’s your job to help foreigners to the top?”

My question lingers.

“I’m thinking, it’s actually not our job, but we’re born in the altitude place,” he says. Tashi illuminates preconceived notions of Sherpa people. “Then they know, all of the Euro countries, all the places know that these Sherpa people are born in this altitude place.” Grinning, he lets out a laugh as he describes what he believes are international climbers’ perceptions of Sherpas. “They know how to challenge for the mountains. They have the energy for the challenge for the mountain,’ and then the European peoples they recommend for the Sherpas. Then [from] there on, we all have the profession of climbing.”

Now that more mountaineer training schools are recognised in Nepal, the number of certified mountain guides is increasing. As a graduate of one such program, Tashi describes that proper training and management of the team are crucial to summiting high-altitude mountains. He advises for all climbers to “do technicals and good cooperate with the team.” He continues, “Sometimes the mountaineers some do not realise...” as he reaches out and pinches his right thumb and pointer finger together, “...you know they have not clipped the safety, and mistakenly he is dead.”

“Do they know how to climb or are they just learning for the first time?” I inquire.

“Actually foreigners, some...know how to climb in the mountain... he know the everything, the technical part.”

“Yeah.” I nod my head to show I understand.

“But, some is new. And then we *have to* give the training at the Basecamp, maybe some 6000 meters.” Tashi elaborates. “The beginners coming, it takes long time. We give the knowledge, sharing. It takes time, but wastes time. But if he coming here ahead, preparing some things, technical part knowledge. Again if he coming here some part he already has, then other things, new things if he wants to learn, then easily too he can learn.”

A subtle grin appears on his face as Tashi shakes his head in disbelief and continues, “Some are thinking, this is a small mountain, ‘ah I can easily do climbing, ’” He describes the mindset of some of his clients who come to climb in the Himalayas. “Do not think like that”, Tashi warns, “managing is important.”

“Some are thinking I’m going to climb Everest, then this year [it’s] not done. Maybe then he’s thinking like so bad.” Tashi explains some of his clients’ desire to climb in spite of dangerous conditions or being advised to turn around. “Do not think like that,” he reiterates. “The mountain is still here, but important is our life.”

“Gone, swept all in the avalanche”

“The Spring season we must go to Everest, and October season the foreign people come to [Manaslu](#), [Cho Oyu](#), and [Shishapangma](#).” Tashi says, indicating that he spends his time climbing other mountains during the tourism shoulder seasons.

“Season was 2012.” Tashi begins a story about his last expedition on Manaslu²². “I led ten Chinese, two Sweden. I had twelve clients, twenty Sherpas with me. I’m the team guide.” The sounds of the bustling streets around me fade into the background as I focus intently on Tashi’s words. “Then the plan at the time, we have to go up towards Camp III then back. I have already made the plan, but that day I am at Camp II. We get up early, half past three. We get up, then make tea for our clients, and we were drinking, and then...” He quickly sweeps his left arm down and across the front of his body. “... came the avalanche. I hear the avalanche coming and then the outside is dark. When the avalanche coming, I was already in my camp. All the Camp III was swept. The avalanche came so fast you know, like winds maybe in seconds.” A smile emerges on his face. Tashi circles his right hand rapidly. “It zoomed so fast,” he says, laughing to himself.

“Was your team okay!?”

“My team is all okay.” he assures me. “But that time one of our Sherpa, he’s the famous one. His name is [Lakpa Rita](#). He lives in the US, he will be coming soon to climb Everest, he was also there. We are safe, but then wind is throwing the ice and there’s some snowing on my tent. Some ice fell, my body also [was] hit. I went up to go see that all my clients are safe, then after I check the Camp III. Nobody there!” Tashi exclaims, shaking his head in disbelief.

“All of Camp III was gone?” I ask incredulously.

“Gone, swept all in the avalanche.”

“Did anyone...” I try to insert another question, but Tashi picks up on what I am about to ask and quickly shifts back into his story.

“Then immediately, I sent my twelve clients and half of the Sherpas I send down, and five Sherpas I kept with me. Then I called for my friend Lakpa Rita. He also came with me. We went immediately up the avalanche part, then I get Camp III to survey [the] avalanche. There were thirty-one peoples. Immediately out of there I get nineteen alive, but most of them have broke the neck or most of them are hurt. Then twelve is missing...” Tashi’s voice trails off and his dark brown eyes grow heavy for a moment. “I called immediately to basecamp, ‘how many [have] lived yesterday night at camp III?’ I get the news,” Tashi says somberly. “Then just I find nineteen are alive, and ten are dead body, and two are missing, but I didn’t find there.”

“You didn’t find them there?” I repeat.

“I searched, for the whole day I searched there.” Tashi’s gaze rises to meet mine. In an earnest voice he continues, “I fully tried to search there. I didn’t found. But ten bodies I found...” Tashi and his team of Sherpas assumed responsibility for the rescue and recovery of

²² One of the world’s fourteen tallest mountains, Manaslu is located in the Nepali Himalayas and ranked eighth in height at 8156 meters above sea level. The events of the fall 2012 expedition that Tashi references have been reported in media outlets as well (cf. Arnette, 2012; Marolt, 2012).

the injured and missing climbers at Manaslu's Camp III. "I unearthed then take out and then I put them in sleeping bags. Then after I called directly the company, and the company sends the heli rescue. First, I put the alive people. The alive people I send down. Then after I request to the heli maybe better to bring these bodies down. I get ten body, only one is Sherpa."

I sit still as he recounts the remainder of his story. My heart fills with gratitude as I reflect on the risks that Tashi and his team took on behalf of others. Returning my attention to Tashi, I inquire about his feelings. "So, it sounds like there are dangerous places in the mountains. Does it ever worry you?"

"From one side there is danger, but you know who knows when maybe coming, when breaking of ice making possible for avalanche. Nobody knows that." Shaking his head from side to side, Tashi insists, "You can't predict."

A Conversation²³ with Dorchi Sherpa on Saturday – March 28, 2015

[Ngima](#) and [Kanchi](#) tease one another as we skirt the hillside and descend towards the small bungalow perched on stilts. Kanchi, an animated and energetic eighteen year-old, befriended us and has graciously served as our local tour guide these past several days. She is the niece of [Tendi Sherpa](#), the co-owner of [Mega Adventures](#), who used to reside in [Chyangba](#) – a rural settlement nestled in the [lower Solu](#) region. Kanchi recently graduated from grade nine, the highest level of education accessible in this valley, and is thrilled to have visitors to help fill her quiet summer holiday.

The distant summit of Mount Peak rises high above the thin layer of clouds that hangs at its buttress. Ngima reaches for the Canon DSLR that swings from my neck. Fascinated by photography, he takes a few quick snaps of the majestic beauty before we descend down to the small Sherpa home. Kanchi scheduled an early morning interview with Dorchi, a retired high-altitude climber and Chyangba resident. We continue to admire the scenery as we meander down the hill, following a small winding footpath between the village residences.

“[Tashi Delek!](#)” a raspy voice croaks. This Sherpa greeting is a phrase that originates from the Tibetan language, and cannot be directly translated to English. “Blessings” and “good luck” are some of the common interpretations, yet it is often used at the beginning of every Sherpa exchange. An older woman wrapped in a long maroon vestment with dandelion-gold detailing, colours that indicate a Lama vocation, sits hunched on a wooden bench next to a young Sherpa boy who repeatedly beats the ground with a stick. Past stacks of chopped timber, I spot two more dark-eyed children playing rambunctiously. Nearly four-years old, they take turns chasing chickens, giggling at their failed attempts to capture them beneath their wicker baskets.

A young woman peeks out from behind a large wooden door. Sonam, Dorchi’s daughter, invites Kanchi, Ngima, and I into the house to wait for her father to return from the fields where he is tending to their cattle. We climb a set of creaky stairs and make ourselves comfortable on the low bench that abuts the short kitchen table. Fascinated by our presence, the children follow us inside and settle onto the seats between Ngima and I. A small kitten nuzzles my ankle.

Maya, the small innocent-looking Sherpa girl, sweeps the kitten up and holds it high in the air before me, an action that prompts uncontrollable giggling from the rest of the children. Sonam offers us [Sherpa Tea](#), a traditional beverage in the southern part of the Solukhumbu region made of flour, salt, and black tea. Ngima and I sip our tea as we doodle pictures of different Nepali words in the notebooks I brought for the children.

Nearly a half an hour later, Dorchi and his son-in-law arrive. “Tashi Delek, [Namaste,](#)” he greets everyone as he enters the kitchen. Contagious smiles stretch between the flushed rosy cheeks of the children’s faces. Ecstatic to see Dorchi, they launch themselves at his legs, each waiting for an individual hug hello. Ngima and Kanchi follow Dorchi into the living room at the back of the house to remind him of why we are here. Kanchi returns to the kitchen and invites me into the main room to have another tea with Dorchi before starting the interview.

²³ This conversation occurred in Nepali, with Ngima acting as my Nepali-English interpreter. I used translated English transcriptions to construct the story.

Lounging casually on a large feather-stuffed cushion in the left corner of the room, Dorchi is dressed in a pink flannel shirt and a black micro-fleece vest; his relaxed style complements his nonchalant demeanour. He drinks his tea slowly as Ngima translates the main objectives of the project into Nepali. Ngima asks Dorchi for consent to be video-recorded. “Hajur,” Dorchi affirms, shaking his head yes. Dorchi rubs his eyes with his fists, unzips his vest half way, and shifts forward in his seat. Ngima places the microphone on the small end table between them, as I punch the red record button with my thumb.

“[Namascar](#), thank you for the interview.” I step out from behind the camera to greet him with a more formal Nepali greeting. After thanking Dorchi for his time, I proceed with my first question. “I was wondering if you can start by telling me about your family and where you grew up.”

“Everybody was saying ‘Everest,’ so I wanted to see how Everest was.”

Dorchi clasps his hands together at the center of his chest, and bows his head gently in my direction. “Namascar,” he murmurs quietly back. With a smile, Dorchi shifts his gaze from the camera to Ngima. From the right corner of his mouth he begins to speak. “I was born here in Solu, in [Chyangba](#), and grew up here as well. In 1993, I requested a couple of times to work with the director of Peak Promotion, Mr. Wangchu Sherpa. He said that I couldn’t make it²⁴,” Dorchi explains with a scowl. Dorchi never engages the question about his family, but instead describes his childhood wish to work as a [Climbing Sherpa](#) on Mt. Everest. As Dorchi continues to speak, I wonder about the way Ngima translated my first question, and what might have prompted Dorchi to jump immediately into a dialogue about Everest.

“I was so persistent,” Dorchi continues with a grin. “I said, ‘I will go to Everest and summit it one time.’ I’ve been to Everest seven times, and even with the late [Babu Chiri Sherpa](#)!” Dorchi gloats about climbing with Babu Chiri, a legendary Sherpa guide from the nearby village of [Takasindu](#).

“Seven summits!” I excitedly recognise his achievements. “What contributed to your continued attempts?” I ask, in awe of Dorchi’s determination.

With his arms crossed tightly in front of his chest, Dorchi rocks forward in his seat and announces, “To climb Everest, it was first my wish. And after that there is name too.” When Sherpas are successful in summiting Everest they are recognised by name, and in many cases incur local fame for these feats. Dorchi sits up tall, with his eyes fixed to the ceiling. “Climbing Everest was not of our ancestor’s time, but everybody was saying ‘Everest’ so I wanted to see how Everest was...” Dorchi reveals. “[Sagarmāthā](#) in Nepali, in Tibetan, [Jomolungma](#).” He clarifies that Mt. Everest has several names, depending on the language being spoken.

“I went to Everest in 1992 from the Tibet side. I didn’t know how to wear the ice-shoe, the [crampon](#). I didn’t even know how to repel either. Later I tried. I learned to go up and down by myself. People didn’t teach me to wear crampons, but I learned by myself.” Dorchi joined the 1992 expedition with minimal mountaineering knowledge and skills, often watching the way the

²⁴ Please note: due to the use of two separate interpreters within this project, Ngima who assisted with the interview transcripts and a Canadian-Nepali friend who finalised the subtitles for the film, there are subtle differences among the transcribed text here and Dorchi’s subtitles that appear in the film.

others used equipment and teaching himself the same techniques. “I didn’t climb the peak at first. In 1992, I went until [Camp V](#), from Tibet side. At that time, I was strong too, and able to walk. In 1993, I went and climbed again.”

Bright light enters through the small window, illuminating the left side of Dorchi’s cheerful face. “At that top without oxygen, it was so tall. What to tell you son, the feeling was always good. [Ek dam ramro](#),” Dorchi describes to Ngima the feeling of being on Everest’s summit.

“It was just to reach the summit once for the name and the fame”

“Ek dam ramro!” I repeat, learning the Nepali words meaning “very good.” Dorchi gives me a thumbs-up as he and Ngima chuckle at my pronunciation.

Moving on to another question, I ask Dorchi about which position he held on the mountain. He laughs as he answers. “What else was I? I went as a [Sherpa](#). We were not expecting to have big business or anything,” he says honestly. “It was just to reach the summit once for the name and the fame. Once was enough, after that I had no more interest.” Dorchi sheds light on some of the underlying motivations for his mountaineering pursuits. As he confesses that he had no more interest in climbing after his first summit, I cannot help but wonder why Dorchi decided to pursue Everest another six times.

“He was a Climbing Sherpa,” Ngima reaffirms.

“At the time, it was like being a [Dzopkyok](#),” Dorchi says with a big belly laugh. “Dzopkyok used to carry the things until the [Basecamp](#) and from there the Climbing Sherpas are used as the high altitude Dzopkyok.” He raises his right arm and extends it high above his head.

Ngima giggles as he explains the joke. “Like before [Namche](#) to Basecamp the Dzopkyok, a mixture of yak and cow, they will carry everything, like the luggage, but from there [Basecamp] the Sherpas will do the work of the Dzopkyok.”

“[Camp IV](#) Dzopkyok,” Dorchi jokes as we all laugh in unison. In between chuckles Dorchi explains to [Kanchi](#), who just walked into the room, the reason for our laughter. “We are called Climbing Sherpas, but from Basecamp to Camp IV we are the Dzopkyok. We have to carry all the things.”

Kanchi giggles at the thought as I playfully flex my right bicep. “So you were very strong?”

“Thirty kilograms while climbing up, and some carried forty, fifty kilos while descending down.” Dorchi depicts the sizeable loads Sherpas were expected to carry up and down the dangerous terrain of the high-altitude mountains. “While descending, due to greed and money, some would often carry one hundred kilograms. They *used to pay* in American dollars, and if they pay \$20, \$50, or \$100 then people would carry double the weight,” Dorchi reports. “But I was unable to do so,” he admits.

Dorchi closes his eyes tightly. “At last, I got sick...” he laments, indicating that this illness took him from working on the mountain. Dorchi says nothing more than, “...a sacred tree near my water source, below my house.”

“He cut the tree which led him to sickness that prevented him from climbing²⁵.” Ngima qualifies Dorchi’s response.

Dorchi quickly moves on from this topic. “What to tell you now son,” Dorchi looks up at Ngima with his kind brown eyes. “I have grown old, and I can’t go climb Everest. Now, I’ll work around the house until death.” Dorchi mocks the reality of his situation.

“Later if we are called for an interview like this, then I will go and help, but even doing trekking, it’s not like before. Nowadays, one should have good communication skills in English. There were very few people before who were able to speak good English, but even without good English they were hired for work. But nowadays there is *no work without* English.” Dorchi reveals the complex circumstances that many of the older Climbing Sherpas face when deciding whether or not to continue to work. “I was also not educated at that time but I was strong, but now I am old. Now it’s the generation for younger ones, and old guys like I don’t have to work anymore.”

“If I had seen properly, then I would have come down earlier”

The soft mewling of the kitten fills the silence as Ngima waits patiently for another cue. My eyes are fixed on Maya, who shuffles into the room. Nearly bumping the camera, she clumsily scoops up the whimpering kitten.

I reconnect my gaze with Ngima. “Are there moments when he felt scared?” I blurt out abruptly.

“What to say son, we used to climb trees and walk a bit on the hills.” Dorchi chuckles as he responds to Ngima’s translation. “Otherwise, while climbing [Everest](#) and [Makalu](#), only tiny ropes are used. If we looked down or fell then we would have fallen all the way to the base.” Dorchi looks over his right shoulder and then throws his hands up helplessly as if his grip suddenly slipped from a ledge. “We were not allowed to look down, and even while descending I came backwards.” Dorchi describes some of the techniques used to eliminate the perception of risk.

“What about a time you felt in danger?” I ask curiously.

“There were forty-five of them all together; there were Koreans, we American groups, and the Indians.” Dorchi pauses for a moment, grasping for the memory. “After summiting, the American doctors, I had lost my goggles unknowingly, and they told me, ‘Wear sunglasses Dorchi,’ but I didn’t have them.” Dorchi pinches his thumbs and index fingers together and raises them to his eyes like they were a pair of glasses. “My eyes were swollen from 6:00pm onward.²⁶ I couldn’t shout or cry,” Dorchi admits, abashed. “It’s a shame to cry.” Dorchi recounts the slow and dangerous climb he endured with his limited vision. “When we reached the [South Summit](#), it was around 10:00pm. We reached the summit at almost 11:00pm. At the

²⁵ According to Sherpa and Buddhist beliefs, the act of cutting down a tree near a water source or polluting the areas surrounding a water source can cause a family illness (N. Sherpa, personal communication, November 11, 2015).

²⁶ The painful symptoms Dorchi describes are a result of *snow blindness* – ultraviolet (UV) keratitis – a condition caused by insufficient eye protection when exposed to intense UV rays. This is common at high altitudes when a natural source of sunlight is reflected off of snow or ice, refracting nearly eighty percent of the UV radiation (Boyd, 2015).

main climb, it was like this..." Dorchi says, stiffening his right hand straight into the air. "People used crampons to hang there while climbing the [Step](#). After that we reached the summit top, and on top it's like a field... *Umma ma ma esto ramro!*" Dorchi draws out his Nepali words for "very good."

"It's very beautiful from the top!" Ngima reiterates Dorchi's sentiment in English.

"People say there is nothing at the top, but there is a field, and a big rock there too." Dorchi continues, describing Everest's summit. "Just beside that there is a big hole too, if you fell down in there then you would never be found. If you look into it you can feel the wind coming forcefully. There were also three wires on top, where flags were flying. We took a picture at the top beside those flags," Dorchi tells us.

"Our members [clients] had taken the picture and promised to send the photos to us. They said that the American doctor's camera got damaged. He had a camera like yours." Dorchi points his finger toward my camera, which sits securely atop the tripod, recording our interview. "It [the camera] was covered with the ice at the top," Dorchi complains, annoyed that there was no evidence of his successful summit on Everest that year.

"They had discussion amongst themselves. A walkie-talkie was not given to me either, but others had them. I followed them down forcefully." Dorchi returns to discussing the risky nature of the descent, exacerbated by his lack of goggles. "Uncle Wangchu thought that I was lost..." Dorchi's sentence trails off. "...and I was," he admits with a chuckle. "I came at the end, behind everyone."

"At last!" Ngima exclaims, relieved.

With his hands cupped around his eyes again, Dorchi cracks a smile. "If I had seen properly, then I would have come down earlier. I came through the route where the other people had travelled, and finally reached [Camp IV](#). Camp IV is a big and massive field almost like an airport. People say that lots of people died there, Japanese and others. We were just above these dead bodies." Dorchi's eyes open wide. Pulling at the leg of his trekking pants, he admits with a grim expression, "We didn't know due to the darkness of night, but they had clothes like ours, they were like ice and we stepped on them as we passed by." Dorchi reports crossing over the accidental graveyard²⁷ of Mt. Everest.

"I got sick. Otherwise, when people died I didn't get scared."

Shifting away from his own confrontations with danger on the mountain, Dorchi launches into a tangent about accidents he has witnessed. "In 1993 at [Camp II](#) there was a route, I don't remember the name, since the name was in English. It was an incline; from that place the Koreans went towards Camp II. They all came down...Oooiii." Dorchi draws out a loud cry as he swipes his hands diagonally across his body, indicating that they all had slipped. "We could only see the blood. Lots of people died." He brushes his hands together quickly, like there was nothing he or anyone else could do.

²⁷ The *death zone*, the section of Mt. Everest between Camp IV (at 8230 meters) and the summit is known for the hundreds of mummified corpses scattered on the mountainside, creating macabre landmarks along the way to the summit (cf. Nuwer, 2015; Strange Remains, 2014).

“Also in 1993, our late [Pasang Lhamu](#) passed away. Pasang Lhamu and one guy from Makalu, their bodies were packed into tarps and were being brought down.” Dorchi discusses the death of the renowned Pasang Lhamu, the first Nepali woman to set foot on the summit of Everest. “Pasang Lhamu and the guy came to our camp. Uncle Wangchu told them [to wait] and move ahead together as a team, but they refused. On [Baisakh](#) 10 they went to the summit.” Dorchi shakes his head disapprovingly. “At the [South Summit](#) they dug the hole and had died there... We later saw the dead body being dragged.”

Ngima offers his interpretation in English, “So like Dorchi’s boss told Pasang Lhamu and her husband not to go [to the summit] alone, but to go together with the group. They didn’t agree and they went, and they passed away.”

I interject for clarification. “Are these accidents connected with a lack of experience?” Ngima translates my concern.

“Bad weather. People know how to climb. Pasang Lhamu had got good training. But it was weather.” Dorchi reports bleakly. “While passing the route at the dam, ice used to break frequently. Many people died. Nothing happened to us because of God.”

Dorchi pauses and looks towards the ceiling for a moment.

“People used to move ahead of us to take the things Camp I to Camp II. There we had to climb downwards, one man was sandwiched and his head was hurt and there was lots of blood all over. But luckily he was alive. Near Camp III, there was one route by a gorge. Some climbers used to come down, and get lost in there. Lobsang Jangbu also got lost around there. He went during the wintertime and died. Lobsang and I worked on the same first trek. He was younger than I, he went to Everest five times, but passed away early.”

Dana-nana-nana-nana-na. Dorchi’s cellphone rings. He pulls it from his pocket and sprawls his body over the big bench cushion. While he talks to the caller, Ngima turns to me and briefly clarifies Dorchi’s lengthy and tangential stories.

Dorchi hangs up the phone and sits back up. “Later, what happened was, I got sick.” Dorchi reminds me that his reasons for retirement were not motivated by fear. “Otherwise, when people died I didn’t get scared. What happened at the time of [Babu Chiri](#), I went alone to Camp II from the Basecamp when my friend had called me. The wind was so powerful; it took away some other people’s tents. It brought the tents with great force into the [Icefall](#). But I was young and energetic,” Dorchi asserts boldly. “I was not afraid on the hills and of the great force of the winds.”

A Conversation²⁸ with Phuri Sherpa on Monday – March 30, 2015

It's only 6:30am. Awakened by my anxious bladder, I am forced up. Extending my arms above me, my spine arches as I stretch my tired body out of my down sleeping bag and into the new day. I notice the achiness of my muscles, likely a result of the fifteen kilograms in my pack. As a researcher implementing visual methods, I was not willing to part with the cameras, computer, and back-up hard drives in [Kathmandu](#).

Guilty thoughts invade my consciousness as I massage knots from my tight shoulders. *You did not hire a porter to carry your things, a decision that could have contributed to the local economy.* Bending forward I stretch the pain from my calves and hamstrings, and remind myself that this was the more ethical, less “colonialist” choice at the time – one that did not expect or assume subservience. Only four days into the field, I am questioning my original decision as I witness the need for economic opportunities in the small villages that pepper the Himalayan hillsides. Ngima spoke to this on our trek to his home in [Dandakharka](#), a quaint village located in [Dolakha District](#) of the [Solu region](#), just south of [Sagarmāthā National Park](#). Means to sanitation, consistent electricity, and running water are still considered luxuries here; technological advancements that are not shared by the entire community. According to Ngima his family has been lucky. His father's success in the trekking industry and long-standing connections allowed for developments around his family's home and village facilities, along with educational opportunities for Ngima and his siblings that extend beyond what is available in this mountain region.

I quietly sneak into the kitchen, doing my best not to disturb [Sumi](#), Ngima's sister, and her three-month-old baby [Dechen](#) who both sleep soundly on the cushioned benches. I gently tug on the handle of the big wooden door and step into the crisp mountain air. I skirt the side of the house on my way to the latrine, passing two clucking chickens and several small yellow chicks caged beneath woven baskets. I slip my hands from the warm pockets of my Patagonia jacket, unlatch the door, and step into the enclosed outdoor structure.

Stepping back out of the washroom, I follow the dirt path back along the house, past the woodpile again, to the water spigot just outside the kitchen door. As I turn the valve slightly to the left, ice-cold spring water rushes onto my palms. Cupping it, I splash some onto my sleepy face and shiver as a few icy droplets trickle below the collar of my coat. Wiping my eyes clear, I can now see the beautiful Himalayan views in the distance. I bite down hard, trying to stop the uncontrollable chatter of my teeth. *No time to be anxious*, I admonish myself. *Another lovely day for an interview!*

Eight o'clock ticks by, and Phuri is not here yet. I sit patiently, cozied into the corner of the kitchen comforted by my [Sherpa Tea](#). Listening carefully for any Nepali words I might recognise, I smile softly and admire the interactions between [Dolma](#), Ngima's mother, and Dechen, her granddaughter. I feel honoured to be in Ngima's home, among his family. Ngima enters the room, places a gentle kiss on top of his niece's forehead, and walks toward the wood-

²⁸ This conversation occurred in Nepali, with Ngima acting as my Nepali-English interpreter. I used the translated English transcriptions to construct the story.

burning stove in the left corner of the kitchen. He stokes the hot embers and adds a small log to the fire to heat the kettle that sits atop the stove.

“Phuri is on his way, my sister went for him.” Ngima says to me reassuringly. At 8:30 am, Phuri and Sumi finally enter the home and join Ngima, Dolma, Dechen, and I in the kitchen.

“[Tashi Delek!](#)” Phuri greets everyone in Sherpa and finds a seat on the bench to my right. He looks as if he just woke up; his hair is matted and a weary expression is visible on his face. *Perhaps he’s bit worn from a hard morning’s work?* I think. Ngima immediately brings him a glass of [chhaang](#), a local spirit made from millet. Sumi reaches for Dechen and swaddles her in wool blankets, placing her into the small basket on the bench. Everyone settles into a seat.

Ngima turns and asks, “Is it okay for my family to be with us for the interview of my uncle?” I nod yes, signifying that it’s fine with me. Ngima refers to Phuri as his uncle, but I believe they are more like cousins; the word “uncle” denotes a relation on Ngima’s father’s side. Of course I do not mind Phuri’s family being present, although I imagine it will contribute to the way that Phuri will tell his story. *Relinquish control*, I silently encourage my researcher self. Ngima reviews the ethic materials with Phuri. He requests to only be audio-recorded, so I put my camera back into its case. Ngima straightens out the mic cable, places the device in front of Phuri, and looks towards me for a cue.

“Okay, We’re ready to start recording.” He flicks on the handheld recorder, and I begin.

“They will give money for sure, but also name.”

Phuri sits attentively on the low-rise bench next to me. His bony elbows perch on his knees, his forearms are relaxed and crossed in front. “First off, thank you, um [Dhanyabad](#), [Thucho](#) for the interview.” Looking into his eyes, I start by saying, “Tell me where you’re from and a bit about your family.” Although my Nepali vocabulary has increased since my time in the Solu, my conversational language skills are minimal and the same goes for Phuri’s English. Relying on Ngima as our acting interpreter, I shift my gaze over to him. Ngima nods his head in my direction, and repeats the question in Nepali to Phuri.

The low pitch of his voice draws attention from Dolma and Sumi who were carrying on their own side conversation. “Well my family is from Chewar, up from [Namche](#). I should tell about climbing the mountain.”

“No brother,” Ngima chimes in again, giving Phuri further directions. “We will ask step by step, firstly about your family and so on. You can just tell where you were born and grew up.”

“Well, we stayed here, isn’t that right?” Phuri asks rhetorically.

“So he’s from [Dandakharka](#), itself. His wife is from another village, it’s the same [VDC](#) but another village – Chewar²⁹” Ngima explains to me. Phuri raised his five children, three sons and two daughters, in Dandakharka and has since retired here.

“First of all, I started from farming.” Phuri begins to describe the path that led him into the mountaineering industry. Like many Sherpa families who reside in the Himalayas,

²⁹ Depending on population size, Village Development Committees (VDCs) are divided into several wards; both Chewar and Dandakharka function within the Gorakhani VDC (The Asian Foundation, 2012).

agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade sustained the early years of his life. “And at the age of sixteen, I started to work,” he proudly states.

“In mountaineering?” Ngima inquires.

“No, I didn’t climb at sixteen years,” Phuri clarifies. “At this age I was in Namche in some other’s house.³⁰ Do you know Au Phur Temba?” Phuri asks Ngima.

Shaking his head in understanding, Ngima clarifies that Phuri was working at Au Phur’s home. “One day, the house owner told me to join,” Phuri explains, waving his hand towards himself in a ‘come with me’ fashion, “so I went along with him.” As a hard-working nineteen year-old, Phuri entered into climbing training in [Manang](#), and was eventually promoted to join Au Phur’s mountaineering expedition as a high-altitude [Climbing Sherpa](#).

“I *had to* climb in a very bad and difficult place.” Phuri lets out a deep exhale as he recalls the memories from his first climb. “I climbed Everest first. I went from the Nepal side. I went as the Climbing Sherpa, but no summit,” he admits. “We *had to* carry the clients’ things, and also help them. We *had to* carry the oxygen and other edible food and supplies.” Phuri relays his responsibilities on the expedition. “I went three times from the Nepal side, and also three times from the Tibet side. From the Tibet side, I went as high as 8300 meters, but no summit,” he confesses again.

“No summit?” I echo in surprise. As I picture Phuri scaling a steep precipice to the final camp on Everest, I could not help but wonder why he never reached the mountain’s peak.

“It’s a scary one, man!” Phuri chirps at Ngima who translated my question about what this job was like.

Giggling, Ngima says to me, “He’s very scared.”

Phuri lets out another gasp. “I’m scared, along with the foreign climbers.” I join Ngima and Phuri in playful laughter, shifting away from the feelings of fear.

“So, why did you continue to climb?” I probe.

“They will give money, but also name.” Phuri admits that his incentive to climb at this time was the money, along with the name and fame. “They write name and full insurance,” he adds. In addition to being recognised as a Mt. Everest expedition team member, each Sherpa climber and porter is covered under a third-party insurance. “We are insured for mountaineering. It’s not the office, but there is a separate insurance company. If nothing happens to us then the insurance company gets the benefit. And if we are not well, or we have any problems, then the insurance company has to bear it.” Phuri sits up a little taller, looks to Ngima and I, and states matter-of-factly, “We have to fill in the form, who is the receiver if the climber dies on the way. Either your mom can be the receiver, father, or children.” With a deep breath he says, “They will get it if the climber dies on the way.”

³⁰ It is common for families from Namche Bazaar, a village situated 3440 meters above sea level in the Khumbu region, to hire help in their private homes, fields, and guesthouses. These employees often come from lower regions, or less privileged and marginalised ethnic communities on the mountainside (N. Sherpa, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

“There was heavy snow above and I didn’t see the crevasse”

“Wait for a moment,” his eyelids gently close as he searches for an answer. “I was nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, and twenty-two. I climbed during these years.” Phuri states. “My last expedition in 1988, I went to Tibet. I went to [Cho Oyu](#). I almost died there.” Phuri lets out a deep belly laugh, a seemingly incongruous reaction. [Dolma](#) and [Sumi](#) sit alongside Ngima and I, wide-eyed and fascinated, awaiting more details of Phuri’s tale.

“While climbing Cho Oyu...” Phuri pauses for a moment, swallows noisily, and then continues, “I fell into a crevasse. There was heavy snow above and I didn’t see the crevasse, and then I fell into it. I fell down along with my bag. At the time the climbers were only doctors. They were good, so they helped to pull me out using rope.”

Dolma’s cheeks are flushed. Shocked by Phuri’s words, she rises to her feet. Now standing face to face with Phuri she asks, “Was it while descending down?”

“While going up”, Phuri corrects. “I felt very scared. What to do?” Phuri expresses a sense of powerlessness as he describes the dangerous and unexpected circumstances to Ngima, Dolma, Sumi, and me.

“Like death or what else?” Sumi comments aloud, questioning the alternatives to Phuri’s situation. A chorus of laughter erupts, leaving Dolma looking less than pleased. Ngima translates these Nepali exchanges to me in English while I sit back, trying to make sense of the ambiguous laughter.

“One American doctor and I, two of us fell down!” Phuri exclaims, reminding us that he was not alone in the crevasse. Downplaying the danger of situation, he turns to Dolma and says reassuringly, “The climbers were very good, Aunt. The climbers were very quick. As soon as it occurred they were ready with rope to pull us up.” In an instant, Phuri’s survival became contingent on the help of others. “The foreigners were doctors at that time, so I was lucky. They had really good hearts,” he recalls.

Though I’m happy and grateful to know that Phuri and his client were saved from this particular scenario, I cannot help but wonder if the presence of the American doctor who was also trapped influenced the immediate rescue.

Dolma finds her seat on the stool again as Phuri recollects how it ended, “We returned back from there. We didn’t go up there after.”

Wearing an expression of scepticism, Sumi asks, “You didn’t go up after that? Was it all cancelled, or did only the two of you cancel?”

“No, we all came back. After that I didn’t go.” Phuri informs her. Phuri’s team, including two other Climbing Sherpas and several American clients, returned down to Basecamp, cancelling that 1988 expedition.

“When I fell then, I was really scared and afraid to go”

“I felt scared.” Phuri defends his rationale for retiring from the mountaineering industry and his shift back into being a guide on small trekking peaks, a role he maintains is less dangerous. “After that I had a call to go to [Makalu](#). There was a phone call, and a message from

the office, but after I was too scared..." His voice trails off behind the murmurs of Ngima's translation to me. Phuri tilts his chin downwards. His eyes shift quickly, darting along the edges of the floorboards. "Still now, there are phone calls for me too," Phuri admits, slowly raising his gaze to meet ours.

"Still now?" Sumi responds in disbelief.

Over twenty-six years have passed since Phuri left his position as a Climbing Sherpa. He continues to receive requests from clients and commercial expedition teams, but has declined each and every opportunity.

"You don't want to go?" I inquire.

"Now I'm scared." Ngima continues to mediate the conversation between Phuri and I.

"I would be scared too!" I respond enthusiastically. As Ngima translates my response, everyone giggles, diffusing the tension in the room. We await more explanation.

"Then you don't feel like going again?" Sumi chimes in again.

"It's very scary to go." Phuri admits again, turning his gaze back toward the floor.

"You have to walk on snow?" Dolma questions innocently.

Sloping his hand into a vertically inclined position, Phuri proclaims, "Not on the snow Aunt! Almost hanging. Going up even when it's this steep, almost straight up."

Phuri quickly shifts the topic of discussion from the realities of the icy mountain slopes to the dangers faced in crossing crevasses en route to Mt. Everest's summit. "It's very dangerous. Look, we have to put the [ladders](#) to cross." Phuri demonstrates by bridging his arm between the bench and the table that sits before him. "Due to fear," Phuri says bouncing his leg rapidly up and down, "sometimes our body was a little bit shaky too!" My heart thumps quickly as I envision Phuri trying to calm his shaking legs while balancing on an aluminum ladder laid over hundreds of meters of black abyss in the [Khumbu Icefall](#). I can understand what this feels like, as I think back to my previous climbing experiences, perched high on precarious ledges, paralysed by the uncontrollable trembling that consumed my body.

"Before you quit the 1988 expedition, was there any other time you almost decided not to go up?" I ask curiously.

"No, not before, when I fell into..." Phuri begins.

"The accident was the changer," Ngima turns to look at me, confirming Phuri's sentiments. "He got a second chance to live."

Phuri reiterates, "When I fell then, I was really scared and afraid to go." Ngima's translated interpretation lingers as I imagine Phuri stepping away from his career, his six climbs on Everest, his responsibility to help foreigners up the mountain, and the risk of death.

"The foreigners demanded that they wanted to go on, so we went"

"He probably heard about the [2014 accident](#) and avalanche. Does he remember any natural accidents like this?" I look towards Ngima, who then translates my query.

"Yeah, [I] heard of that." Phuri's voice softens. "Lots of people got killed up there."

"Did people die in the avalanches at the time you were also climbing?" Sumi chimes in of her own accord, clarifying the question.

Phuri gestures yes, moving his head up and down, “Yeah, people got killed. Foreigners also got killed. Maybe around 1965, it was not an avalanche. While going up, there will be crevasses and up there will be ice, sometimes this ice breaks and comes down – It’s this, we fear.” Phuri speaks of the large freestanding or hanging *seracs*. Because of the continuous movement of a glacier, this ice is exceptionally unstable; it can fracture into huge chunks and fall at any time, without warning.

“I stayed at [Camp III](#) to help rescue.” Phuri declares. Curious about the implications of large accidents during Phuri’s climbing tenure, I ask him if there were ever labour-strikes or mountain closures similar to the historical closure of Mt. Everest after the 2014 avalanche. The room is quiet, and all that can be heard is the boiling water in the kettle. Phuri sits silently for a moment, appearing to be deep in thought. “Last year, like in 2014 what happened, maybe something happened around the [South Col](#), otherwise it was very rare. There was nothing like such, during my time, but there was one up there at the South Col. Lots of people from [Phortse](#) died there too.”

“Did you go climbing even after that?” Ngima asks.

“Yes, we went to climb after that.” Phuri’s eyes widen, and a grimace clouds his face.

“You still had to go up?” I reiterate, catching up on the missed Nepali translations.

Phuri nods his head methodically, “The *foreigners demanded* that they wanted to go on, so we went.”

While shaking his head disapprovingly, Ngima interprets Phuri’s words, “The clients were paying, and they wanted to go.”

“Up there, who will bring them down?”

Phuri’s voice deepens; he stresses that regardless of the number of hired support, clients must come to the mountain with previous skills and experience. “They should have some ideas to climb up and also to climb down too,” he asserts, relinquishing some of the responsibility he felt for his clients.

Phuri illustrates the purpose and importance of gear used in the expedition, and emphasises that this knowledge should be obtained prior to departure. “When climbing up, we use a [jumar](#). When we lock it against the rope it won’t move down in any condition. It will keep us hanging and you move a little bit up and again lock it.” He connects the tips of his index fingers and thumbs into the shape of an infinity sign. “Figure eight is like this; we fit rope on it and use the hand to catch the rope. It will let us come down smoothly.”

Mountaineering technologies like the jumar and figure eight are trusted and implemented by many expedition teams to help ensure a standard level of safety on the mountain. An additional technology, essential for climbing Everest, is the oxygen bottle. The bottles are carried on climbers’ backs and provide supplemental oxygen to offset the thin air of high mountain ascents.

“The people from lower parts, when they go, they sometimes die due to height.” Phuri outlines the potentially fatal consequences for individuals who grow up in the lower valleys and then choose to work at high altitudes; these deaths are usually linked to high [altitude](#)

[sicknesses](#)³¹. The air above 8000 meters decreases significantly, along with the available oxygen. “Two Germans died up there. One man, and a woman.” Phuri recounts a tragic ending to one of his Everest expeditions. “They went to the top. Up there, they finished their oxygen, and so they died in the middle.” Phuri’s eyes move slowly up to meet mine. I sense mild frustration as he shakes his head from side to side.

“Did you bring them down?” I ask, curious to know what happened to their bodies.

Phuri retorts quickly, “Up there, who will bring them down?”

“If it was down [further], then a helicopter can take it [climber’s body].” Dolma chimes.

“A heli won’t land up at that high altitude”³², Phuri adds to Dolma’s point. Phuri somberly admits, “Dead people are left there. At the South Col, and also higher.”

³¹ Mountain sickness can progress to high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) or high altitude cerebral edema (HACE), which are both potentially fatal (Schoene, 2008). With the Everest summit standing at 8850 meters there is approximately thirty-three percent of the oxygen that is available at sea level. Consequently, approximately ninety-seven percent of climbers choose to use supplemental oxygen when making their bid for the summit (Arnette, 2013a).

³² Helicopters are more advanced and are commonly seen in the mountains. The improvements in this technology, along with better gear (such as lighter oxygen canisters), have contributed to the increasing international summit success rates on Mt. Everest. More importantly, these advancements have led to high-altitude rescues that would have been impossible two decades ago (Arnette, 2013b).

A Conversation with (Pemba) Rinchen Sherpa on Friday – April 3, 2015

The soft melody of birdsong floats over from a nearby tree, contributing to the calm and tranquility of the morning. I take a deep breath of the fresh mountain air and close my eyes as rays of sunshine warm my cheeks. I savour this moment of stillness, grateful to be here with Rinchen and his family who have willingly welcomed me into their home for the last three nights.

“We should set it here.” Ngima taps my shoulder, holding the tripod and camera.

“Yes, sounds good.” I agree as I open my eyes. “What a beautiful backdrop,” I say, admiring the deep valley that winds endlessly between snow-capped mountain ranges before disappearing into the distant horizon. To my immediate left is a small stable where a young cow and four goats are lounging in the sun. Far beyond the animal pen sits the Pema Namding Monastery, a major landmark for travellers ascending the strenuous 500-meter stair-climb into Kharikhola.

The village of [Kharikhola](#), quaint and peaceful, rests high on the hillside, just northeast of the bustling village of Salleri. [Salleri](#) is presently the highest point in the [Solukhumbu](#) region that is accessible by jeep or SUV. Travellers who dislike flying or prefer smaller tourist crowds will often begin their adventures from Salleri: trekking through the less-visited southern villages of the Solu like [Takasindu](#) and Kharikhola before finally arriving in [Lukla](#), the home of the [Tenzing-Hillary Airport](#) and a common starting point for trekking and mountaineering expeditions.

“Okay, right here is okay?” Rinchen asks, pointing to the stool Ngima placed in front of the camera. Ngima and I both nod our heads. [Cheering](#), Rinchen’s three-year-old son perches on a nearby log, curiously observing his father’s actions.

Clang, clang, clang. Little Cheering beats on a kitchen pot with a long wooden spoon he grips tightly with his right hand. A mischievous boy, he bangs the pot again until Rinchen looks over to acknowledge his presence. Rinchen waves at Cheering gleefully, and then lifts his left index finger to his pursed lips, signifying “please be quiet.” The additional days I’ve spent in Kharikhola have allowed me to better understand the personalities of Rinchen and his family. Attending his oldest son Futi’s academic award ceremony; eating a home-cooked meal made by Lhakpa, his fifteen-year-old daughter; sharing a glass of [Chhaang](#) with his boisterous wife Pema; having Nepali-English global warming discussions while both Rinchen and I were partly inebriated; and participating in a local [puja](#) to wish his climbing friend well have all contributed to a deeper understanding of how life on the mountain is experienced by Rinchen.

“So the recording is on,” Ngima tells us from behind the camera.

Rinchen’s wife Pema, wearing a red t-shirt and a black traditional Sherpa dress adorned by a colourful apron, now sits next to Cheering. She reaches down to hold the spoon still, silencing the clanging noise. Rinchen waits attentively for my question. Smiling in the direction of the camera lens, his eyes glow with a genuine eagerness to participate.

“[Thuche](#), thank you for your time,” I begin. “Also, please know that Ngima is here, so please feel free to speak in Nepali or English, whichever is best for you to express your story to us.” Ngima interprets my words to Rinchen; he smiles and affirms that he understands.

“My first climb it was not so danger, I am strong”

Tanned and weathered from the elements, Rinchen’s face appears older than his forty-two years, but his enthusiastic personality, shiny black hair, and lean muscular frame indicate youthfulness.

“Tell me a little bit about yourself,” I request.

A confused look forms on Rinchen’s face as his eyes dart from the camera to Ngima. Ngima happily translates my question into Nepali.

Extending his arm towards his house, Rinchen answers in English. “I born this [Kharikhola](#), I born Kharikhola.” Raising his finger he says, “I have one sister and I have three brothers.” Rinchen quickly switches to holding three fingers up in the air. “I started climbing maybe twelve years before,” he says, revealing that he did not start out working on mountaineering expeditions. “Before is farmer, farmer some cutting grass, looking to see the cow. And after that then go to the little trekking, and going to the Lukla, and carry the [porter](#). First my English starting, before I speak no English. We speak the English to carry [as] the porter. No writing me, but I speak.”

“You started speaking English when you started working as a porter?” I inquire, to ensure I understand what Rinchen is trying to convey.

“Yeah, when I am porter.” Porters generally carry goods, and now they increasingly transport tourist luggage up and down the valleys of the Himalayas, from one guesthouse to the next. Lengthy and regular exchanges with international tourists and trekkers are limited, and it is often assumed that English language skills are not necessary for this position. Yet, Rinchen illuminates an essential need for the English language in the trekking and mountaineering industries.

“I porter, then my first expedition for Everest expedition was in 2097.” With a small chuckle, he corrects himself. “1997.”

“Your first expedition was on Everest?” I question enthusiastically.

“That time was my Everest expedition, climbing with the Malaysian television group. That time I first was [Climbing Sherpa](#), but after going to the [Camp II](#), [Camp III](#), many big groups just took movie groups, took specialty Sherpa. After, one Sherpa not so good feeling well, he’s sick and go back. He had some problem; he rescued and go back to Kathmandu.” Rinchen’s colleague fell ill, creating an opportunity for him to shift into a new role on the mountain. “After we make a camera summit with Malaysian television group,” Rinchen explains, describing his new responsibility as an assistant to a film crew. “We making the...” Rinchen’s sentence trails off as he raises his left hand and slides it steadily across his body as if he were holding a large camera recording something in the distance. “First summit that time. First climbing also. And first summit also.”

“First climb, and first summit.” Ngima repeats for clarification.

“First summit!” I echo, impressed, knowing that the weight of the camera equipment I carried up to Kharikhola is just a fraction of the weight and altitude that Rinchen battled high on the mountain.

“That Malaysian group, that time me, Camp I, Camp II, up-down-up-down we do and then after we [go up to] [South Col](#) over near 7800 meters. Seven times up-down-up-down,” he exclaims, furiously waving the magazine clenched in his right hand. “That times my physically was very good.” Rinchen recognises that at the time he could endure the continual ascents and descents through the treacherous mountain terrain carrying commercial television gear.

“These are normal, or usual responsibilities when working on the mountain?” I ponder aloud. I look to Ngima to assist with simplifying and conveying my question to Rinchen.

“Yes, normally, but we carry some load, and sometimes carry up-down-up-down. We are the preparing Camp II, [and Camp] I, setting everything, setting food, everything,” Rinchen says, signifying the extent of his varying roles. “South Col, all the oxygen, all the food, climbing back to the tent also everything is set up at the South Col and Camp IV,” he continues, explaining the general responsibilities for Climbing Sherpas on Mt. Everest.

“That time my physically is very strong, but *we carry for* the one television group, big movie...” Rinchen returns to describing his first expedition with the Malaysian Television group.

“Big cameras?” I interject.

“Big cameras. And thirty-five kg, one generator also.”

“One generator?!” I repeat in disbelief.

“One generator we carry to the [Camp II](#). One generator, one company made in Japanese. It’s like small, but thirty-five kg we carry direct Basecamp to Camp II. To Camp II for the movie group.” Rinchen describes how he lugged up a generator to supply power to a media production company as high as Camp II – nearly 6400 meters above sea level. “I am strong, but my first expedition we getting good job.” Rinchen acknowledges that the weight and level of difficulty can result in increased compensation. “We do very strong, I can do okay no problem. Not scary, I do. My first climb it was not so danger, I am strong,” Rinchen proclaims confidently.

“First time top, is important for life... And next many times climbing is my job”

“I start climbing that times, I *need to earn* the money, and second it’s my job. That time before I carry as the porter. I need the Everest expedition, I summit successful and never will do the porter. But now every year I do the mountaineering guide position. And now I do the camera man.” Recognition as an adept guide led to Rinchen’s continued employment as a Climbing Sherpa as well as an increase in pay. “Now me Everest it’s my sixteen times. Sixteen times climbing, every year. Eleven times summits.”

“Whoool!” Ngima and I applaud Rinchen’s accomplishments.

“Sixteen years I climb Everest, and every year, 1997 my beginning expedition, and every year [until] 2012.” Rinchen has climbed Everest for sixteen consecutive years, but is not working on the mountain this 2015 season.

Curious, I ask him about his future pursuits on Everest.

“Maybe I will do.” Rinchen admits he’s considering climbing Everest again. His pearly-white smile stretches from ear to ear as he proudly says, “First time top, is important for life. Important for life, record also. That time I’m very happy. And next many times climbing is my job. I’m waiting, but for some filming groups, so not so [much] carry[ing]. Not so up-down, just some specialty for filming group.” Rinchen explains that he no longer wants to transport gear and supplies repeatedly to the high camps of Everest, but would rather wait to be requested to be part of a mountain film crew.

“I do the Everest cameraman. I am Super Sherpa. You look on supersherpa.com, who is camera man there, we do the shooting,” he declares, raising a rolled up magazine to his right eye like he’s looking through a viewfinder of a large camera. “This year, I am going to the [Ama Dablam](#) but maybe after Ama Dablam, maybe we go for some filming group also in the Khumbu Icefall. I know one cameraman that will maybe request me,” Rinchen states optimistically.

“Safety is life. Money is nothing.”

Rinchen’s knowledge of the [Khumbu Icefall](#), notorious for its deep crevasses, large ice blocks and hanging [seracs](#), contributes to his qualifications for managing and guiding a film crew through this section of the Mt. Everest route. “[It’s] dangerous I know very well there, Khumbu Icefall. I know how, where there is looking for the Icefall, which way we go, everyday Icefall is like this.” Along with this knowledge base Rinchen discusses the benefits of his personal networks. “Khumbu [Icefall Doctors](#) and me are friends. We are everyday near camp talking. He says ‘please this way is very danger.’ Some people, client leaders, *they say* ‘go Sherpas,’ and they go.” Rinchen reveals that Sherpas are sometimes sent through the Icefall, by the international guides, despite the recommendations and advice of the Icefall Doctors. Wagging his finger back and forth disapprovingly, Rinchen continues, “The Icefall Doctor told me, ‘Today is closed, much better yesterday we were looking, check the way, this is very danger, today we stop. Tomorrow we go and we make the change.’”

“And you listen to the Icefall Doctor?” I chime in.

“Yeah, Icefall Doctor is my friend.” Rinchen firmly states, indicating the trust he places in his climbing friends. “Sometimes coming the avalanche. Somebody people [have] very many experience, people say ‘this way danger, must take care.’” Rinchen continues to explain the importance of local knowledge in mountaineering. “I know, ‘please’ I call to my clients, ‘today is danger, okay? Danger place here, okay?’ My clients say, ‘Okay.’” He explains that his authority and expertise is respected while climbing.

“That’s good! Your clients listen.” I move my head in agreement with Rinchen.

“Safety!” Rinchen shifts onto the edge of his chair. His voice filled with conviction, he says, “Safety is life. Money is nothing!”

With his right hand pressed to his brow line, Rinchen peers into the distance. “I look and check, I’ve been many times through the Icefall. I [go] up-down in one expedition, maybe twenty times the Icefall. ‘This way is danger, but after the next day we go, making the Khumbu Icefall. Doctor is my friend. We talk, this way is danger,’” he reiterates the dialogue he has had with clients about advancing through risky or hazardous obstacles on the mountain.

“So the clients listen to you?” I confirm.

“They listen but...” Rinchen pauses for a moment. “Somebody people, they no listen my talk,” he confesses. “Somebody peoples they think many dollars, my country, all the banking, my house the sell, selling that getting money to go Everest. ‘I need Everest.’ Sometimes very danger after going too. But I talked to some people like that.” Clients invest tens of thousands of dollars into attempting the Mt. Everest summit and are often critiqued for their limited experience and ignoring crucial life-saving advice due to financial considerations and personal goals. “Life is safety.” Rinchen murmurs again.

“So what happens?” I await the details of how Rinchen navigates the decision to accompany his client.

“Not going I,” Rinchen declares. “I’ve talked to some people, ohh not listening. Why I do this? ‘No, go yourself.’ Life is for life!” he affirms passionately. Rinchen sits up tall and brushes his right palm onto his left like he’s cleaning something off of them. “I don’t go, I don’t go. Please. Money is nothing. Wind is coming and the clouds...this Icefall, everyday it’s going like this... like this,” he explains, describing the unpredictable shifts of the Icefall. “Money is nothing, but life is the thing.”

“Babu Chiri Sherpa is a world name. Please, we got to rescue.”

“I know very well an expedition can change every hour. It change like this, like the clouds.” Rinchen points to the rapid movements of the clouds in the distance. “That day is very bad weather...” his words trail off. “See the very sport world record holder [Babu Chiri Sherpa](#)...” Rinchen attempts to begin his story again. Shaking his head solemnly, he says, “Mountain Hardware sponsored Babu Chiri that time he died.”

Rinchen recalls the events that unfolded the day Babu Chiri Sherpa, a renowned Everest summiter, passed away. “That day we go this way many times, [South Col](#), come back. My friend also was sick, very tired.” Rinchen and his friend retreated to their tent after multiple trips up and down the mountain during the Everest expedition in the spring season of 2001.

“After we were very tired, sleeping, some tea... drink. We very tired and we sleep. And after twelve o’clock is coming, people is saying, ‘Oh, Babu is no.’ ‘Babu Chiri Sherpa is no success.’ That time he’s looking for the Nuptse face and near Camp II some people see light, big light and somebody, the people say ‘Babu [gets] another record. Maybe Babu’s is very strong [and climbs] before sixteen hours³³. Babu is going maybe another record. Some people say that Babu is another record, another record he do, they talk, talk, talk. Babu is not calling the Basecamp. Basecamp also talk, and Kathmandu is also talking that time, not on telephone but the satellite phone.” Rinchen recounts the deliberations amongst the climbers who had not yet heard from Babu himself. “After we talk, me and my friend this evening we see. We were looking, we [use our] rest time to look [for] Babu. Babu Chiri, the one place, maybe [he go] looking here.”

³³ Babu Chiri Sherpa is known for two world records: the fastest Mt. Everest summit from basecamp along the Southeast ridge (16 hours and 56 minutes), and spending twenty-one hours on the summit without supplemental oxygen (Everest History, 2004a; Guinness, 2017; Mu & Nepal, 2015).

Cupping his hand over his brow, Rinchen squints as if he were trying to focus on something far away. “Look down there, just only boots. One is foot, no inside liner, no socks.’ He was looking, just picturing.” Rinchen admits that he believed Babu was off video-recording or taking photographs. “What I think, he looking the moving picturing...but after the very wind, [it was] very cold that time, very cold wind, also very dangerous part. And Babu that time, he go fall down the crevasse. Babu is dead.”

“So Babu fell down the crevasse?” I inquire.

“Yeah.” Rinchen’s voice softens with sympathy. “One or two people go there, looking. ‘Oh really, Babu is inside the crevasse.’ Then tomorrow morning, after twelve o’clock we have my friend, a very good mountain guide instructor, now his technical is better, rescue technical. Also we go that time too. He founded Babu, head down.” Rinchen bends at his hip, flops his body over the right edge of his stool, and hangs lifeless for a moment. “They founded Babu,” Rinchen continues while popping back upright. “And then Basecamp talk, Kathmandu talk, and tomorrow all the climbers of Everest stop. Stop to rescue the Babu Chiri”

“So everyone, all of the expeditions stopped climbing?” I ask perplexed, thinking it was rare to have all teams stop for the death of one climber.

“Yeah, all is stop. No climb this morning.” Rinchen reiterates.

“To rescue Babu Cherri, because he is very famous.” Ngima chimes in.

Rinchen’s eyes open wide as he peers over to me. “Important day. World famous. Babu Chiri Sherpa is a world name. Please, we got to rescue. Safety for the all, all they stop. Babu and some, we have many friend. We have some Sherpa [whose] good, especially rescues [in the] crevasse. Also, Pemba Dorchie Sherpa good mountaineering association of the sport climbing, he go down to Babu and makes the nets inside and after we bring him up.”

“I think that money is important, but must take care the life more.”

Rinchen launches into his thoughts about the [2014 avalanche](#) on Mt. Everest. “Last year, some of the people with clients go. Somebody stop. No. Somebody go. Many people died, it’s the first record³⁴ of people died there. The accident, all the country, also the world everything is black news, ‘black this year’, ‘Everest is black this year,’ they say that. And after, one Chinese³⁵ gone up.” Similar to Tashi’s previous account, Rinchen explains that despite the tragic circumstances, one Chinese climber decided to continue to the summit of Mt. Everest from the Southern Nepali side. In doing so she disregarded the collective decision to close the mountain, agreed upon by Sherpa and Nepali workers, the Nepali government, and international mountaineering outfitters.

“What were you doing at the time?” I ask, curious to understand how he came to understand the events that unfolded after the 2014 avalanche.

³⁴ The 2014 avalanche claimed seventeen Sherpa lives in one day, which at the time was recognised as a record number in the region for the highest same-day death toll in a single mountain accident.

³⁵ In Rinchen’s interview he references this climber’s nationality as Canadianese. It has been changed to Chinese after hearing the details of this story from several different Climbing Sherpas.

“That time, no Basecamp. I was [at] [Pangboche](#).” Rinchen covers both of his ears with his hands. “Pangboche also hear, bad news coming all Sherpa people go down. I work for the Seven Summit Group, I’m going to touching the Basecamp. My friend said, ‘Why? Everybody go down, why do you go to basecamp? Please come back.’ So I come back too, all Sherpa come back together. We finished expedition.” Rinchen explains that he was en route to the basecamp, working with a trekking group at the time, but was encouraged by a friend to descend back down the mountain.

“That time is all the closed expedition, all the closed, the government also, the permit also cancelled. But one Chinese is going to summit. One Chinese, maybe [has] some Sherpa there, [who] is getting the good money. One Sherpa, fourteen *Lakh*³⁶. Nepali managed it. Some say its good money, I don’t know.”

“Big money, yeah?” I reiterate Rinchen’s speculation about the Sherpa’s motivation for assisting the Chinese climber up the mountain, despite the grim circumstances of the avalanche.

“Goal is goal!” Rinchen exclaims, peering directly into the lens of the camera. The pitch of his voice rises as if he were about to deliver an important message. “You take a lot of money, pay my porter, like money is nothing. Money is pay, okay, but [know] when it is good weather, when it is good place. Safety is life. Life is life. Life is important!” Rinchen preaches with conviction, throwing his hands high into the air. “Money we will make next year. Next day. Another job. Many jobs, not only mountaineering Everest. We climb another mountain. Or by jeep, by driver, another business.” Rinchen’ reminds me that working on Everest is not the only employment opportunity in the Solukhumbu region, and that the money is not always worth the dangers of the job. “I think that money is important, but must take care the life more.”

³⁶ A *lakh* is a unit borrowed from the Indian numbering system equivalent to 100,000 (Asian Development Bank, 2011). According to Rinchen, the Climbing Sherpa who assisted the Chinese mountaineer was paid fourteen lakh, approximately 1.4 million Nepali rupees or \$13,000 USD; a large sum of money compared to the average Sherpa climber’s seasonal salary of \$4000-\$5000 USD.

A Conversation with Kaji Sherpa on Friday – April 7, 2015

We departed [Lukla](#) two and a half hours ago. With each [prayer wheel](#) that I turn and [Mani rock](#) I pass, I am reminded of the first trip I made through these enchanted forests of the [Khumbu](#) region. We have set off for [Namche Bazaar](#), a long and gruelling day for trekkers that demands eight hours of hiking up and down... and up. Despite the exertion, I am content, grateful to be back. My ears are occupied by babbling sounds of the flowing Dudh Kosi (Milk River) while my eyes shift from one picture perfect landscape to the next.

We finally cross the metal suspension bridge, arriving at the first tea stop – one of many – in the quaint village of Phakding. While Ngima catches up with a friend, I sit silently in the warm rays of the sun. *This feels familiar*, I reminisce. In this moment, I am brought back to my memories from 2013: the smell of fresh vegetable-stuffed *momos*³⁷; the shrieks and laughter of young children playing along the footpaths; and the beauty of blossoming rhododendron flowers. *Romantic*, I muse, although my critical self knows that the picture is much more complex.

“Maggie, your hot orange.” My daydreams subside. I open my eyes to see Ngima exiting the teahouse with a warm beverage.

“Dhanyaaaabaaadddd, Ngiiimaa” I draw out the Nepali phrase, thanking him playfully. As I sip the last drops of the orange drink, I walk into the teahouse to pay my tab. “Dhanyabad,” I thank the host, handing her my empty mug.

I bend deep into my knees to hoist my heavy pack from the rock barrier that acts as a property fence. Pulling the hip strap taught, I steady the weight. Back on the trail, Ngima phones Kaji, his cousin who is meant to meet us to discuss his potential involvement in my research project. Ngima’s eagerness to find individuals for me to interview is appreciated, yet I am still learning how to exercise control over his decisions. As we slowly begin to ascend from the valley floor, Ngima informs me that Kaji and his German clients will meet us at the next village.

Winding through pine trees, we make our way down towards the river. Melodies of birdsong harmonise with the gurgling waters below. My gaze rises from the dirt trail to suddenly meet the company of three oncoming trekkers.

“[Tashi Delek!](#)” Ngima greets them joyfully. The trekkers halt in their tracks and the dark-haired Nepali man lifts his sunglasses. “Kaji [Dia](#)”, Ngima says while enclosing the man’s hand inside his. I introduce myself to Kaji and his two German clients. We backtrack to the last teahouse Ngima and I passed, and settle into seats on the patio overlooking the Dudh Kosi. Kaji agrees to participate in my project, but prefers to talk now rather than later. As Ngima and I set up the equipment, I order tea for everyone. The five of us exchange small talk and sip black tea. A cool wind rustles my paperwork as I explain to Kaji the purpose of the project. I remind him that both languages, Nepali and English, are available to use, indicating that Ngima will be acting as my interpreter. Ngima clicks the camera on, and we begin.

³⁷ Influenced by Tibetan and Chinese cuisines, these bite-size vegetable and/or meat stuffed dumplings are one of the most popular dishes in Nepal (cf. Sijapati, 2016).

“It is my job. The work is perfect for me.”

Kaji’s short black hair waves freely. His dimpled smile shines as bright as the sunbeams that reflect off the lenses of his glasses. “I live...” he begins to speak. The soft tone of Kaji’s voice muffles the sound of his words. It is a challenge to hear him amidst the audible flow of the river and gusting winds. I gently ask him to speak up, reminding him that I am recording.

“I lived in [Dandakharka](#),” he repeats, louder this time.

“Dandakharka,” I echo enthusiastically. I had the privilege of visiting this southern [Solu](#) village as a guest in Ngima’s home. We roamed the hills and I met some of Kaji’s cousins, clearing rocks from a field, who still maintain agrarian lifestyles. I smile and reflect on the hard working families, and the incomparable hospitality of the Sherpas from the Solu region.

Kaji cheerfully pipes back up, “I grew up there. [My family], they’re still there. I have three brothers and three sisters.”

“And your parents?” I inquire.

“I have only dad, I don’t have a mom. She was dead in 2007.”

The opportunity to dig deeper presents itself, but something inside me cautions against this. We met minutes ago and the topic of death seems too deeply personal to pursue. I silently wonder about the reasons behind Kaji’s mother’s passing, but dare not ask.

“Oh okay, I’m so sorry.” I say sympathetically.

“That’s okay.” Kaji responds. His mouth lifts into a gentle smile.

“Okay, so your dad’s in Dandakharka?” I begin again.

“Yes, still he works trekking.”

Slowly lifting his gaze from his clasped hands, Kaji describes how he left Dandakharka at a young age to move to Kathmandu, eventually entering into the trekking industry just like his father. “I start my trekking life when I was twenty-two years. Now, I’m running twenty-nine.” This is Kaji’s seventh year in the trekking business. His German clients, a father and daughter duo, sit beside him as proof of his position. Although he is currently guiding groups along the popular [EBC](#) trekking route, Kaji reveals that he is an aspiring mountaineer as well.

“Mountaineering, I started in 2013. I have been to the [Everest] summit two times, five days in between. We have fifteen persons from UK. It was successful.” Kaji recounts proudly. “One expedition, but I have to go two times.” He clarifies that both summits were accomplished in the same climbing year, during the same expedition. If men are feeling well and fit, they are sometimes asked by [Sirdars](#)³⁸ or Western guides to return to the summit and help more clients to the top.

“What was your position?” I ask.

“[Climbing Sherpa](#). I help clients up. We give oxygen *for them* and we *take care for* them. We *have to* help, all the persons. We *have to* carry oxygen. Sometimes, we *have to* give

³⁸ Sirdar was adopted to signify a notable and important position ranking, such as a leader. The Sirdars on the mountain are generally responsible for managing the Sherpa and Nepali climbers that assist commercial teams during their climbs (N.Sherpa, personal communication, April 7, 2015).

the training at Basecamp.” Kaji explains. With a subtle gesture upwards with his right hand, he admits, “It is my job. The work is perfect for me, just I go up and down. I work five days.”

“I don’t want to quit. I would like to climb more mountains that are 8000 meters”

“You’ve summited two times, and it’s only been two years!” I say excitedly.

“2014, I have been.” Kaji acknowledges his other attempt on Everest.

“And then the accident happened?” I unintentionally cut in, knowing that no one made it to the top of Everest during the 2014 climbing season.

“Yeah the accident happened in [Camp I](#), below the Camp I. There was a very deep crevasse and a very long ladder, and the ladder fell down in the crevasse and people wanted to try to fix the ladder. That time over there was a very big hanging ice.”

The blustering wind picks up. I take another sip of my tea as Kaji continues to tell his story of the tragic morning of [April 18, 2014](#). “I saw my life. I’m also there when the snow is falling down, when the avalanche was coming there. I’m lucky to turn back ten minutes before. So many people were...” Kaji pauses for a brief moment. Nodding his head, he says somberly, “lost.”

“I’m so sorry.” I reply sincerely.

Kaji reiterates, “There was nothing dangerous for me, I was lucky enough to survive by ten to fifteen minutes.”

“Did you get hurt or injured?” I ask inquisitively.

“No, never. I have never got injured,” Kaji softly confirms, shaking his head left to right. Ngima, who has been chatting with the young German girl, unexpectedly chimes in.

“He is like a survivor of the 2014 avalanche, so just by ten minutes he was lucky. So even he was in the Kathmandu media. Lots of people coming for the interview.”

“Lots of interviews.” I repeat shamefully, assuming that Kaji must be tired of recapping the details of his near-death experience. “Well I appreciate your time today.”

Returning to his story of the 2014 avalanche, Kaji depicts what unfolded immediately after the unanticipated surge of snow through the Khumbu Icefall. “Ten minutes or fifteen minutes later come helicopter. Then we contacted our friends, ‘all is okay?’ We were seven climbers that time, our team. And all friends were okay. Then I come to the avalanche places to rescue with a rope case.”

Ngima speaks up again, asking Kaji for more details about the accident. Kaji leans back in his plastic lawn chair and responds in Nepali instead of English, “I went to rescue the injured along with the medical team from UK. After that Everest was closed. Not by the government, by the Climbing Sherpa. They all said let’s not climb this time, because you know the reasons.”

Ngima translates Kaji’s words, while offering additional interpretations.

“So like all the Climbing Sherpas like they were together, gathering or meeting, and they all said this year is bad, so they just stop for now, and maybe we can continue next year.”

I shift my gaze from Ngima over to Kaji. “How come they closed the mountain?”

In English, Kaji states simply, “In the mountain we *have to* respect for tourists, and tourist also *have to* respect Sherpa.” We all shake our heads yes in response to Kaji’s statement.

As we sit there in stillness for a moment, I reflect on Kaji's upcoming expedition. In ten days he will set out for Basecamp to meet his team of clients from the UK, in hopes of challenging Everest again this spring season.

"So this year you'll go? You're not scared?" My own fears and worries are evident as I break the silence.

"Some people are scared. Sometimes there will be accident, I'm not sure." With a coy smile, Kaji admits, "I don't want to quit, I would like to climb more mountains that are 8000 meters." His soft brown eyes glow with ambition, "It's very powerful. I'm very happy to make summit."

A Conversation with Da Gelje Sherpa on Wednesday – April 8, 2015

A young, dark-haired girl invites us through the swinging kitchen doors and shows us to a small wooden table. Sonam is the owner of a cozy lodge and restaurant in [Namche Bazaar](#), an acquaintance of Karma, whom I connected with when I first arrived in Nepal.

“[Namaste!](#)” Sonam greets us and joins the table. The brightness of his smile complements his cherry-red North Face jacket. “Please, what would you like to drink?” he inquires.

“Hot orange?” Ngima replies, looking to me.

“Sounds good. Thank you!”

Hot orange is a sugary drink, popular among trekkers, that consists of concentrated orange-flavoured powder mixed into boiling water. Over the sweet beverages we explain to Sonam the focus of my project and ask if he is interested in being interviewed. Contradicting what Karma had told us, Sonam explains that he has only summited Everest once, during an Army expedition, and politely declines our request.

“Other men would have more insight around the discussion of mountaineering and Everest,” he humbly admits. Thanking him for his time, we finish our drinks over casual conversation and get ready to leave.

Clomp. Clomp. Clomp. The rhythmic sound of heavy stomping boots reverberates through the stairwell. As we exit the kitchen into the dining hall, we are met with five climbers bundled in ash gray coats with small white ice picks embroidered just above the left breast.

Sonam whispers, “He’s the one you should talk to,” subtly pointing out the man dressed in a red ball cap, a buff stretched over his neck, and gold-rimmed sunglasses perched upon the cap. Ngima takes note, and nudges me to wait in the seats that line the perimeter of the room. I overhear bits of their conversation: “from Texas”, and they are “attempting the summit this year.” I wait anxiously, while Ngima has a discussion in Nepali with the man in the cap.

Ngima schedules an interview with Da Gelje for the next day. Calling me over, he introduces us. “Maggie, this is Da Gelje Sherpa.”

“Tashi Delek, Namaste.” I greet him in both Sherpa and Nepali. His handshake is firm, face stern – a weathered look that indicates much experience and time in the mountains. “Tashi Delek!” Da Gelje responds softly, lips curling up at the corners. The sternness I initially perceive melts away. With a bright and infectious smile, Da Gelje introduces me to his clients and explains that he will accompany each of them to the [EBC](#), but has himself decided not to summit. Da Gelje, often called by his nickname Dawa, is a well-known senior climber and member of the [Nepali Mountaineering Association \(NMA\)](#). As part of the NMA he helps plan the routes that [Ice Doctors](#) set through the [Khumbu Icefall](#) each spring climbing season. He also helps to manage Basecamp by acting as a liaison between commercial climbing companies and the government, a role that requires accessibility and availability.

“It was a pleasure to meet you.” I exclaim excitedly, as Ngima and I pack up to go.

“Yes, a pleasure. See you sometime tomorrow,” he responds.

“We had no good education before, you know? And after that we go to carrying the load.”

Voices from three tables over erupt with excited chatter, filling the silent lull in our conversation. “I wonder why people climb, is it dangerous?” The question I posed moments ago hangs in the air as I await Da Gelje’s response. His eyes, glossy and heavy, fix on the views outside the window, head turned to the right as if he is trying to avoid the camera’s lens.

“Oh, danger,” Da Gelje says in a low, raspy voice. “It’s not easy, climbing. Not easy. Very, very difficult.” Turning his eyes forward, he raises his right index finger to his head. Tapping it twice, he continues, “Thinking. Walking, thinking, very difficult. Not easy you know? That is our job, because we have not good education before.” I gaze back at Da Gelje sympathetically. He continues to explain the difficult nature of his job, “When I’m climbing to [Camp III](#), first time. Very, very, very difficult. I am very afraid. Because I’m climbing up with rope with [crampons](#) you know?” Gripping the imaginary rope with two hands Da Gelje mimics the ascent. “Up is a little easy, then I went to [South Col](#). After that I see down. Very like this...” Da Gelje’s melancholy tone turns to good-natured laughter as he explains the sharp angle of the mountain with his arm placed in a steep declined position.

“Shheeew. Like straight down?” I squeal excitedly. Ngima chuckles at my reaction.

“How do I go down? Very difficult for my body and my mind. So just I’m thinking after that, ‘Okay not only me. I have many friends many people here. What are they doing? I must also follow that.’ [That’s] my thinking.” Da Gelje laughs ironically.

“You learned by watching?” I ask in surprise.

Still rocking back and forth in his bout of laughter, Da Gelje explains, “Before, I was never a climbing guide there. Very danger.”

The cheery jokes dissolve and a solemn disposition washes back over Da Gelje. “That time is no training school, nothing you know?” I shake my head yes in response to Da Gelje’s rhetorical question, wondering what it must have been like to grow up in the mountains. “Now it’s very different,” he acknowledges.

“Korima. My village is [in] [Solukhumbu](#), below the [Lukla](#),” Da Gelje points out the window in a south-westerly direction. “From here,” he says, referring to [Namche Bazaar](#), “by walk, two days. Near the [Salleri](#).” Da Gelje’s mention of Salleri familiarises me with the location of his village. “In my village, only Sherpa, nobody else.” Da Gelje continues to emphasise the remote nature of his village. “Three hundred. Three hundred house or something. Only Sherpa. We’re seven brothers.” Da Gelje looks up for a moment. With a contagious smile he says, “and I have two sisters.”

“Seven brothers, two sisters.” I echo, flashing a warm smile in return.

“Yeah. First I start farmer. In my village I have big lands. Lots of growing potatoes, corn and vegetables, rice, uhh... cabbage, beans, green beans, buckwheat, wheat. So many, many kind of food we grow. Also we have cow, lots of cow. Sati Gāi, do you know?” I nod my head, indicating that I understand the Nepali phrase meaning friend and cow. “Lots of milk, we don’t cut yak, [or] any animal you know.” Da Gelje explains the importance of these creatures in his

culture, and how Sherpas, particularly those who practice Buddhism, do not kill their own animals.

Wishing to understand what factors led to his work on Mt. Everest, I probe, “So, you worked as a farmer first, and when and how did you become interested in trekking and mountaineering?”

“So when I was sixteen years old, that time...I’d like to go to [Kathmandu](#). I went to Kathmandu. After that I found the trekking job – a [porter](#).”

“You started as a porter?”

“Yeah. People say, ‘you like to carry some load, I give you money.’ ‘Yeah, I can do that!’ I say.” His voice rings with excitement.

“How was that?” I ask.

Giggling, Da Gelje exclaims, “Yeah, first time I carried thirty kilos!”

“Thirty kilos, wow! I carry fifteen kilo and I’m like ‘ohhh,’” I say, impressed, while emphasising my distress over the load.

“No, almost twenty” Ngima pipes up, “but I help you.”

With a bashful chuckle, I admit to Da Gelje, “Yeah he does help me, but it’s heavy!”

Bending at each elbow, Da Gelje curls his fists up towards his biceps. His posture is upright and stiff. “So when I was sixteen years old that time I’m taller and very...” His voice trails off, but he flexes to accentuate his strength. “Only four days I carried load, after that the guide says, ‘Now your load is finished.’ I carried the food. One day ten rupees³⁹ I got.” Da Gelje chortles about the wage, and discloses his age to provide context. “Yeah, thirty-three years old now.” I begin to weave Da Gelje’s timeline in my mind.

“So you started trekking at age sixteen, when did you go from trekking to mountaineering?”

Da Gelje speaks slow and soft. “After that trip I’m coming back to my home, and some years I just stay in my home, and after that is my father’s sick you know?”

“He was sick?” I ask for clarification.

“My father. My father was very sick, and he died, six months after.” Da Gelje’s voice cracks with emotion.

“Oh... I’m so... sorry.” I offer sympathetically.

Da Gelje tightly blinks his eyes closed for a moment. Opening them again he tries to continue. “After that...” Da Gelje takes another pause, turning his head to avoid eye contact with me and Ngima. “So I have it VERY difficult in the village.” Emotion pervades his speech as he looks back at us to explain his grave situation during that time.

A single tear slides down his smooth, brown cheek.

“Oh, sorry. Sorry.” Da Gelje apologises repeatedly for his unexpected emotional response.

³⁹ This Nepali rupee rate equates to approximately less than fifteen Canadian cents (in present day currency exchange rates).

My heart swells with pain in this moment. “No, no it’s okay. Slowly, there is no rush. It’s tough, those things.”

“After that, I like to go trekking and mountaineering you know?” he begins to speak, but pauses once more. “Sorry I’m thinking of my father...” My discomfort is heightened in the deepening silence. I suddenly feel the urge to connect with Da Gelje through my own experiences of death, but immediately feel they are too trivial.

He begins again. “We had no good education before, you know? And after that we go to carrying the load.”

“You start carrying the load to start paying for the family and to help?” I ask curiously.

“Yes, yes.” He murmurs while loudly clearing his throat. Tears well in his eyes. A moral dilemma begins to arise within me: *Do I continue to capture on camera the grief and pain that Da Gelje wears so openly on his face?*

“We can take a minute I am so sorry. Do you want me to stop the Camera?” I ask.

“Yes, sorry.” Da Gelje confirms.

In Nepali Da Gelje asks Ngima for a glass of cold water.

“When I get the Sirdar chance, I’m the leader. After that I got a summit.”

I re-focus the lens and press the record button. Traces of sadness are still evident in Da Gelje’s bloodshot eyes, but his smile shines bright again. I settle back into my seat beside the camera. “You... you talk easy questions,” Da Gelje demands with a heartfelt chuckle.

“Okay, easy questions.” I agree. “Which year did you start going to Everest?”

“Uh...” Da Gelje peers at the ceiling momentarily as if he is shuffling through distant memories. “1984. I start climbing. Not Everest. First, I went to the [Mera Peak](#), [Island Peak](#), many, many peaks I’m climbing and trekking. Many trekking Sherpa jobs.”

“When did you start going up the 8000 ones?” I ask, referring to the giants that stand above 8000 meters such as Everest, [Lhotse](#), and the like.

“1996.”

“Were you there for the [’96 Everest tragedy](#), the big storm?” I inquire, referring to the events of May 10-11, 1996.

“Yeah 1996, I’m from the North side.” Da Gelje indicates that he was positioned in Tibet rather than Nepal this specific year. “Some Indians died that time. I’m with the UK, working with a British expedition. That time I am cook. I have twenty-two members that time. 6500 meters high to EBC, I am cooking for two months.” Da Gelje describes his role on the other side of the mountain on this disastrous day in history; a point of view left out of many of the adventure novels that flooded the shelves post-tragedy.

Moving in chronological order, Da Gelje continues to recount his work in the 8000 meters mountains. “In 1996 autumn season I’m coming to the Nepal side Everest. That time, I’m also cook. In 1997, I went climbing from the north side; climbing that time. No summit. Only carrying the load up and down. 8300 meters is the last camp on

the north side, I went seven times. Up... and down... Up... and down,” he says, slowly drawing out the last syllables.

“Because, I didn’t get a chance you know?” Da Gelje confesses.

“What do you mean get a chance?”

“I didn’t get a chance. That time, I’m not a summitter. So, people take only summitter people. I never got a chance. I’m only carrying loads up and down.” Da Gelje explains, repeatedly pointing to the ceiling, then to the floor, and back to the ceiling.

“Who decides who gets the chance?”

“The leader and Sherpa leader. Sherpa leader is very, very, very bad before.” He admits honestly. “Their thinking was very bad.”

I sense an undercurrent of complex politics between the climbers and their [Sirdars](#), the Sherpa leaders. “After that, 1998 I’m climbing First Singapore expedition. I’m [Climbing Sherpa](#). That time also I didn’t get the chance!” Da Gelje’s dimples draw up into his cheeks as he once more bursts into laughter. “Before I never get the summit chance. When I get the Sirdar chance, I’m the leader. After that I got a summit. Before I never get the chance,” he states, explaining that his summit bids were contingent on his Sirdar status.

“Which year was this first summit?” I ask.

“2005. When I got the Sirdar, I go to direct summit.” Da Gelje proudly raises his arm in the air. “The first time I got a summit, I’m so happy. Because the top of the World is Everest. How is that I’ve been there? I’m so happy, you know? So happy, I see all the way around.” Da Gelje rotates in his seat 360 degrees, simulating his summit day. “I take a picture. Very nice picture I got, very nice picture. And I’m so happy. And my friend is crying.”

While slapping his knee with his right hand, Da Gelje leans back to let out a deep belly-laugh. “People lots of crying. WAAAAA,” he teases, mimicking the other climbers. “Okay, yeah, I’m crying.” He admits with a sly smile.

“Waaa.” I joke back. “But it’s such an experience!” I rationalise.

Mesmerised by Da Gelje’s climbing feat, I inquire curiously, “So then, how many summits total on Everest now?”

“Seven.”

“Seven, wow-ie!” I squeal.

“[For the] 8000 meters, I got a summit [on] [Everest](#) seven times, [Lhotse](#) one time, [Cho Oyu](#) three times, [Kangchenjunga](#) eight times, and [Dhaulagiri](#) one time, [Pumori](#) one time. And many mountains I climbed. And very danger mountain is [Mountain Jongsong](#). Jongsong Himal, this is a mountain near Kangchenjunga, I climbed there.” Da Gelje proudly recites his climbing achievements – all accomplished within ten years.

“They don’t know how to go summit, how to go coming back, how many oxygen they need”

Da Gelje waves his extended finger back and forth as a warning sign. “Manage,” he instructs firmly. “Manage. Very, very important for the manage. Before Kathmandu. Before when leave Kathmandu to Basecamp. Before we manage: everything write, everything pack,

everything manage. If we have it at Basecamp, we carry it up. If we don't have it at Basecamp, what to do?"

Because of the extreme, desolate conditions of the high mountain, Da Gelje emphasises the need for pre-departure planning to reduce the probability of unexpected and fatal situations. "I'm climbing twenty-eight times Everest, never accident." Da Gelje declares proudly. "Never. My group, never. Never accidents, I'm so happy. Twenty-eight times climbing... I've been one-hundred, two-hundred times trekking. Never accident. One hundred times at the peaks and pass, maybe I have one-hundred people and porters I manage. No accident." Claspng his hands together in prayer and raising them to his heart, Da Gelje giggles. "Then I'm very happy, my god."

"But in 2005," Da Gelje tilts his head down, the North Face emblem visible atop his red cap, his eyes shaded by its brim. He continues to speak softly, "2005... When climbing Everest from Tibet side, after summiting I saw another people. They were Russian. He is going too crazy. He have oxygen finished, you know?" I gently shake my head no to Da Gelje's rhetorical question, fearing what he might say next.

"So, when you finish your oxygen you start losing your mind a little?" I inquire, curious about the physiological effects of altitude.

"Losing... losing your mind, yeah." Da Gelje confirms, circling his right index finger near his right ear. "So I *give to* him oxygen. Half, he use – half, I use," he says, placing a cupped hand over his mouth to represent an oxygen mask. "And after that he is climbing down. Second Step. Second Step, is a very, very danger place. Like the [Hillary Step](#). Similar, but more dangerous." He holds his arm stiff in the air, imitating the edge of this precipice. "Second Step, is all the way rock. Rock, 200 meters or something. And he's slowly, slowly descending down with me."

Briefly interrupting his own story, Da Gelje provides additional context. "I have also seven members. I have seven members, and eight Sherpa. That time I'm Sirdar. My group [and] me already summited and back. And he's [Russian Climber] also summited and back. So, I'm slowly, showing my group, my Sherpa, [how to] manage and go down. And I saw him at that place," Da Gelje explains, referring to the Russian climber stuck on the Second Step.

"He had oxygen that finished. And I give some oxygen."

"So, you share yours, half and half?" I verify.

"Yeah, share. I have no problems. He's already descending down... I said to him, 'Slowly, slowly.' He's a very tall man, this Russian. He have also Sherpa. Sherpa also have no oxygen. He's like..." Da Gelje's description trails off as he wobbles his entire body as if he is on a rocking boat and cannot find his footing.

"That Sherpa guy, both of them are like this?" I ask, mimicking Da Gelje's gestures.

"Yeah. That is not good. Like, they have a Sherpa guide, they have another guide also. Not good manage." Neck rigid, gaze fixed on the ceiling, Da Gelje leans back stiffly and suddenly collapses, lifeless. "He's finished [at] the Second Step. He's like that." His

eyes roll to the back of his head. “Guy how are you?” I said, ‘how are you?’ I told him like that. ‘See me, see me?’” Da Gelje rotates his neck as if he is looking up at someone, and then collapses again. “Then finished, right there, died.” Da Gelje pops back up, in another bout of laughter.

“The Russian guy?” I ask with urgency. “What about his Sherpa, did he live?”

“Sherpa is alive.” Da Gelje chuckles once more.

Though I’m confused about Da Gelje’s response, I join in and laugh along anyways. I sense a discomfort in his body language that does not match his giddiness. Giggling, I say, “We laugh, but what did you do then?”

“Same rope. We’re descending down the same rope. He’s died near to me. He’s first. And I’m last. And, so I have to shake him like that, and everything,” With an aggressive joggling action, Da Gelje continues to depict the events that unfolded that fateful day. “No move. No life. So I give uhh...”

“CPR?” I propose.

“CPR,” Da Gelje confirms. “Breath to him. I am first aid training three, four times a year. Many times I do that.” Blowing air through the fist placed in front of his mouth, Da Gelje erupts again in laughter. “No, no. Not coming back.”

“So, do you leave him on the mountain?”

“I have to fix another rope, and his body is fixing onto another rope. And I leave his body there. And my group passes. Very dangerous place...I have to pass all my group. Not easy.” Da Gelje exclaims, shaking his head shamefully. “They don’t know how to go summit, how to go coming back, how many oxygen they need. They don’t know.” Da Gelje stresses the lack of team management and preparation by both the Russian client and the Sherpas. “I carry all the member’s, all the Sherpa extra oxygen bottles. So if our own bottles are already finished, we change them with new oxygen bottles. They have only one bottle.” His finger freezes momentarily in the air. “One bottle, finished at 8600m. So right there... died.”

“How to make safety route? How to open the way? ...We make rules”

Da Gelje’s white teeth emerge from his sly smile. “My wife don’t know, she don’t know the danger.”

“You keep it a secret from her?”

“Because I have no problems, she don’t know.”

“Til now he is lucky.” Ngima chimes in.

“All the time I’m coming there, I am happy!” Da Gelje chuckles.

Despite the fluidity of our laughter, we cannot forget the very real, and often life-threatening risks that climbers and Sherpas accept in attempting to summit Everest. “I worked the [Icefall Doctor](#) for two years,” Da Gelje divulges about his past held roles on the mountain. “Very difficult job. Not very easy. [Icefall](#), Icefall is like that you know?” With his palm facing up, Da Gelje stiffens his fingers upward like towers of ice,

simulating the Khumbu Icefall. “Sometimes we’re climbing like this, and down, and come here. Like that.” He traces a finger from his other hand through the model Icefall.

“It’s like a maze you have to go through?” I ask.

“Yeah. Sometimes climbing is not possible. Sometimes the ice is collapsed, very danger. So people’s experience [of knowing], which ice is collapse, which is not collapsed. We can see and manage. Before we see and check, and after that we fix the rope. This is good.”

With his peace fingers stretched out, Da Gelje declares, “Two years before the experience Icefall Doctor died. 2013 they died, and 2014 is new Doctor. I think the Icefall Doctor is not very experienced, last year.” Da Gelje imparts his feelings about the tragic [2014 Everest](#) season. “So they don’t know which place is danger, you know?” He traces the fatal route in the air. “This is Icefall. This is Nuptse. This is Lola you know. Also this is mountain. So last year, the Icefall Doctor opened the route like that. And when the avalanche came here,” Da Gelje points just below Camp I on his imaginary map, “people died here. All the Sherpas climbing with loads go this place. From here cracks ice.”

“People died only five minutes after. Sixteen people died.” He throws his hands into the air in defeat, while shrugging his shoulders tentatively. Da Gelje’s sombre voice resumes, “After that all people coming down. And Sherpa doesn’t like to go to this route. It’s danger. After that we respect for the sixteen people who died you know?” Without hesitation, he declares, “So this year I think no problem this year. We changed the route.”

Da Gelje exudes confidence in the plan for the approaching climbing season. “So I write the map, you see. We changed the route. I’m [Nepal Mountaineering Association](#) board member. So I *have to* talk. I have to talk with the [SPCC](#)⁴⁰ here. I *have to* talk with the ministry. And I *have to* talk with the Icefall Doctors. I *have to* talk with the Western guides. We have a meeting, every time. When I go to Basecamp I *have to* meet with Western guide and all Sherpa leaders. ‘How to make safety route? How to open the way?’ ‘How do we go to the summit day?’ We make rules. One day, only two hundred people. ‘When is good weather?’ So we have to check weather windows, you know?”

Recently, climbing restrictions have been created to decrease chances of bottlenecks and traffic jams on the [Hillary Step](#) during a given summit push. Da Gelje explains, “If three-four days the weather window is open. Then five or six groups in same day because they’re small. And big group, only two groups. After that nobody dies, nobody frostbite. Easy summit, easy back down.”

“Let’s hope for this year too!” I squeal, and Da Gelje nods his head in harmony.

⁴⁰ The Sagarmāthā Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) was originally established in the 1980s as a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to clean up the Solukhumbu region of trash and waste. However, only receiving a small proportion of federal funding, the increasing costs of waste management in the ‘90s necessitated the SPCC to think of new ways to raise money. Eventually new positions emerged on the mountain: Icefall Doctors (Sagarmāthā Pollution Control Committee, 2016; Loomis, 2015).

Connecting his gaze with the lens, Da Gelje peers into the camera. “Ahem,” he clears his throat. “I like to give the message to young person. I don’t send directly to climbing. Before is good training. Good climbing training. Basic trainings is very, very important. And basic, advance is very important. After training, no danger.”

A Conversation with Lakpa Sherpa on Wednesday – April 8, 2015

As I flip open my cell phone, the digital display illuminates 4:45pm. *Bing!* An indication of an incoming message chimes loudly. I assume it's Ngima, reminding me of the other interview he scheduled for five o'clock today with Lakpa Sherpa, an International Mountain Guide and close friend of Da Gelje. Eight hours have elapsed since our time spent with Da Gelje, but I still feel emotionally and physically drained. I exit my bedroom and enter the small washroom. A trickle of cold water flows from the tap; cupping it with my hands, I splash my face. I look in the mirror and see my exhausted reflection staring back. Ironically, this is the only day we haven't embarked on village treks to solicit participants. And yet, my energy is low. I hide my matted hair beneath the folded Merino-wool buff, gently slap the sleepiness from both of my cheeks, and smile into the mirror. Slinging my camera bag over my shoulder, I shuffle down the wooden teahouse stairs and out the door.

As the sun begins to dip, its brightness colours the village, highlighting the vibrant door and window-frames of small shops and houses. I quickly descend the crowded village steps two at a time, weaving between trekkers who are crossing back and forth to barter with local shop keepers. The covered patio of Café 8848 is filled with tired hiking groups seeking refuge, indulging in Western comforts like espresso shots and baked pastries.

Bong. Bong. Bong. The deep, rhythmic sounds of cowbells for sale ring in the faint mountain breeze. I round the corner into the busy village square of [Namche Bazaar](#). Ngima and five Sherpa men gather around a table, boisterous and lively, exchanging jokes. Recognising the man in the red cap, I approach him first. "Namaste, Da Gelje!"

As the other men begin to shift out of their plastic lawn chairs, Ngima introduces me to each of them.

"This is Lakpa Sherpa, Maggie," he directs my attention to a man dressed in royal blue. Standing solidly at five feet-eleven inches, his eyes are shaded by sport sunglasses and a white North Face ball cap. I extend my hand to meet his tight grip. The strength and roughness of his climber's hands, callused and muscular, indicates tremendous experience.

"[Namaste](#)," he begins to speak. "Should we sit here in the sun?" Lakpa suggests, pointing back towards the table.

After a brief conversation, I begin to set up the camera while Ngima guides Lakpa through the paperwork and forms. As I scan the environment for correct lighting, I realise that Lakpa's buddies haven't left. Rather, more men have gathered, along with curious tourists, all huddled around waiting for me to start. With a deep breath in, I push back the rising nervousness and take a seat diagonally positioned in front of Lakpa. The dark lenses of Lakpa's glasses disguise his friendly and cheerful demeanour. He sits poised, waiting patiently for my cue.

"It's on," Ngima yells from behind the camera, indicating that we're rolling.

"Okay, let's begin then!" I respond.

“I started from the bottom line”

Lakpa cracks a smile. “My English is not perfect, but you can understand.”

“No, no, rambro, rambro English!” I hastily repeat the word “good” in Nepali, disagreeing with Lakpa’s previous comment. “First, thank you for meeting with me and taking time out of your busy schedule.” I offer my genuine gratitude.

“So, your current job is now what?” As I speak, I can’t help but think about how much I sound like a news reporter – ‘tell me the facts’ – with my rigid question. Perhaps I unconsciously feel pressured by all of these bystanders.

“I’m actively teaching and guiding both.” Lakpa responds concisely.

How do I open up these questions? I ponder to myself. I begin again. “Where did you grow up? When you were growing up, what did you do?”

Gesturing with his left hand, Lakpa paints a picture of his childhood. “I’m born in uhh...it’s a village called Kije. I have a joint family; I grew up with my grandparents, I’ve got one sister. My house elevation is 2800 meters. From my house, you can see a whole panoramic mountain view.” Lakpa sweeps his arm 180 degrees across his body. “First I did the government service, but it was always a sitting job. I want to travel national, international. I want to meet people.” Lakpa’s discontent with his stationary military-post position led him to question his role in the mountains. “So, that time I thought, ‘which job is fit for me?’ I was nineteen years old. After, I jumped to [porter](#) job.”

“I started from the bottom line.” Raising his arms, he ascends up the rungs of an imaginary ladder.

“From the bottom to the top.” I confirm.

“I like that, you know?” Lakpa says with humility.

“What’s the job like, being a porter, how was that?”

Composed, hands clasped in his lap, Lakpa admits, “Oh that’s a little bit pain. Pain is because I was in school. I studied at high school. I go to a good facility. Then jumped to porter job.” He shrugs his shoulders to his ears and chuckles. “It’s a little pain job. Lots of pain, heavy.”

“How many kilograms do you think?” I ask Lakpa about the weight of the loads he was expected to carry kilometer after kilometer through the rocky and sometimes treacherous Himalayan terrain.

“Thirty Kilo. Thirty, forty, sometimes.” Lakpa reveals casually, while giving a nonchalant look in the direction of his friends.

Together we recount his progression: schooling, government service, and porter job.

“After that, I was physically very fit. Since when I was in school, I’d do a lot of exercise...” He jockeys his fists in the air like a boxer. “...some sports, martial arts, you know? My whole body was fit.” Lakpa releases his subtly flexed chest muscles and continues. “And I remember one time I got a rescue. One Canadian lady, lost in Dhaulagiri Icefall. Then I got a chance on a search and rescue team.”

“Were you trained for that?” I interrupt for clarification.

“No. I was a strong man, so they took me along. ‘Ooh he’s strong so let’s go.’” Lakpa briefly refers to how he was recruited and then resumes with the story. “So she fell, she lost somewhere on the waterfall. When she’s lost after that one week, snow fell, so it was really deep snow and frozen. It was difficult to break.”

“Was she alive?”

Shaking his head sorrowfully, Lakpa mumbles, “It was a body search and rescue.”

We both fall silent for a moment.

“Uhh, so this led to working in the high mountains?” I probe.

“There was some experienced guys with us, some senior guys. Going up, I’m always first you know? Breaking trail, in deep snow,” Lakpa says while sweeping his hands vigorously in front of himself, as if swimming. “They get there at four o’clock [pm], I get there at eight o’clock, nine o’clock time [am]. But then I was asked, ‘How is possible?’ They told me, ‘Oh you must train for expedition, or join some training courses.’ So, I joined a mountaineering course. This course was in [Manang](#), basic mountaineering course. After that we have advance mountaineering course. After that I continue, I got a chance to do training in France. In 2002, I did some mountaineering courses in France.” Lakpa exudes confidence and pride as he explains how he acquired his mountaineering skills. “After that I became an instructor.”

“I was able to jump on the left side. That’s why I survived”

I take a moment to scan our surroundings. Just beyond where Lakpa sits, five exhausted trekkers teeter from one hiking pole to the next in a slow ascent up the Namche village steps. I marvel inwardly at their determination. Lakpa begins to speak again, and I turn my full attention to his story.

“In 2003, I got my first summit. I climbed Mt. Everest with the Indo-Nepal joint Everest expedition. I [felt] a little bit excited, a little bit excitement. I did something.” With dimpled cheeks, Lakpa chuckles. “Something in life,” he adds. Lakpa’s statement corresponds with sentiments expressed by many others who embark on mountaineering and high-risk adventure pursuits, who engage these activities because it provides them with purpose or a goal.

Lakpa extends his arms straight in front like a bridge. His disposition quickly changes and he confesses excitedly, “When we cross big [crevasse](#), and cross the long [ladders](#), you know sometimes it’s scary! Coming down is so scary, with a big load and boots you know?” Lakpa reveals the dangerous realities of these climbs. His expedition in 2003 was one of six Everest attempts, and the first of his four successful Everest summits.

“What happened to the other two?” I inquire about Lakpa’s unsuccessful attempts.

“The one time from North Side [of Everest], I was in a big avalanche.” Lakpa reclines in his chair, hands clasped gently in his lap. He begins, “It was autumn, 2014. Autumn is always deep snow in September. Dutch, *they wanted to* climb in September. It was dangerous because autumn there’s not so many groups. One, maybe two groups. Sometimes it’s difficult to fix the line you know? It’s a lot of work. A guy was in front of me and he crossed one slab.” Lakpa raises his right arm above his head as if he was covering it for protection, and exclaims, “It was a slab avalanche! Avalanche came and then, I think ‘Oh this is an avalanche so I have to get out

quick.” Lakpa describes what was going through his mind at this critical moment. “In the training we do some avalanche training, how to manage to get out. I was hit by avalanche, but at the same time I jumped.” Somersaulting his hands, Lakpa asserts, “I was able to jump on the left side. That’s why I survived. That day we cancelled. And the next day we tried again.”

After such a narrow miss, Lakpa acknowledges the important role his previous training played, and continues to play, in his work on the mountain. “Being an instructor, I always promote training. You know without knowledge, without skills, without educations, it’s difficult. It’s a danger job, but we did many years training. This training is to minimise. You cannot lose accident, but we minimise.”

Unpredictable weather patterns and mountain hazards are often out of one’s control, but Lakpa hints at ways in which their disastrous effects might be minimised. “So, a lot of the climbers [guides] they must train. Basic knowledge. Sometimes they can analyse dangers. Different danger weather patterns, you know? Sometime they fall into the crevasse and they’re able to come by themselves. If they saw somebody, they’re able to do rescue.”

Lakpa exchanges a quick glance with his colleagues and climbing buddies who are still attentively listening to our interview. Looking back to me, he reminisces, “Before then there was no training anywhere [in the Nepali Himalayas]. Before there’s no school – no training – but nowadays many training is being conducted, so they must go there and learn something before going on expedition.”

Lakpa’s voice deepens into a more serious tone as he continues to explain, “On client side, they also must train. You need experience before going on an expedition. Good experience. Not really good, but minimum physical and foundations. Only, this way we minimise the dangers.”

The sun shines through the clouds for a moment, illuminating Lakpa’s cheerful face and highlighting his positive message. “So you know we try to minimise this kind of accident to make this job reputable.” My chin moves up and down in agreement. Lakpa continues, “If everywhere accident people dying for us, this job is not good job.”

“I learned this profession. If I do other business, I have to start from zero”

“Nobody knewed that. The situation was unpredictable.” He throws both hands up in disbelief. “I wasn’t there.” Lakpa shakes his head, referring to the tragic [2014 Everest avalanche](#). “You know the route was more, maybe a little bit left side, too close to the [serac](#) side. But, you didn’t need to fix so many ladders, you [didn’t] have to cross so many blocks, crevasses. But it was more left side, the serac side – more dangerous.” Lakpa details some of the concerns people had regarding the route in that particular year.

“What about the closing?” I inquire.

Lakpa’s gaze rises to meet mine. “That year...” he begins solemnly, “...you know it’s so many accidents, so all the climbers they decide to close. It was black year, something like that. Bad luck, so many friends lost and respect and mourning. A lot of climbers got a family pressure, children and wife, so he stops. You lose some business, but sixteen, seventeen people died, and after if you continue you know people psychologically affect, not good feeling you know.”

Lakpa sheds light on the reasons why some climbers chose to stop climbing, not only last year, but indefinitely.

“When you make your decision, is there any pressure to not climb?” I ask, intrigued.

“Now, a lot of my friends, my family they say ‘Stop now. But this year the route is a little bit changed. So we feel safe here,” he responds confidently.

Lakpa grins from beneath the brim of his white ball cap. “But, this is my job and I learned this profession. If I do other business, I have to start from zero, you know? But this job, I’m an instructor and certified mountain guide.” As Lakpa sits a bit straighter in his chair, he exudes a sense of pride. “It took me almost fifteen years. I’ve spent a lot of money, energy, and a lot of money. So if I stop now then I have to find other job.” With a rush of laughter, he leans forward and squeals, “Then you start from [porters](#).”

A Conversation with Kami Sherpa on Friday – April 10, 2015

Bing! The chime of my pre-paid phone serves as a reminder to pick up my pace. I quickly cram my tattered Moleskin notebook, pen, lav-microphone, audio-recorder, DSLR camera, and retractable tripod into my small daypack. Brushing my teeth with my right hand, I manage to flip open my phone with my left and scroll to the text-message that blinks in my inbox.

“Good morning, you awake?” I can almost hear Ngima’s concerned voice; he always checks in with me when we stay the night in separate accommodations. This attentiveness is a quality often attributed to Sherpas in Western literature, as well as first-hand stories told to me by trekkers. When we arrived in [Namche Bazaar](#) three days ago, Ngima decided to sleep at his cousin’s local *momo* shop. Due to the limited space, I chose to stay a five minute trek up the mountain in a quaint guesthouse cozied behind colourful souvenir shops and a contemporary German bakery.

“O-n -- m-y...” I begin to type out a response. I rinse my toothbrush and return it to the wooden nightstand tucked between the two beds in my room. “...w-a-y -- n-o-w,” I finally punch into the phone, pressing the send button.

While eating dinner with friends last night, Ngima organised an interview for 8:00am with a local climber, Kami Sherpa from [Pangboche](#). Kami is passing through Namche with the rest of his expedition team on the way to Everest Basecamp. He expressed interest in talking with me before they continued their trek up, and so, trusting Ngima’s judgment, I agreed.

Bing! My phone chimes again as I stuff it into my pocket. I zip my Patagonia down-feather jacket to my chin, and swaddle my neck with a scarf. Slinging my pack over my shoulder, I lock my room and scurry down the lop-sided stairwell into the main dining area of the guesthouse.

“[Namaste Didi](#),” the owner greets me. “Breakfast?” he inquires. Meeting his eyes with an apologetic gaze, I respond.

“Namaste! I am so sorry, I have to run to a meeting.” Pushing past the heavy quilt curtain, I exit through the wood frame and teeter down a set of steep steps cut into the hill. The morning air bites at my nose, but bright rays of sunshine split the clouds, promising warmer temperatures and clear views. A group of fifteen tourists march past me, likely on their morning acclimatisation walk. All of them are decked out from head to toe in Gortex, a DSLR camera swinging from each neck as they repeatedly shift their weight, balancing their self from one hiking pole to the next.

I reflect on how my fieldwork is unfolding in a different way from what I had anticipated, particularly in the [Khumbu](#). This region is more developed than I remember from 2013, and vastly more touristic than the villages of the [Solu](#). Throngs of trekkers and mountaineers crowd the trails, cafes with available wifi, and any lookout with a glimpse of the world’s tallest mountains. It’s obvious that I am here in the midst of the hype of the spring adventure season. Most Climbing Sherpas and guides are busy prepping itineraries, collecting gear, and orienting their clients to the challenges of these mountains.

I adapt my interviews according to this new and unexpected environment, but I find it difficult to let go of my initial hopes. I try to dispel romantic notions of “back stage” from my mind as I accept that multiple days with each Climbing Sherpa in his home is unlikely. Instead, I refocus on the “emplaced narratives” I may encounter, like the one that lays before me today: Kami on his way to Basecamp.

I pass through the bustling alleyways of Namche. *Bong...bong...bong*. The ringing of cattle bells signals the approach of yak that saunter slowly upwards, accompanied by their young shepherds. Shopkeepers re-stock their shelves and sweep the dirt from their doorsteps. Beads hanging from display racks sway gently in the breeze.

“Namaste.” I clasp my palms together and bow my chin towards the ground. The petite Tibetan woman returns the greeting from her small stool perch. *Does she remember me?* I think to myself, realising she’s the same woman who sold me prayer beads two years ago. As I pass the final souvenir stand I see the momo shop in the distance, set just in front of the village school.

I enter the shop. “Namaste. Good morning Maggie.” Ngima stands up from a wooden bench that runs around the perimeter of the one-room shop. He shows me to a plastic lawn chair on the right side of the room and informs me that Kami will be here shortly.

“Namaste. Timilai...sanchai...cha?” I sound out Nepali words, attempting to ask “how are you” to Ngima’s cousin, Fulamu, and her daughter. Giggling, Fulamu responds, “Sanchai cha,” that she is fine, and brings me a cup of black tea.

As we await Kami’s arrival, Ngima briefs me for the upcoming interview. Kami has climbed Everest many times, however he is currently on his way to attempt the summit of Mt. [Lhotse](#) alongside a famous American mountaineer, who is using his climbs to raise money and awareness for Alzheimer’s research. Lhotse and Everest share about eighty percent of the same climbing route, until a split-point just above the yellow band, a well-known landmark of yellow rocks on the mountainside. As I process this information, Kami pushes through the blue and green blanket hanging from the doorframe.

“Namaste!” Kami says enthusiastically, pulling his cotton buff from his face and chin down around his neck. He radiates calm, warm energy as he approaches us.

“Hello, I am Kami. How are you?” he turns to me and asks. His voice is relaxed, his demeanour is friendly, and his English is quite clear. My worries about language differences dissipate.

“Namaste, Kami. [Dhanyabad](#) for coming to speak with me,” I gently reply.

Ngima and I explain to Kami the general interview details and talk him through the consent forms. Receiving permission to video-record, I set up my tripod and camera. I place my chair just in front of the camera, diagonally across from Kami’s position on the bench along the wall.

“Are we ready?” Ngima asks excitedly. I nod yes. Ngima presses the red button to begin recording. Connecting with Kami’s eyes, I wonder if his behaviours and words will be altered by

the multiple gazes present in the room: the lens of the camera, my Western-interviewer perspective, Ngima's translations, and the tea-drinking bystanders.

“Almost my 8000 meters almost finished. Only two left”

Kami unzips the external shell of his jacket away from his chin and settles into his seat. Cued by my first question, he begins. “I’m from [Pangboche](#).”

“Does your family live there?” I inquire, hoping to better understand his home life situation. Skirting the question, Kami quickly shifts his focus to his experience on the mountain instead. I temper my desire to control the interview and lean in to listen more closely to what he has to say.

“I’m climbing many times for the Everest, for sixteen times the summit,” Kami states proudly.

“Sixteen?!” I gasp in disbelief. “Out of how many expeditions?”

“Many, many” he answers. His bottom lip slowly curls revealing a subtle coy smile. Kami started working in Nepal’s mountaineering industry at the age of sixteen. “First climbing was in ‘85,” he explains. “It was my first expedition with the Norwegian group. The first time I was a little bit scared, but then after that you know. After more and more acclimatise, more technical, more experience, now. And now I’m not scared.” With the 1985 expedition as a starting point, Kami continues to tell how he moved through different positions on the mountain.

“[I’m a] mountain guide.” he emphasises. “Before, I’m working for the trekking. Like the [porter](#)...” Kami raises his arms in the air, “...carrying very heavy loads,” he continues saying as he bends his elbows, clenching both of his fists in front of his face as if he were tightly holding onto something, steadying it with imaginary rope. “Then after that the trekking guide, [and] now the climbing guide.” Kami’s progression from working as a porter to the more lucrative position of assisting with mountaineering expeditions is typical of many Climbing Sherpas’ stories. Over thirty years since his first porter job Kami is still guiding and climbing, this year for a renowned USA-based commercial climbing team. Opportunities like this over the years have helped him to successfully summit countless mountains.

Kami leans forward from his relaxed, seated posture and excitedly launches into a comprehensive listing of such climbs. “Sixteen for the Everest, three summits for the [K2](#), um...” he briefly pauses trying to recall his past successful ascents. “Ten summits to [Cho Oyu](#) from the Tibet side, four times the summit of [Makalu](#). Almost my 8000 meters almost finished. Only two left, [Lhotse](#) and [Annapurna I](#),” Kami announces enthusiastically. “All fourteen is almost finished!”

“Oh my!” I sit mesmerised, aware of the significance of this statement; summing all of Earth’s “eight thousanders.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Summiting the fourteen independent mountains that stand over 8000 meters above sea level is indeed a unique mountaineering record. Each is a part of the Himalayan range, while eight of the fourteen are situated on or within the borders of Nepal. Currently this accomplishment has only been achieved by thirty-three climbers globally, a statistic that includes two Nepali-Sherpa climbers (Jurgakski, 2017).

Kami's twinkling eyes open wide. He eagerly reminds us, "Now, I'm going for Everest and Lhotse both." Kami's vision is already fixed on the peaks he will climb during the 2015 spring season, understanding that if successful, he will be one summit closer to ascending all fourteen of the world's highest mountain peaks.

With a grin stretched from cheek to cheek Kami chuckles, "Now I'm very old."

"No, you're not," I interject, laughing with him.

Kami sticks his pink tongue out between his teeth, nods his head yes, and laughs. "Now fifty years," he clarifies "...and again I'm climbing for another ten more years." Currently fifty years of age, Kami convinces Ngima and I that he plans to be involved in the industry for quite a bit longer.

"Ten more years?" I echo astounded by his eagerness to continue; perhaps the feat of climbing all fourteen is achievable in Kami's lifetime. Trying to work through my understanding of Kami's individual situation, I probe further about his upcoming climbing season. "Which ones are your clients this year?" I ask curiously.

"You know this company?" Kami replies, unzipping the multiple layers of fleece and Gore-Tex that conceal the logo of his expedition team.

I nod my head excitedly, recognising the name.

"I'm working with them two years ago. And now they recommend for me. 'You're coming climbing with me. I need you' they said that to me" Kami explains, laughing.

"They requested you to come?"

"Yes, and last summer I was climbing with them with the expedition to the K2."

"Wow. So now they request you?" I echo as more pieces of Kami's story fall into place.

"My wife, and my family, my mom, everybody say, 'please now stop.'"

Fulamu walks towards us with a big metal thermos and tops up our mugs with fresh black tea. She cosies into a chair at the end of the small bench-like table that Kami sits behind. Her presence prompts me to return to my question about Kami's family.

"What about Pangboche, do you have family there?"

A warm glow radiates from Kami's face as he responds softly, "I have six sisters, three older sisters, three younger sisters."

"Only son?" I inquire further, knowing this to be a significant role in Sherpa culture from my previous discussions with other Sherpa men.⁴²

"No I have... my brother." Kami corrects me. "He is in the United States of America. He is married to an American." Kami divulges about his brother. "He's not here now. His family is in America."

"He's in the US?" I repeat curiously. "Did he also climb?"

"Yeah he's climbing. My brother also climbing for the Everest. Eighteen times the summit"

⁴² Within a Sherpa cultural context responsibilities of care for aging parents and maintaining family property are allocated to the youngest or only son (M. Sherpa of Phortse, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

“Chooooo” I push a long-winded sound of surprise through my pursed lips, astounded again by the quantity of successful summit ascents.

“Now, he has stopped for the expeditions.” Stiffening his right hand, Kami turns it inward and abruptly chops through the air down into the open palm of his left hand.

The conversation halts for a moment.

“Why did he stop?” I finally respond.

“I don’t know, he just finished.”

“Just finished?”

“His wife, his son, his daughter, they don’t like no more for the expedition. Because last year, there was many big problems at the Everest. That’s why his family say, please.” Kami bemoans.

“His family asked him to stop?” I request more clarity on the matter.

“Yes, but me also that. My wife, and my family, my mom, everybody say, ‘please now stop.’” A subtle smirk appears across Kami’s face as he tries to defend his predicament. “Then how to stop that? Because *I need for* the money, need for the ya know?”

“How do you feel about stopping?” I ask sympathetically.

“Yeah, I’m thinking about that. Ya know? But I need...to make the money.”

“I was at the Camp I, but we don’t have any problem...we are very lucky”

Kami’s face is emotionless, gaze fixed on the ground, as he processes my question about the closure of [Mt. Everest in 2014](#). “Many Climbing Sherpas died there,” he laments. The palpable sense of loss lingers while my mind shuffles through media stock images of the aftermath: voyeuristic imagery of lifeless bodies hanging like ragdolls from rescue helicopters; injured climbers, bloody and bandaged, laid out on hospital gurneys; desperate mothers, wives, and daughters on their knees, begging for explanations from their gods.

“All the expedition teams they don’t like that...” Kami describes the unfolding of the mountain closure. “They don’t like the route they climbing. And all the, you know the commercial groups, the big, big expedition commercial groups, they’re talking at a meeting like that. And then okay, they close. Close for the expedition”

Although avalanches are often unpredictable and the condition of the [Khumbu Icefall](#) unstable, Kami declares that the location of the 2014 climbing route was precariously placed. Waving his hand, Kami points to the left. “Last year they opened the route in the left side...” His eyes turn up to meet his raised right arm. Kami quickly sweeps his arm downward, motioning that something is falling from above, and explains that the left side of the Khumbu Icefall is dangerous. The 2015-route is believed to be safer. “Now this year, I heard that it is much, much better...not left side, not right side, in the middle. The [Doctors](#) made for the route,” Kami reports.

Kami admits that the closing Everest was a decision made out of respect for the men and families impacted by this tragedy.

“All those unfortunate deaths...” my voice trails off as I try to sympathise.

“Yeah, but last year our team is no problem. Everyone was very good.” Kami states softly, bringing positivity to the unfortunate memories. “I was at the [Camp I](#), but we don’t have any problem because we have sixty-five Climbing Sherpas. We have no, no died. No accident.”

Grateful to return from the mountain unharmed, Kami grins faintly and says, “Yeah, we are very lucky.”

“Clients don’t like that. ‘We pay a lot of money, we need for the summit’”

“In all of your years in expeditions, all the summits, can you tell me of any problems you’ve encountered?” I inquire, hoping to facilitate a deeper discussion around how mountain accidents are experienced by Kami.

“Sometime in 2006, no [‘96](#) we had a problem for the Everest. Many, many people died there.” Kami shakes his head from side to side and then continues in a low voice. “Like our leader. You know the New Zealander, Rob Hall?”

“I know Rob Hall, yeah. They wrote many books about ‘96.” I say eagerly.

“I was there!”

“Wow, you were with his team?” I’m amazed by the connection and excited by the opportunity to hear stories of the ‘96 tragedy from someone other than Western authors and climbers. “And what happened during that time for you?”

“The ‘96, there was a bad storm there. I was at the [Camp IV](#)...because we were helping for the clients. And then we have problems, three or four clients died.” Kami says gravely, turning his right hand over in the air while shrugging his shoulder as if to say “what could be done?”

“What happened?”

“Some clients are very slow...like [it was] too late, and then the storm. Then bad weather, and then all the people are very tired. And then some clients finish for the oxygen. Problem for the oxygen.” While shaking his head disapprovingly, Kami continues, “Yeah, some clients they still go up. Then the Climbing Sherpa say, ‘No, it’s too late. We go back.’ Clients don’t like that. ‘*We pay a lot of money, we need for the summit.*’ Then the Climbing Sherpa say, ‘No, it’s too late. Turn down.’ They say that.”

“And do the clients listen?” I chime in. “What happens?”

“We turn the clients. Otherwise problem. Both [of us] would have problem.” Kami justifies his actions. “Some clients are very smart. Then okay, they go back,” he declares, while tapping his fingers on the right side of his head a few times. “Some clients, they’re not.” He shakes his head. “Some clients paid a lot of money. ‘*We need to push. Go to the summit.*’ Say that some clients.”

“Yeah so you’re able to say no? As a guide and a Climbing Sherpa you can say no please, and some listen?”

Kami laughs in disbelief. “Yeah, some listen, and some don’t listen.”

A Conversation with Lhakpa Dorji Sherpa on Sunday – April 12, 2015

The sun sets into the shadow of the mountains. A thin blanket of yesterday's snowfall covers the fields of planted crops that stretch across the slope of the rural farming village. Cool mountain air nips at my nose, while my gaze fixates on the two young yaks playfully clashing their heads together in the side yard. I wrap my scarf tightly around my neck, pulling the plaid fabric up over my chin and chattering mouth, and slide the curtain across the rod closing off my bedroom window view. Locking the door behind me, I head to join [Pemba](#) and his family in the main dining hall. Pemba, my interpreter and guide for the later part of my fieldwork, has invited me to stay at his family's lodge for the next three nights; a brief respite from before we continue our ascent towards the Mt. Everest Basecamp.

Warmth radiates from the metal barrel fireplace positioned in the center of the room. Benches adorned with vibrant rugs and pillows run along the perimeter, set behind hand-carved tables that double as storage for grain. I settle into one of the blue plastic chairs that circle the fireplace. Pemba's mother, [Ngawang Karma](#), looks up from her task for a moment, "Namaste," she welcomes me, smiling brightly. She continues to fill the barrel with handfuls of sun-dried cattle dung. The re-use of dry animal excrement is a common practice in locations where tree lines are thin and wood is scarce. Scooting my chair closer to the barrel, I open my hands, palms down, and hover them over the growing flames. [Fu Doma](#), Pemba's sister, pops her head through the counter window that connects the dining area to the kitchen.

"Maggie, what would you like for dinner?" Pemba inquires on her behalf, cheerfully smiling from beneath his green wool cap.

"Uhh... I'll have what you have!" I respond light-heartedly, with hopes to eat and be served with the family tonight. Although I have requested not to be treated as a tourist, Pemba and his family graciously and hospitably ensure that I am accommodated each night.

Tonight *The Namaste Lodge* is quiet. The snow has likely deterred the tourists and trekkers heading to [Cho La Pass](#). With fewer responsibilities for lodge guests, Pemba's father, Lhakpa Dorji, has agreed to tell us about his climbing experiences. Lhakpa Dorji, perched on a chair near the center fireplace, laughs jovially and carries on with Pemba and Ngawang, who sit on a bench behind me. I snap the legs of my tripod into place and secure my camera tightly to its swivelling fixture. Setting the focus to manual, I briefly peer through the lens and center the frame on Lhakpa Dorji, bundled in his down-feathered vest and black ski headband. Feelings of gratitude and happiness tingle through my body as I look up from the camera for a moment to witness the warm-hearted exchanges between him and his Sherpa family. As aromas of curried spices pour from the kitchen, I am reminded of the time of night. I make final adjustments to my settings and Pemba turns down the soft rock melodies playing in the background.

"Let's get started," I announce.

"If you want to go with the expedition, I give you the Climbing Sherpa"

Raising his strong, weathered hand, Lhakpa Dorji extends his index finger, pointing it at the ground. "I born here," he affirms. "I born here, and I grow [up] here," he repeats, referring to

the village [Phortse](#). “I’m the alone son, and I have three sisters. I’m the second one. One, my older sister, she passed away in 1987.” Lhakpa Dorji tucks his chin into his chest and pauses in silence for a moment. “Now I have two,” he continues. “Both are living here, and both husbands do expeditions now too.”

Although known for its farming and animal husbandry, the pride of Phortse⁴³ lies in its long lineage of strong Sherpa climbers and Mt. Everest summiters. Situated at 3840 meters above sea level, Phortse is nearly a three-day hike from the [Lukla airstrip](#); geography that perhaps lends to the community’s adaptability to high-altitude work.

Lhakpa Dorji’s dark, almond-shaped eyes briefly glance to the ceiling and then back to the camera as he recalls what led him to working in the mountains. “Before that time we have the enormous yak. Not Nak, Yak.” He clarifies, “Yak is male, and Nak is female.” Lhakpa Dorji explains the common confusion many tourists have about the large, friendly cattle that roam the Himalayan hillsides, and who have become the primary source of dairy sold in the mountains. “I was six or seven, between the town my parents leave me behind the yaks, for the Shepard of the yaks. And then after the yak thing, I did the trekking.”

Lhakpa Dorji shifts forward energetically in his seat. His pitch raises an octave, “When I was fourteen years old, that time I carried the...” His thought is interrupted by his own question.

“You know the cook boy, [kitchen boy](#)? Cook boy means for carrying all the trekking group, mostly the camping group. That time, we needed all the kitchen stuff, big load and carrying and cooking.” Lhakpa Dorji depicts the responsibilities of a trekking expedition kitchen boy, a much more indispensable role before teahouses and lodges peppered the lengths of the trekking circuits.

“I was the kitchen boy. I did that for two years. And that time my salary was only twelve rupees⁴⁴. ”

“Tweeelllvvve rupees?” I draw out my pronunciation, surprised to know the wage he references is equal to approximately fifteen Canadian cents.

“Yeah, twelve rupees. I did that and after two years, then I get the chance... I work hard.” Lhakpa Dorji tightens his right fist and points his finger back at himself. Flashing a pearly white smile, he continues. “I work hard then they chose me as the [Sherpa](#). Sherpa means for to set up the tent,” he explains, mimicking the hand motions of constructing the nylon structure.

“So, you did kitchen boy for two years, and then you did Sherpa for trekking?” I ask, clarifying the timeline and trajectory of his career.

“Yeah kitchen boy, then trekking Sherpa. Then after in 1979, when I work hard then the one guy from [Namche](#), his name is Sonam Gilme. His trekking company, they take me with him!” Lhakpa Dorji exclaims in a surprised voice. “Before we don’t know each other. But when they make the trekking company, they call me to Kathmandu. And then I see my [Sirdar](#), his

⁴³ To date, sixty-six Sherpas from Phortse have successfully summited Everest. Phortse is also the home of the only climbing school in the entire Solukhumbu region. Known as The Khumbu Climbing School, it is an initiative started by the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation and is co-operated and organized through Lhakpa’s lodge (P. Sherpa, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

⁴⁴ This Nepali rupee rate equates to approximately less than fifteen Canadian cents (in present day currency exchange rates).

name is Sonam Gilme, I get to work with him. That time, I have no clothes, no pack, no gears.” Lhakpa Dorji peers over at Pemba, describing his reality of having never been hired to a trekking expedition before then.

“Until then I’ve been to school here in Phortse for four years,” he says, extending his arm eastward in the direction of the Phortse schoolhouse. “He [Sonam] couldn’t write his bill for his trekking. Then he trust…” The words trail off for a moment. Lhakpa Dorji proudly pipes back up, “We had about three or four Sherpas, but he trust me for his writing to make the bills.”

“So you helped him?” I question.

“Yeah, then I worked with him always! He kepted me always everyday with him.” Lhakpa Dorji describes the tireless determination that him and his Sirdar brought to such trekking excursions, leading clients across harsh terrains for sometimes months at a time. “We started the trekking from the Dolagot,” he explains, confessing that before regular commercial flights were available, their teams would trek an exhausting fifteen days into the region. Lhakpa Dorji sits quietly for a moment, as if the recollection of this specific trip triggers another distant memory.

“Then after that,” he begins to explain, shaking his head no, “he mostly don’t talk much.” The tone of Lhakpa Dorji’s deep voice softens as he recalls his exchanges with his Sirdar, Sonam Gilme. “Maybe I did something wrong? I don’t know why he didn’t talk with me. I’m a little bit scared in my mind,” he declares fervently. “Then I tried to talk with him, ‘Um, I’m sorry. I have nothing now, and I’d like to if I get the chance. I want to go as kitchen boy in the expedition to [Mt. Everest] Basecamp.’ If I get to do that then for Basecamp we get equipment, not high or lots, but a couple of clothes.” Lhakpa Dorji recounts the benefits of a position at Basecamp, and how the choice to work on Everest, and get paid for it, was not entirely his decision.

“After that...he talked with me. ‘You know, if you want to go with the expedition, I give you the Climbing Sherpa.’” Lhakpa Dorji describes his conversation with Sonam.

“He didn’t want you for the kitchen boy, he wanted you for the expedition?” I inquire.

“Yeah, the expedition Sherpa. He said, ‘I want to take you with me to [Dhaulagiri](#).’” A glow washes over Lhakpa Dorji. “And then...we come to Namche. I’m so happy that time.”

“Even if it’s for the money, you know it’s [your] future.”

The mellow songs of Pemba’s music waft across the dining hall. While I await the response to my next question, I look around the room. Three photographs hang above Lhakpa Dorji, each one depicting triumphant sunburnt faces bundled atop down-feathered snowsuits, gloved hands grasping flags and other mountain offerings.

“1982.” Lhakpa Dorji begins, telling the story of his first expedition to Everest. “1982 that is the Canadian expedition.”

“Canadian?!” I echo in excitement. [Pemba](#) and [Ngawang](#) erupt with laughter, understanding my close affiliation with the country.

“I worked for Mountain Travel Nepal, I was young and I worked hard, and they chose me, and they send me to Everest,” Lhakpa Dorji says, proudly sweeping his left hand up into the

air. “That time I was the Climbing Sherpa. They make the two groups... One group under the [Camp II](#), that time no Nukel, and one group is from Camp II to [South Col](#).”

“What’s a Nukel?” I ask curiously.

“The Climbing Sherpa is mostly over the Camp II, and Nukel is below the Camp II, between the [Basecamp](#) and Camp II. And they get little salary and equipment, a little less.”

I nod my head, grateful for the explanation.

“They chose us. I’m so strong at that time. They chose me over the Camp II. Not only me, we had a couple of Sherpas. That time, we leave very early in night before the light, we go starting to leave from Basecamp to [Camp I](#).”

Though he knows the mountains are never quite predictable, Lhakpa Dorji explains the precautions the team of Sherpas took to avoid additional risks that day in 1982 during the Canadian expedition. “Then one morning...” Lhakpa Dorji proceeds, “...there’s a big avalanche comes from the Lola. That day, I was in Basecamp.”

“So you were in Basecamp?”

“I was at Basecamp, and a couple of my friends over there. They heard the sound of the avalanche, but because there’s no light, they don’t know from where the avalanche [was coming].” Lhakpa Dorji hollows out his mouth and pushes a robust “Wooo” through his pursed lips. “Sounds very loud. WOOOOOO, like big wind,” he exclaims.

I nod my head yes, acknowledging that it’s a difficult sound to imitate, but very much identifiable.

“And then it [the avalanche] went into Dam. Dam is from Basecamp to Camp I in the middle.”

Pemba chimes in sombrely, “Dam is where the sixteen people from last year died.”

“Over near the Khumbu Icefall?” I question.

“Yeah, that’s called Dam.” Pemba confirms.

Lhakpa Dorji brings us back to his story, “Then that day three Sherpas finished from the avalanche.” Lhakpa Dorji hovers three fingers out in front of himself. “Finished,” he states again.

I hang on Lhakpa Dorji’s words, awaiting more explanation.

“All the other Sherpas, they came back to Basecamp. Then we went the same day...we tried to look [for] the bodies. That day still no find, then the next day we found one Sherpa people. One body. The snow is soft, he is in the avalanche...” Suddenly, Lhakpa Dorji jerks his body out of the seat and stands upright, stiff like a frozen statue. “He stay like this,” Lhakpa Dorji continues. “He’s all snow covered. We didn’t found the two [other] Sherpas. One Sherpa’s from [Thame](#), and one Sherpa’s from the [Khumjung](#), and one Sherpa’s from the Khunde. We found the body from the Khunde Sherpa.”

These words linger for just a moment, but the silence feels much longer. My curiosity about what happens next, what happens after someone dies on the mountain, spews from my mouth in a stream of questions.

“So then you leave him? Or how do you... Do you dig him out and bring him down?”

“We’re digging, we’re all digging. And then we bring him down to Basecamp. Then the next day, we are six Sherpas who put him tied to the mattress, which is over the ladder, the aluminum ladder.”

Bending his elbows, Lhakpa Dorji raises both of his closed fists up to his shoulders. From there he presses his hands forcefully up as if he were lifting something quite heavy. “Then, we bring him down to Chouyoula, below the Tukla. When we were bringing the body to Chouyoula the next day another one, a Canadian member. Another one in the Icefall.”

“Sometimes the snow in the Icefall is like broke down,” Lhakpa Dorji elaborates, drawing the scenario out in the air. “...and then one Canadian dead. That time, no avalanche, just a small area broke down.”

“Oh, they just sunk right through?”

“Yeah, no sound, no nothing, and then broke down. One Canadian did that.” Lhakpa Dorji reiterates.

“Did they go all the way down, and then you couldn’t rescue?”

“Yeah, no body. Nothing.”

The death of the Canadian member was the second accident of Lhakpa Dorji’s 1982 Everest expedition. While some members and Sherpas continued to climb towards the summit despite the accidents, Lhakpa Dorji and the designated recovery team rushed the body of the fallen [Khunde](#) Sherpa down towards Chouyoula. “We are six Sherpas, we start bringing the body from Basecamp at seven o’clock, then we get to [Lobuche](#) at eleven o’clock. Because we are young,” he acknowledges.

I nod my head, recognising the growing complexities of his role. Lhakpa Dorji gently folds his hands into his lap, and sits still.

“When things like this happen, what are you thinking?” I ask aloud.

Lhakpa Dorji shakes his head back and forth, “I am scared. I don’t know,” he admits. “But even if *it’s for* the money, you know it’s [your] future.”

“I don’t know how long I was dead... I said that time I don’t want any more expeditions.”

“That was luck.” Lhakpa Dorji shakes his head, eyes glazed over as if he is deeply reflecting on his good fortune; his ability to walk away physically unharmed from the 1982 Everest expedition.

“So, that time you were safe.” I recapitulate his point.

“Yeah, I was safe, yeah.”

“How about a time where you might have felt your own life was in danger?” I probe. Pemba has already told me a story from his father’s last summit on Everest, but I ask Lhakpa Dorji the question anyways. I ask because the story belongs to him, and it is his choice whether to share it or not.

“Oh, I guess a couple of times,” Lhakpa Dorji responds with an immediate head nod yes. He continues... “1983 in the spring, I was again same Sirdar, same guide, Sonam Gilme. Then I get the Everest, and that time I was the second team. On the first team there was four members and one Sherpa. They make the summit, I think May

seventh, or something. They did the summit, they come back, and after me and two American people, we did the summit for the fourteenth of May.”

“Fourteenth of May, so you made the summit?” I interject for clarification.

“Yeah. And that time, from the [South Col](#) to Summit is no rope. South Col is 7900 meters, and then we’re fixing the rope.” Unlike in recent times, the responsibility of fixing ropes up to the summit was entrusted to Lhakpa Dorji and his team. Nowadays ropes are generally fixed by the first large expedition team to make the summit, and then left for others to use for the remainder of the climbing season.

“That time we had five people: three members, two Sherpas,” Lhakpa Dorji continues. “Now I forget his name, but one member he wanted to try without oxygen, and two members wanted to go with oxygen. And my choice, I’d like to go really for myself to the summit; I chose with the oxygen⁴⁵. And the other Sherpa, my friend, he go to without.”

“That time it was the old French oxygen bottles. The member had the two bottles, and I had one bottle. We are starting at quarter past three from South Col, in the morning. We [are] tired, and the other who uses without oxygen, after one hour he is too cold... and returned back.” Lhakpa Dorji bends at the elbow, raises his right hand and waves it back over his shoulder. Lhakpa Dorji repeats, “He went back, he returned.” The foreign member and Climbing Sherpa who both chose to climb without oxygen made their way back to [Camp IV](#), as Lhakpa Dorji and the remaining two clients forged ahead.

“Then there’s two members and me. I break the trail.” Fists clenching in excitement, Lhakpa Dorji exclaims, “I like to really go, and I’m so young!” He reaches towards his shins and knees. “Some part is here and some part is here,” he says illustrating the depth of the snow he had to trudge through to make way for his team. “We get to the summit at one o’clock, PM.” Lhakpa Dorji continues in a matter-of-fact manner. “When we’re going up we keep the main rope. There are three people, and we have one rope. One member is very weak. He is vomiting at the last camp. *But, still we pull up.*” Lhakpa Dorji admits.

“So, he’s on a rope with you?”

“He had the rope.” Lhakpa Dorji simulates an aggressive pulling motion, indicating the force needed for the unexpected game of tug-o-war. “We pull up him.”

“Ooohh” the sound of surprise draws out of my mouth slowly as I begin to comprehend the idea of Lhakpa Dorji hoisting his sick client further up the mountain.

“We take him all the way to the summit.”

“What?! How come?” my awe and surprise prompts me to inquire.

“We *have to*. One of the members, my friend, also he is quite strong.” Lhakpa Dorji never indicates exactly what propelled his decision to drag the weaker climber to the summit. Rather, he launches into a description of where his clients originate from, and reveals that after the expedition he never spoke to or saw the sick client again.

⁴⁵ Nearly ninety-seven percent of climbers choose to use supplemental oxygen, which is carried in canisters upon their backs. To ascend and summit without oxygen is a rare feat, accomplished by less than one hundred climbers total (Arnette, 2013a).

Lhakpa Dorji shifts back to his story. “After one [in the afternoon] we get there. We take a couple of pictures. That time the summit is very steep. It was like when you’re on the horse.” As if he were sliding onto a saddle, Lhakpa Dorji spreads the peace fingers of his right hand wide, turning them upside down to imitate a pair of legs, and places them atop the extended pointer finger of his left hand.

“One person go to look over the summit. We make the anchor here, then we take the picture. Then we get to the south summit at two o’clock, PM. Then after that, they [the foreign clients] leave me behind, and they run before. Down.”

Gripped by suspense, I grow anxious, “How come?” I demand. The corners of Lhakpa Dorji’s lips curl down as he shrugs his shoulders in uncertainty. He doesn’t have an answer.

“Then I am alone, and I have no idea of the technical. I am just one. I have no idea, I could have died, from the [South Summit](#) isn’t very safe. No rope. And that time, the ice axe I get [from] the Canadian expedition. Now, most ice axes are very light, good teeth for the ice.” Lhakpa Dorji flexes four fingers of his right hand. Sawing them into the palm of his left, he says “But that time the teeth like not as sharp.”

I peer back up to the summit photographs hanging above him, focusing on the central one, the one I presume to be Lhakpa Dorji.

“I take a long time to come down from the south summit,” he continues to recount. “I’m so tired, and I get the ice in my goggle, the sweat. When I almost get to the last camp...” Lhakpa Dorji’s sentence expands into a description of the terrain of his descent. “This side is the soft side, we can come slowly. But here the ice and the snow is hard. I couldn’t see, then I fell down. I fell down from that.”

“I fell down from that,” he repeats. “It’s about 250, about nearly 300 I fell down, like rolling down” Lhakpa Dorji, rotates his right wrist quickly to indicate a summersaulting motion.

“Meters?” I question.

“I fall down. Yeah,” he confirms that he meant meters.

“Were you awake?”

“Unconscious. But went over the rock.” he exclaims.

He throws both hands up into the air as if in surrender. “Then after that, I don’t know how long I was dead.” Lhakpa Dorji confesses. “I don’t know? I thought [it’s] like a dream, like when I woke up I had no goggles. I had no ice axe. My bag was with me. I was like a dream, it just took me about five minutes to take rest. Then I came to try down, I found my goggles, I found my ice axe about five meters down there. Then after that I get to [South Col](#) 6:30PM.”

A sense of relief washes through me for a moment. “Then other members, about three members in the South Col [Camp], they don’t care me. They didn’t know where I am. Or where I was. But maybe two members, they are so tired, I don’t know, but even other climbing leader he’s the climbing leader, but he didn’t watch me.”

“Even the Sirdar did not ask about you?” I question, perplexed.

“No.” Lhakpa Dorji abruptly shakes his head once. “When I was there I am so cold, I no can walk that time. I tried to make a cup of ice, and tried to make the water. I couldn’t eat anything, I didn’t drink the water. The whole night I couldn’t sleep.”

“Couldn’t sleep.” I repeat sympathetically.

“Yeah, because I’m worried about that, ‘oh when I was dead’. That time I’m not married. I’m single. Just my parents, but even I’m so scared. And I’m the only son.”

“So, you were so scared, and you thought ‘they don’t care about me?’”

“Yeah, and I’m so sad. So scared.”

I sit in shock for a moment. So enthralled by the words that were pouring from Lhakpa Dorji’s mouth, I was unaware that plates of [Dal bhat](#) had been placed in front of us. My mind swirls with more questions, but I know it’s time to wrap up. I ask my final question.

“When you think about that, were you ever going again?” Lhakpa Dorji’s dark brown eyes connect with my gaze.

“I said that time I don’t want any more expeditions. I thought that time, no more,” He explains. “Then when I came back, then I spent time in South Col next year and came to Camp II. Sonam Gilme he tries another, the first group, the other Sherpa [Ang Rita](#) from Thame, he chose them. He [Ang Rita] said ‘no more.’ Then he chose me. I was in Camp II, and *they pressured me* [to join] another team for another summit. I said ‘NO!’ Then *they bring me to* Basecamp and they talk a lot of questions.” Lhakpa Dorji pleads the request aloud, ““*Please go do another summit.*””

“And I said, ‘NO!’”

With this as Lhakpa Dorji’s closing remark I turn off my camera. I move to join him and his family for dinner, reflecting on his accident, and the decision to never again summit Mt. Everest.

A Conversation⁴⁶ with Dawa Sherpa on Monday – April 13, 2015

Pemba and I make our way to the top of the rocky bluff that sits behind the village of [Phortse](#). I stall, taking a few moments to catch my breath as I admire the splendour of the mountains. Far below us, the river surges through the valley gorge. Large birds glide swiftly on the wind in front of a backdrop of snow-capped mountains. Puffy clouds meander across the expansive blue-grey sky. Peppering the hills of Phortse, the colourful roofs of guesthouses are inscribed with thick white letters; local advertisements that can be seen from far above.

“Over there. That’s it!” [Pemba](#) nudges me from my mountain-gazing trance and points towards a small hut tucked between the pines half-way down the cliff. Pemba previously explained to me that Dawa and his wife occupy this tiny home during the summer months to tend to their grazing yak and cattle.

“What? How do we get down there?” I ask, perplexed.

“Just follow me.”

Heading northeast, Pemba leads me up and down...and up several sets of steps chiselled into the steep rock face. A familiar feeling washes over me as we descend another set. *Aha, yes this is the way to Tengboche!* I determine silently in my head. Tengboche, known for its large Buddhist monastery, is a popular site on the [EBC](#) trekking route; I stopped there during my trek in 2013.

“Okay, now this way.” Pemba directs after twenty exhausting minutes of stair climbing. He deviates from the well-trodden trekking path onto a narrow goat trail that zigzags down the precarious cliff.

Apprehensive, I follow him. Rocks and gravel shift under my unsteady feet. A loose chunk slips over the edge, and sends a loud crashing echo back toward us.

“Careful Maggie!” Pemba reiterates the need for caution. I reach out for the arm he extends. Balancing my camera and small daypack across my chest I cautiously descend the layered ledges with Pemba’s assistance. We continue to scramble over boulders and pass between the trees traversing the mountain.

Constructed of rock and mud with a shale roof, the house is camouflaged by its natural environment. Two small calves frolic and tumble in the side yard.

“Do you think anyone’s home?” I ask Pemba. With no phone line or cell tower nearby, the only way for us to find Dawa, is to show up at his door.

“Let’s hope.” Pemba responds.

A human figure bundled in a lavender colour pops out of the house and then disappears back inside with the calves in tow.

“[Tashi Delek!](#)” Pemba announces as we approach the home.

⁴⁶ This conversation occurred in Sherpa, with Pemba acting as my Sherpa-English interpreter. I used translated English transcriptions to construct the story.

We skirt past the grazing pen to find a petite woman wearing a traditional Sherpa dress and a lavender down-feather jacket standing at the entrance of the home. Her eyes exude warmth that softens her coarse and weathered face.

“Tashi Delek,” she chirps, bowing her chin to her chest. Pemba and the woman exchange words in Sherpa.

“This is Futi Sherpa, Dawa’s wife,” says Pemba, introducing me to her. “She says that Dawa is out gathering grass for his cattle, but we’re welcome to wait for him inside.”

“Tashi Delek, [Thuche!](#)” I greet Futi, and thank her for welcoming us into her home.

Following Futi and Pemba, I duck through the wood-framed entrance of the small hut. To my surprise, the calves that were once outside are now snuggled on a bed of hay in the back right corner of the house. Directly to the left of the sleepy cattle sits a wood-burning stove with a metal pot of tea warming on top. Futi points to the mattress on the opposing side of the small room, and gestures for me to have a seat. Pemba perches on a small stool near the stove, and continues to chat with Futi, while I sit patiently and quietly listen for Sherpa words I might know.

After nearly twenty minutes pass, a tanned muscular hand finally pushes through the fabric that hangs from the door. In comes Dawa, outfitted in quick-dry pants, hiking boots, and an over-sized down coat. A bright orange hat is pulled down around his ears and grey stubble covers his chin. “Tashi Delek?!” he says, a bit confused. As he settles onto the mattress to my left, Pemba explains the reason for our visit. With no hesitation, Dawa launches into a story about the first successful summit of Mt. Everest.

“He says that [Hillary](#) was on belay and [Tenzing](#) was actually the first to the top.” Pemba translates the contested details of the 1953 summit claims. *Interesting*, I think to myself contemplating the often-told narrative of the Hillary-Tenzing summit.

At seventy-eight years old, Dawa’s energy and storytelling reminds me of my grandfather - eager and tangential in nature. While Pemba and Dawa continue to speak together in Sherpa, I ask for Dawa’s verbal consent to be included in the project and permission to audio-record the unfolding conversation.

“In the past there were no mountain expeditions”

Dawa looks over to me. His eyes glow brightly in the smoky haze of the room. “I first went with Mingma Norbu Sherpa of [Khunde](#), who was [Hillary’s](#) helper, to work for him. At that time we followed Hillary with duffels as big as a huge man...” Dawa hunches forward, chuckling, and reaches out to touch Pemba, indicating the bags were bigger than his five foot nine inch build. “We could run as fast as [we would] without any load. We were young and strong.” Dawa claims proudly.

“At first a man from [Khumjung](#) used to look after all Hillary’s work, but later he got bit old, and Mingma was very smart and got all of Hillary’s work. Mingma recommended my strength and hard work to another [Sirdar](#) from Namche, called Chootare Sherpa, so I went with him for a Japanese expedition on Everest.” Pemba explains Dawa’s relationship with Sir Edmund Hillary, whose successful summit contributed to the increase in mountaineering

expeditions, and who is celebrated in the Solukhumbu for his philanthropic and development efforts.

“After that I went almost three expeditions a year, sometimes including winter ascents. I remember going for a winter ascent on Everest with a man from Khumjung. He asked me to go to [South Col](#) to carry a tent and set it up there. I went and left the tent there, later everything got cancelled after a big storm.”

Futi grips the charred jug tightly as she fills our cups with more tea. Bright flames flicker through the open hole of the clay stove. Droplets of perspiration gather at Dawa’s sideburns and he pulls the orange knit hat from his head. With his gaze on Pemba, Dawa declares, “In the past there were no mountain expeditions, but now it is impossible without expeditions.” While Pemba translates this Sherpa statement to English, Dawa continues. “We had no tourists so it was all trading systems, exchanging goods. We used to nurture baby yaks and [Dzopkyok](#) and use to trade them for salts.” He paints a picture of how life was different before tourism and mountaineering expanded into Nepal.

“We used to go to Tibet. We made stew from potatoes and carried it, walked it down to the lowlands called Dingla Bazaar and use to bring back rice on our back. We used to take herbs to lowlands of Nepal called Jaynagar and brought Khoram (sugarcane plants) and took it back to Tibet, and brought salt, Tsampa (roasted barley flour used for porridge), and other stuff back again. We didn’t have to have money.”

Pausing for a moment, Dawa cracks a smile and says gleefully, “While travelling for trading, we used to buy jar of alcohol made of millet and corn. We drank it, got drunk, sang songs, relaxed and had fun.” Dawa sways his body back and forth as he recollects more pre-mountaineering memories. “At the times when there were no tourists in Khumbu, some wealthy people from [Namche](#) did big business; Da Tsheri from Namche had a house full of rough salts. Da Tsheri and Pemba Tsheri were the richest,” Dawa recalls, singling out some renowned Namche traders. “They did lots of big business, they had very good relations with the Tibetans.”

“So Namche has always been pretty wealthy,” I say drawing the connection. The present-day village of Namche is now recognised as the wealthiest village of the Khumbu region, still acting as a trading post and tourist hub, and hosting weekly Saturday bazaars.

Dawa carries on in a jovial tone as he continues to talk with Pemba in Sherpa. Pemba slaps his hand down to his knee as he and Dawa erupt with laughter.

“What did he say?” I ask, confused.

“The first time tourists were here, he said everyone was excited, ‘Oh the tourist show!’” Pemba chuckles as he relays the story to me.

Delight shines from Dawa’s toothy smile. “At that time, all treks and expedition started from [Darjeeling](#). It was the first time we saw foreigners around Khumbu. We were near [Deboche](#) to get some grass for the cattle. We were so excited to see new people, Bengalis. We hid our bamboo baskets in the bushes and rushed to see them.” He chortles at his own explanation.

“At that time, some from Phortse wore a hat, which they brought with them all the way from Darjeeling. I used to get jealous of them wearing those hats.” Dawa confesses. Sherpa men

were known to migrate to Darjeeling to assist with ascents as porters in the Indian Himalayas. Often they would return with new materials and goods, sometimes bringing Bengali people back to Nepal to visit.

“Those Bengalis knew a few Sherpas, and distributed safety pins and needles. We got nothing but we were excited to see them around. We were very young and amazed to see new people with fancy dresses. And there were also Nepalese from low lands with the Bengalis, they were pretty excited to get to Namche,” Dawa recalls. “Now the people of lowland have started to get up here [the [Upper Khumbu](#) region] and we Sherpas have started going to foreign lands.” Dawa explains that travelling between regions or even internationally is quite common for Sherpas.

“Despite the huge loss, we had a grand party”

“Once we climbed [Thamserku](#) starting above Monjo. It was with Hillary’s team.” Dawa describes a 6623 meter peak he pursued in the Eastern Himalayas of Nepal. “And we did it in only two weeks, we followed the ridge. We always started up at night, because in the day it was warm. The wind blew snow and ice; it was hard. We didn’t have snow pickets, we made wooden bars and used them as snow pickets and did the summit via the ridge.”

“Oh my gosh!” I squeal. “So you just used wood from branches?” I inquire about how he made his equipment. Dawa nods his head yes, acknowledging that mountaineering gear was not as advanced as it is today, requiring ingenuity.

“I went to [Lhotse](#) twice.” Dawa continues to list mountaineering expeditions he worked on. “[Makalu](#) once up to Camp V. There I worked as a Nukel. Nukel is one who works with the loads on lower camps, a position below a Climbing Sherpa.” Dawa gives an explanation of the hierarchy that existed on these expeditions. “They don’t get paid as much as Climbing Sherpas,” he reveals about the individuals who work as Nukels. “They have to get firewood for themselves. They got some rice from the group and had to cook it themselves, and had to haul loads up many times. We three from Phortse were the strongest ones.”

Dawa pauses to slurp tea from his thermos. “I did lots of expeditions. I also did a lot of treks with Mountain Travel, the first travel agency of Nepal around Western Nepal, Pokhara and other parts.”

Pemba continues to translate the details of Dawa’s climbing resume.

“I went through many different routes via South Col, via West Ridge following Lola, via steep rocky South Face, many times,” Dawa identifies the different routes he ascended on Mt. Everest. “I worked for Koreans, Italians, and many others.” Giggling playfully, Dawa discloses the benefits of his diligence. “Koreans loved us. They packed lots of food because we worked hard.”

“Were these expeditions usually successful?” I pose my question to Pemba, who communicates it back to Dawa. The sudden shake of Dawa’s head indicates disagreement.

Spreading each of the fingers on his right hand, he recalls, “I went for [Dhaulagiri](#) with a group of five women.”

“Dhaulagiri is near [Annapurna](#).” Pemba provides me with geographical context.

“There was an avalanche from Camp III around the late afternoon. The avalanche took everything...”

Futi stands silent and still, awaiting more details.

“The avalanche took all five women, leaving them in a lower crevasse. We had our camp just below a ridge so we were lucky that the avalanche went more towards the other side, otherwise we, all five Sherpas and five women, would have died.” Futi’s eyes widen as Dawa continues to explain the perilous situation. “The five of us rescued the four women from the crevasse using flat webbing rope, but [we] never found the fifth one wearing all Gore-Tex stuff. We were all actually inside the kitchen tent and were carried away too, but got stuck somewhere.” Dawa recounts the moments of panic. “Yishi Tenzing and Chewang Rinji were cursing themselves, ‘Thoichalo! (Shit!) Thoichalo (Shit!)!’ and then I remembered a knife in my back pocket, so I took it out and tore the tent.”

“Among us five...” Shaken by the memories, Dawa slows the pace of his story. “...the one from Namche was at the head of the avalanche... and Gyaljen from Khunde was about to fall into a crevasse... but everyone was ok later... But we lost everything.” Although the majority of the team escaped death, all of the equipment, tents, and food were swept away by the avalanche. “We called our friends who were up at Camp III or IV. They brought tents so we managed to spend some more days. We tried looking for the missing things, but couldn’t find them so we lowered back to Basecamp.”

“And then he said, like it was big damage, but still that it was the best expedition.” Pemba reveals more of Dawa’s story in English.

“Despite the huge loss, we had a grand party!” A cheerful grin stretches across Dawa’s face. “It was so much fun. It was one of the best expeditions I have been to, we got lots of clothes and sleeping bags and tips, also we had so much fun, so it was the best!”

“We were there to climb anyway so the Sirdars made us go up”

“A guy from Phortse, Dorji’s uncle.” Dawa’s animated storytelling continues. “He was going up to [Lhotse](#) summit with a client. They were pretty late for the summit, they summited sometime at night and returned to Camp IV. They were tired, and so they started late the next day from Camp IV towards Camp II. It was around noon when an avalanche got him, not the clients.” Dawa shakes his head dolefully, accepting both the importance of timing on the mountain and the unpredictability of avalanches.

“It dropped him at the corner of Camp III, but he was still alive. He had a hole in his neck caused by a snow pick.” Dawa clenches his teeth tightly as he describes the impalement.

“The client escaped the avalanche, he was a little further back.” Pemba clarifies details of the story. “Dorji’s uncle was brought all the way to Camp III, and Dawa says he had a hole all the way from here.” Pemba clutches his neck with both hands.

“Like something hit him?” I ask concerned.

“Something sharp, maybe sharp ice. And then when he talked his voice came from here,” Pemba says, pointing to the center of his throat.

“This part,” I say grabbing my own throat. “Oh no, no, no.” I wince at the graphic imagery that crops up in my imagination.

“He was carried down by Sherpas up to the Icefall, but it was hard for the Sherpas to take him through the Icefall so he was brought back to Camp I for the night.” Dawa continues to narrate the unfolding events. “The same night he passed away...” he murmurs softly, shifting his eyes down towards the dirt floor, “...so we covered him with cloth and put him in a crevasse.”

“Really? Was there a ceremony for him, or like a [puja](#) or anything?” I ask curiously.

“No, nothing was done,” Dawa responds frankly.

“So how did you proceed? What about the clients?”

“For Westerners I’m not sure, they discussed among themselves, the Sirdar and the members,” he admits. “We [Sherpas] were there to climb anyway so the Sirdars *made us go up*.”

I hang my head for a moment, processing Dawa’s experience of being asked to continue to climb after witnessing the horrific death of his teammate.

“After being taken by avalanche once or twice, everyone...asked me not to go climbing”

“What about you?” I request, captivated by Dawa’s tales. “Do you remember a time that you thought maybe you’d lose your life on the mountain?”

Dawa shoots a glance towards Futi who squats near the small fire. “Camp II was steep up on the South rocky face which directly reaches to the [South Summit](#). It was so steep that we had to set up a hanging camp,” he explains to Futi and Pemba. “Some others were ahead of us and they ran out of food and oxygen. So me and the other six or seven, started up with food towards our friends. I was leading the group with oxygen on my back and the others had food on that steep south face.” Dawa identifies that he was the lead climber, the first to ascend, setting the equipment and route for the others to follow.

Dawa tightly closes his eyes, trying to recall the details of this expedition. “I remember an avalanche.” Opening his eyes wide, he exclaims, “I tried to stop myself from being taken with an ice axe, trying to get it into snow, but it was fresh snow so it took all of us down. I was found out at the head of avalanche with my body upside down.” Dawa cartwheels his hands towards the ground, acting out his position. “Others were above in the avalanche, one from Namche called Jangbu was never found in that avalanche. Two of the Sherpas got out, called for help and got me out unknowingly.”

Suddenly the pot on the stove overflows. A surge of hot liquid douses the flickering tongues of the fire. Before carrying on, Dawa teases Futi, mocking her ability to make a simple pot of tea. Pemba and I join in the light-hearted amusement.

Dawa returns to his tale. “When I woke up it was morning and I was lying down with oxygen and glucose water on.” He cups his hands over his mouth, indicating an oxygen mask. “Because of fresh snow it didn’t harm me much, but the route on the Icefall was messed up by the avalanche, so it took a week long [to repair]. So we stayed at Camp I for a week, a week at Basecamp and then the Sirdar *sent me to Dingboche* with a client.” Two weeks after his near-death experience he descended to Dingboche, a village at the altitude of 4410 meters, to rest with a client while the route to Everest’s summit was being repaired.

“I was pretty homesick after that accident and wanted to go home. So early the next morning, I walked down to my home in [Phortse](#) through [Pangboche](#), where I had a cousin.”

“It was my grandfather,” Pemba interrupts briefly making the connection to Dawa’s cousin.

Dawa nods his head in agreement. “I got to my cousin’s home and at the same moment they were talking about me, being taken by the avalanche. They were happy to see me back. Then I had some tea and started for Phortse. When I got to Phortse, the work on the fields was all completed and the cattle and yak were being brought down from the higher summer places. One of my cousins was crying thinking I was gone forever! Later he became happy to see me.” Dawa describes the surprise and shock of his friends and family, who were never informed that he had survived the avalanche.

“After that I didn’t return up, slowly everyone asked me not to go on anymore expeditions.”

“That was his last time going?” I ask.

“After being taken by avalanche once or twice, everyone, relatives, family asked me not to go climbing and then after a while I stopped going.”

“The ladies said, ‘No more, no more’ and then he stopped,” Pemba interprets Dawa’s family’s pleas.

I reflect on the Dawa’s formidable narrative, finally breaking the lingering silence with one last question. “Does he have children?”

“He has a son and a daughter,” Pemba answers confidently as they are cousins to him. “They live in Phortse still. His son is now on Everest, and his grandson is on Everest too,” Pemba proclaims noting that Dawa’s family legacy lives on.

A Conversation⁴⁷ with Lhakpa Gyaljen Sherpa on Tuesday – April 14, 2015

A thin layer of snow blankets the [Phortse](#) hillside. [Pemba](#) leads me down a small muddy trail to the bottom of the village. “That’s it,” he points towards the old two-story structure rising from the thick dense fog. Lhakpa Gyaljen suffered a stroke when he was younger and no longer has full range of motion in his legs. Since wet and snowy weather conditions inhibit his mobility, Pemba and I agreed to come talk with him at his home. As we approach the front of the house, I peer towards the frosty windowpane on the second floor.

“It looks dark in there, are you sure he’s home?” I ask.

Thud... Thud... Thud. Pemba’s curled up fist raps hard against the wooden door. We wait for a few moments. No answer. *Thud. Thud.* Pemba quickly thumps the door two more times. He turns to me and passes the thermos of hot black tea that we brought for Lhakpa Gyaljen as our thank-you gift. “Hold this, wait here.” Pemba directs.

I watch him scramble over wooden planks of the pasture fencing, and then skirt around the side of the house. A few minutes later, the front door suddenly pops open. Pemba takes the thermos back and leads me through a small room resembling a storage cellar. A clucking chicken pokes its bobbing head out from behind the canvas curtain of an adjacent room.

“That’s a small stable over there,” Pemba clarifies the presence of the bird and the stack of hay bails that teeter against the wall. In the far right corner of the room, Pemba guides me up a set of wood-slat steps through a one-meter square cut-out in the ceiling. I duck my head as I come through the opening and negotiate the final few steps. Pulling on the handrail I hoist myself off the last wooden slat and onto the floor of the second level of the home.

“Hello. [Tashi Delek!](#)” A cheerful voice squawks from the far side of the large room. A bright beam of white light shines through the sheer window curtains, illuminating the right side of Lhakpa Gyaljen’s face. Still in bed, he sits upright tucked beneath several large duvets. “Sorry. Sorry. I a sleeping,” he apologises.

“Tashi Delek!” I greet, making my way past the unlit stove and fireplace toward Lhakpa Gyaljen’s bedside. “Oh no...No. I am so sorry we woke you. Would you prefer for us to return later?” I question with concern. With a small chuckle, Lhakpa Gyaljen rattles off a quick response in Sherpa language to Pemba who stands beside me.

“So, due to bad weather he doesn’t get out much and he gets very bored. So he says for us to stay and talk,” Pemba translates Lhakpa Gyaljen’s words to me.

Lhakpa Gyaljen echoes in English. “Stay, please. Sit down. Sit down.”

“Okay, okay!” I respond enthusiastically. As I begin to set up the camera and review the consent form, Pemba moves two stools closer to the bed.

“Before, I had nothing. After the expedition ends, I make a home...”

Lhakpa Gyaljen folds the information letter and consent form in half and places them on the ledge behind him. He peers attentively towards the camera as he unzips his tattered red and

⁴⁷ This conversation occurred in Sherpa, with Pemba acting as my Sherpa-English interpreter. I used translated English transcriptions to construct the story.

black down-feathered jacket half way. He pulls back the neon green blanket, the top layer of his bedding, and slightly shifts his position. Pemba hands us each a glass of tea, and we begin.

“Thank you so much for sharing your time with me today.” I reiterate my appreciation for Lhakpa Gyaljen’s willingness to participate in my study and then briefly explain the purpose of my visit. “I’m here because I want to hear the stories of Sherpas, those that are not told in the books I’ve read. Stories like yours.”

“Okay, okay.” he responds, nodding his head yes.

“About Sherpa people. People and foreigners don’t know about people like you,” Pemba translates my ideas into Sherpa, offering his own interpretation.

“They don’t know?” Lhakpa Gyaljen replies perplexed, shrugging his right shoulder towards his ear.

Pemba clarifies, “Ya, you climbed mountains this way and that way, they don’t know. They don’t have it in books. If it were for the foreigners climbing, they would have written several books already.”

“Oh...” Lhakpa Gyaljen shakes his head acknowledging that he understands Pemba’s concern. “I can tell them then,” he says with a clever smile.

His smile triggers my cheeks to tighten and a grin stretches across my own face. Connecting my gaze with Lhakpa Gyaljen’s, I prompt him with my first question, “so, I guess tell me about your family. Where did you grow up?”

His right hand stiffens. Lhakpa Gyaljen firmly presses downward onto the pile of blankets that lie across his lap. He confirms, “Before I’m born here, Phortse. And I have a father...” Holding out his right peace fingers he continues, “...two brothers, mother also. Two sisters.” He raises two fingers once again. Gently placing his hand back into his lap, he draws his focus slowly up towards the ceiling. The pitch of Lhakpa Gyaljen’s voice grows deeper as he describes a time when his father and brothers were trekking along the Himalayan mountainside.

“And father is, must bring my two brothers to Nala. Nala, Yak. Nalakankar⁴⁸ many years ago. And in that time, my father is going to help my brothers they going up Nala, Gokyo side.”

“Near Gokyo,” I repeat as I nod my chin up and down to indicate that I am somewhat familiar of the region. “Okay, so was that for trading or why did your father go?” I ask for clarification.

“He, yak bring. Lots of snowing, and bring down.” Lhakpa Gyaljen waves his right hand back towards himself in a “come with me” fashion, describing that the purpose of his father’s trek was to shepherd his yak from the highlands back home to Phortse. “Two brothers, my father, also one dog they near the Thorey⁴⁹. [At] Thorey, big avalanche [came] down!” Lhakpa Gyaljen abruptly sweeps his right arm away from his body. “...and two brothers, my father, and one dog finished!”

“Oh...” Pemba and I both respond soberly, shocked by the unexpected turn of events.

“Finished...” I repeat. “I’m so sorry.”

⁴⁸ Nalakankar is a small sub range of the Himalayan range in southern Tibet and the northwest corner of Nepal (D. Tamang, personal communication, April 21, 2016).

⁴⁹ A place name for a location near Gokyo (D. Tamang, personal communication, April 21, 2016).

Lhakpa Gyaljen crosses his right arm beneath his left and grips the left elbow with his fingertips. Rocking his arms side-to-side he explains, “I was just born then, a baby infant in a cradle. Maybe one month, two months. I now sixty-six [years old].”

“Oh, you were a baby. Okay, so, you grew up with just your mother and sisters?”

Lhakpa Gyaljen pulls his fingers through the grey matted hair atop his head. Drawing his hand slowly back down onto his face, he scratches methodically at his chin a few times as if he were deeply concentrated. Looking back to me he indicates solemnly, “Two sisters is dead now, eight years ago... and my mother is dead forty years ago.”

“I’m...I’m.. sorry,” the words clump in my throat as I try to extend my sincerest sympathies for the loss of his family members.

“Oh, it’s no problem.” Lhakpa Gyaljen replies wearing a “what can we do” look on his face.

“Yeah...” I begin to reply, but I suddenly find myself challenged to respond. My mind shuffles through what these significant losses might have meant for Lhakpa Gyaljen’s life and childhood.

Slowly shifting the conversation towards mountaineering, I begin again. “So, your family circumstances, how has this affected your life in the mountains? What did you do before you started working on the mountains?”

“Before, I had nothing.” He states rather matter-of-factly.

“Nothing.” I resound.

“Working. I like [to] get the expedition. So money’s the problem.” Lhakpa Gyaljen refocuses his dark almond coloured eyes from his lap over towards me. He continues, “Then I speak to my friend, ‘Oh please give me expedition.’ Then, I am going a lot of expeditions. After the expedition ends, I make a home [Pangboche](#). My village is Pangboche, I make my home.” Lhakpa Gyaljen extends his right index finger, pointing northeast.

“Okay, so you made a home in Pangboche?” I curiously question, recognising that we are presently sitting in Phortse in a structure that I believe to be Lhakpa Gyaljen’s home.

“Pangboche and Phortse.” He affirms.

“Oh, okay so you built two homes? One here and one in Pangboche?”

“Yes. Yes, then I had three sons.” Lhakpa raises three of his fingers up and waves them at me gleefully, “Three sons, one daughter!” Smiling he continues, “One daughter. She’s married. In [Namche Bazaar](#). And they have one son, one daughter. His son is [Darjeeling](#). They study in Darjeeling. And my daughter’s now in Dingboche, She’s [the owner of] Sonam Friendship Lodge.”

“Ahh, wonderfuul!” I share in the excitement of the list of achievements that Lhakpa Gyaljen willingly shares with Pemba and I. With the smile still stretched from ear to ear he looks off towards the camera, over to Pemba, and then again back at me.

“You will have good record if you go to summit.”

The steam of my breath dances from my mouth as I push the next question through my chattering lips. “Sooo. At what age did you start working for these mountaineering expeditions?”

“Twenty-five.” Lhakpa Gyaljen confirms. He proudly extends his arm high into the air and exclaims, “First expedition, Germany. Everest!”

“Everest was your first mountain?” I ask eagerly.

“1979. Korean, American, Italian, Australian.” Lhakpa Gyaljen readily names the international teams of people he encountered on the mountain that year.

“Did you continue to work on Everest? How many expeditions did you go on Everest?”

“Ugh many times, no person counts!” Lhakpa Gyaljen’s chuckles at the thought of pinpointing the exact number of mountaineering expeditions he embarked upon. “One time Everest summit. One time. I was twenty-nine.” He indicates that he successfully summited once, four years into his mountaineering career.

“What did it feel like to be up there?” I pry, hoping to hear about the sensations he experienced standing on top of the world.

Lhakpa Gyaljen’s head tilts to the left as he looks to Pemba for a translation in Sherpa. After processing the inquiry again in Sherpa, he responds back to us in English. “Too bad, very danger. I don’t know, could fall down, not good way, and very steep. And maybe, twenty minutes I stayed at summit.” Sitting up a bit taller. Lhakpa Gyaljen grins as he holds his hollowed fist to his eye. “Just there my friend take pictures and of Germany, two peoples.”

“It was a German expedition?” I chime in.

“Yeah. And he can help me fix rope. [We were] joined, and he helped me up.”

“He helped you?” I question, trying to understand who Lhakpa Gyaljen is referencing, his German clients or his friend.

“Two people are members [clients]. He helped me up.”

Pemba slightly confused himself asks another clarifying question in Sherpa: “The foreigner helped you or you helped him?”

“Foreigners helped me up, pulled me with the main rope up to the summit and helped me down also with the main rope.” Lhakpa Gyaljen yanks at an imaginary rope as he describes how the two German climbers assisted him in successfully reaching the summit of Mt. Everest. “That time it was a little bit cloudy. The big Goddess at Everest, Miyolangsangma⁵⁰, you know big Goddess. Buddhist.”

I bow my chin down in understanding, and ask for additional details. “What about the goddess?”

Lhakpa Gyaljen peers out the window. “The weather, as soon as we reached the summit, we might have reached on time...” He gestures snowfall with the movement of his hands, illustrating the changing weather conditions, “...it was little cloudy and there was a little snow, but success!” Although the weather patterns began to shift on the day of Lhakpa Gyaljen’s summit bid, his team ascended and descended safely and successfully.

⁵⁰ Miyolangsangma is the name of the mountain goddess as told in the Lama’s scriptures. In Tibetan and Nepali the mountain is sometimes called Chomolungma and Sagarmāthā, respectfully (P. Sherpa, personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Lhakpa Gyaljen's squints his eyes tightly. His cheeks draw up into a big contagious smile. With a great big belly he squeals, "I like the summit."

His cheeriness triggers my lips to curl up, emphasising my dimples. With a giggle I reply, "You like it. Okay. What do you like about it?"

Animatedly, Lhakpa Gyaljen explains, "You will have good record if you go to summit! And all those who had summited Everest were once given two-way tickets and a party in a big hotel [in Kathmandu]. We had another king then, Birendra. He said that now more tourists will come and more trekking and it will be good. But he was killed two years after that."

Pemba adds, "Two years before the King died, they had a big program, and all the Everest summiters were appreciated for their summits with some certificates and medals, and they had a big party."

"Oh, exciting!" Turning back to Lhakpa Gyaljen, I ask enthusiastically, "So, were you honoured for climbing Everest by the King?"

"Yes! I see him, the King. A big celebration [at] Hotel Shangri-La. Oh big, big, program." Lhakpa Gyaljen lengthens the reach of his right arm into the air to illustrate the scale of the celebration. "Lots of people! That time is maybe about maximum two hundred, three hundred people. Ahh, many people!" He shrills, revelling in the memory.

"After I had stroke, then it is not possible. I stay."

The howl is audible. The house creaks as the force of the wind presses upon its structure. I shiver as shivers creep up my spine. I zip my coat to my chin and more tightly swaddle my scarf around my neck.

Lhakpa Gyaljen reaches for his mug of hot tea. Cupping it, he warms his hands for a moment, then takes a small sip and addresses my question about his discontinuation with the mountaineering industry.

"After I had the stroke, then it is not possible. I stay." Setting the mug back onto the ledge, he continues to explain that a stroke induced by cold, left him with no choice: He could no longer climb.

"Oh, okay." I sympathise. "Well, what happened? Was this while you were working or while at home?" I inquire to better understand the circumstances that led him to his current situation.

"The Tibet side of Everest. With the Chinese members [clients]. 2000." Lhakpa Gyaljen states.

"The year 2000?" I clarify.

Nodding his head up and down he says, "Yes, that time. And the members were Chinese. four, five, no more. And no Sherpas."

"You were the only Sherpa?"

"Only was me," Lhakpa Gyaljen claims as he taps his chest twice with his right hand. He reveals that there were, in fact, two Sherpa, but due to the limited help around expedition duties, the other Climbing Sherpa became very tired.

“The group leader was a Tibetan guy named Nima Tsheri, he asked me to take the satellite to summit and said he would pay me 20,000 Chinese Fegok. Fegok means money, Chinese currency.” Lhakpa Gyaljen shakes his head no, and turns his gaze down into his open palms. He laments, “I didn’t know that something like this would happen. The satellite was small, as small as the lid of a pot. I carried that, my clothes, food and just went.” Looking over to Pemba, Lhakpa Gyaljen asks, “You know Ang Mingma? He was also up there. He also couldn’t go in high altitude.”

“Wait. Wait. What is he saying?” I chime in, requesting Pemba to provide me with more English translations of Lhakpa Gyaljen’s story.

Pemba rehashes some details that I missed: “So it was a lot of money at the time, so he went up. He went up but he got very tired. Then he couldn’t go up, so he stayed at camp, there was a camp at 8300 meters.”

Lhakpa Gyaljen looks at me and confirms in English, “Inside the tent. Two nights there, 8300 meters. Two nights’ sleep, and no oxygen and no friend. No help. No tea. Nothing. No food, with out sleeping bag, no mattress, no luggage.”

“You had nothing?” I question in disbelief.

“Nothing. Two nights there.” Lhakpa Gyaljen reiterates, and then turns back to Pemba and to describe the unfolding events more comprehensively in Sherpa. “Another Climbing Sherpa on the mountain was Lhakpa Tshering from [Khumjung](#), Karsang’s son. He also did not help. He had gone to the summit with an old Chinese guy. The Chinese couldn’t descend. He stayed up there on the summit, he kept staying up there. They stayed there and did not help me. So I was stuck two nights at that camp. And I have the habit of eating a lot at high altitude, but I had no food. I had no friends and was too tired to get the snow to eat. That is how I was left hungry.”

“Sounds very scary...” I pause acknowledging the grave danger his life was in. “What were you thinking at the time?”

“I had no such thoughts. I was confused.” Lhakpa Gyaljen admits, cocking his head back. Rolling his neck back and forth limply, he confesses, “Like it was high and no oxygen, and very tired.”

“Okay, okay.” I reply. “Then is that what induced the stroke? Two nights at high-altitude?”

Pemba interjects, “Yeah like, laying down on the cold ground.”

“Yeah, and before I had blood pressure high at ninety.” Lhakpa Gyaljen adds.

“And no one was there to help you? So what happened next?” I ask, sitting anxiously on the edge of my seat.

“My friend was with another group, so he send two or three Sherpas up and they bring [me] down to Rongbuk camp.”

Pemba offers clarification, “Rongbuk⁵¹ is the glacier where the Tibetan Basecamp was. His friend from Khumjung sent Climbing Sherpas up from that camp to bring him down, and he

⁵¹ The Rongbuk Glacier is located in the Himalaya of southern Tibet.

was brought down.”

“Whew.” I let out a sigh of relieve to know Lhakpa Gyaljen made it off the mountain alive.

“Yeah.” He nods his head in unison with mine.

“And so that was your last expedition?”

“Yeah. In 2000, finished.” Lhakpa Gyaljen quickly pushes his hand away from, and to the right of his body, illustrating ‘no more.’

“Oh.” I respond bleakly.

“Yeah...and...” Lhakpa Gyaljen’s eyes open widely; his voice raises a pitch as he explains, “Now my wife Pangboche. She is not coming here” Wagging his finger back and forth, Lhakpa Gyaljen looks me in the eyes. “She don’t like me!” He proclaims.

“No?” I counter this claim.

“Yeah.”

I draw out my concern and disbelief “Ohhhh.” The outcome of Lhakpa Gyaljen’s story pains my heart, and I begin to ache for his reality.

Bending his elbow, Lhakpa Gyaljen turns his right palm into the air and tilts his chin to the left. “I don’t know.” He continues to attempt to rationalise his situation. “So, Because, I have no money, not working. And, almost every time I just eat, sleep, drink, not working, nothing. Then she don’t like me.”

“Oh. That’s tough. I’m sorry...” Unsure an appropriate response to this candour, I shift the conversation just slightly. “Did you ever think about stopping before your stroke? Were you scared to go?”

As Pemba translates my inquiry to Sherpa, Lhakpa Gyaljen chuckles. “I question, too danger, no more going to the expedition. Trekking is better but...” Pausing for a moment he sighs and let’s out another great big laugh. Shaking his head from side to side disapprovingly, he bemoans, “So because we need more money, more money. Going, going, going. Little bit, little bit, little bit of work. Going up.”

“Okay, so you needed the money.” I repeat.

“Yes.” He continues to assert, “So, because I have, our village of Namche Bazaar, everywhere is very too much expensive food. Milk, sugar, rice, ooh everything is very expensive, our village.”

Pemba nods in agreement, appreciating Lhakpa Gyaljen’s point. Inflation of goods remains in the [Solukhumbu](#). “Yeah, you can’t get anything with 1000 rupees⁵².” Pemba admits. Lhakpa Gyaljen snaps back, “2000 rupees. Nothing.” He chortles, “In Namche Bazaar, we can get nothing if we go there with 2000 rupees!”

⁵² This Nepali rupee rate equates to approximately \$12.00 CAD (in present day currency exchange rates).

A Conversation with Ang Phurba Sherpa on Friday – April 17, 2015

The alarm sounds, “5:30am already,” I groan silently after a restless night. A full night’s sleep is hard to come by at high-altitude, especially if you are still trying to acclimatise. [Pemba](#) and I arrived in [Gorakshep](#) yesterday afternoon. Situated at an elevation of 5164 meters, this is the final village along the [Everest Base Camp \(EBC\)](#) trekking route; a settlement that was created solely for the acclimatising trekkers and mountaineers who explore Everest’s frontiers.

Pemba and I tiptoe down the creaky wooden staircase and exit the back door of the lodge. A steamy cloud of breath dances in the bright beam of my headlamp. Rising before the sun makes for a bone-chilling trek towards the EBC, but I know the early push will give us time to chat with Pemba’s uncle Kami, and one or two of his Sherpa teammates. Coincidentally, [Kami](#) is the Climbing Sherpa I already spoke with in [Namche](#).

I firmly place my boot onto the icy footpath. My quads fire as I force one leg in front of the other to keep up with Pemba’s pace. I feel stronger this year compared to my trek to Basecamp in 2013. The twelve Sherpa stories that have already been shared with me have served as inspiration, reinforcing the importance of this project, and have imbued a new sense of motivation and determination.

Halfway there, Pemba asks to borrow my camera. The sun glistens from behind the distant snowy peaks, and the warm hues of dawn wash away the shadows of the night. *Click. Click. Click.* Pemba snaps a few photos of the 360-degree beauty and returns the camera to me.

“Over there,” he says, pointing to our destination on the horizon. With our quick strides we pass another group of fatigued trekkers. “Nepali flat” is how many tourists refer to this multi-hour trek. The terrain is not a steep incline; rather, it is comprised of rolling hills, with an equal number of strenuous ascents and descents.

The sun, now well into the sky, contributes to the creaking of the icy glacier that we begin to cross. Pemba and I choose to walk in silence, which allows me to save energy and breath, but also enables my cautious ear to hear the snow and ice that break free from the glacial mass we stand upon. Large eruptions sound intermittently from the valley below.

“Is that an avalanche?” I ask Pemba

“Maybe, or it could be chunks of melting ice.” Pemba explains that as the temperatures rise, ice will break off from the moraine and fall into the pool of melted glacier water.

Finally! I think with relief as we approach the heap of rocks. Countless Tibetan prayer flags left behind by trekkers and mountaineers flap in the wind, strung between glacial ice and rocky cairns. I turn my body clockwise, scanning the panoramic view. Further up the valley a small tent city is tucked between the bases of converging mountains. In the opposite direction, a deep valley winds endlessly into the horizon. I angle my camera lens to snap a picture of the vast mountain landscape. In the foreground sits a smooth slate rock with thick black letters painted on that read “Everest Basecamp 2015.” Though most who make it this far would turn back after taking their iconic photograph, Pemba and I press on toward the tents.

Weaving through small tent-communities, Pemba and I search for his uncle’s camp. As we continue to traipse through the expansive Basecamp, I gawk in disbelief at the comprehensive

infrastructure. There are hundreds of little nylon accommodations, each one set upon a bed of rocks that has been purposefully arranged and flattened. Dotted around this landscape are canvas washrooms with minicamp showers; dining halls adorned with rugs and collapsible chairs; and expedition team offices, each equipped with generators and technologies with satellite capabilities.

“[Tashi Delek](#), Kami” Pemba speaks into his phone. The 3G mobile network in Nepal’s Himalayas has become quite reliable; the increasing cell towers are seen as a sign of development.

Kami’s bright smile greets us as we ascend the small icy mound to his team’s camp. Although he seems surprised to see me again, he exudes a warm and welcoming energy. “Tashi Delek, Namaste Kami!” I say excitedly.

“Namaste.” Kami bows his chin to his chest for a moment, and then grasps tightly onto my right hand. Leading me to a kitchen mess-tent, Kami informs me that many of his team members and fellow guides are getting ready for breakfast.

“Take some breakfast, and I will bring Phurba to talk with you after,” he insists.

I settle onto a small campstool near the cooks. I watch them stack fried eggs, greasy bacon, ripe tomatoes, and buttered toast onto large serving platters. A cheerful cook whisks the platters through the canvas door, while I make small talk with the dark-haired boy who vigorously stirs a large pot of porridge.

“Here, miss.” He spoons a heap of oats into a bowl and offers it to me.

“Dhanyabad.” I thank him in Nepali.

Humming a jaunty melody, the cook reappears through the entrance of the mess-tent with an armful of empty platters. He approaches me to ask if I care to have one of the remaining eggs. I gratefully accept his offer, having already trekked for two hours on an empty stomach.

Just before 8:00am Pemba, Kami, and Phurba join me in the kitchen. I rise to my feet as Phurba, bundled in a navy down-feather jacket, calmly saunters towards me. His backwards cap and longer hair contribute to his relaxed temperament. With a contagious smile, he introduces himself, and I briefly explain the premise of the project to him.

“First, I want to thank you.” Phurba says connecting his gaze with mine. “I believe this is important work, and thank you for choosing us to talk with.” My cheeks grow warm. I am humbled by Phurba’s unexpected words.

“You are the ones who should be thanked, the true heroes here.” I say sincerely. “Thank you for agreeing to participate.”

Kami leads us to another tent, a quieter space to conduct an interview.

“That time I had my big aim: One day I have to climb Mt. Everest.”

Phurba’s face softens as if he’s deep in thought. The loud propellers of a passing helicopter cut into the silence of the moment. He looks up and admits, “I know that this mountain is really danger, but this is my profession. So, that’s why I’m doing the mountain, because I love the mountains. So still, I work in the mountains.” I gently nod my chin up and down in appreciation of this sentiment.

Phurba describes how he came to enter the climbing profession. “Before mountaineering I went to the school, but not like, not like a university. I have not been. But, all my villager people they use to be trekking. So I found that.” With limited alternatives he began to work for trekking expeditions. “When I start the working and trekking, I was sixteen years. That time first I work, I start from the [porter](#), you know? Then I earn a little money and then I used it to spend for my brothers and sisters educations.”

Phurba’s childhood home was in a small, impoverished village called Kamabalu in the [Sankhuwasabha District](#). Phurba describes the dire situation him and his siblings faced. “From my village the school is really far away, and there’s not a school in my village. Just from my village to my school I need to walk like, uhh... one day.” The money Phurba earned from being a porter helped to pay the room and board for his younger brothers and sisters at this neighbouring village school.

To find work Phurba migrated to the Khumbu region, where tourism was already quite developed and the prospect of employment more promising.

“How far is [Khumbu](#) from your village? How many valleys over?” I ask, trying to get a sense of the vastness of the Himalayan foothills.

“Many, many villages. Many villages, I can’t count, too far.” Phurba unclasps his hands and extends his arms out wide to create a sense of distance. “I fly to Kathmandu to Tumlingtar. From Tumlingtar I have to walk like three days.” Phurba details the difficulty of his commute from the Khumbu region back to his home village.

“Wow, that is far!” I respond enthusiastically. I know that the long distance and duration of these trips is usually a direct result of limited infrastructure, such as well-maintained roads or functioning airstrips.

“Now I live in [Kathmandu](#).” Phurba tells me, acknowledging that he no longer lives full-time in Kamabalu. Moving away from the mountains is a common practice for youth who seek higher education, and young professionals like Phurba who find a more lucrative livelihood by integrating into the city. “Sometimes in the year, two times, I will go into my village.” A smile stretches across Phurba’s round face as he explains that many members of his family still live there.

“I have still grandparents, father, mother, and three sisters, and three...” As his voice trails off Phurba sits there solemnly, the corners of his smile turned down. “...two brother left.” He corrects himself. “One brother is...” His eyes lift to meet mine. “Last year he got accident in the [Khumbu Icefall](#),” he says somberly.

“He was in the [2014 avalanche](#) in the Khumbu icefall?” I clarify.

“Yeah.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” I say sincerely. Having only been engaged in dialogue for a few minutes, I decide to lead our discussion in a different direction. “We’ll talk about him in a little bit, if you’re okay with that, but let’s talk about when you were young first.”

Phurba shakes his head in agreement, and begins to recount the career path that led him to the mountaineering industry. “First, I work. I start from the porter, you know?” He firmly

stacks his right hand atop of his left. “I like to say the porter is like the base of trekking. You know?”

Sitting in the folding chair to my right, Pemba echoes, “Yeah the base.”

Phurba nods his head correspondingly. “Like, uhh...” Looking back at me, he asserts, “You can’t learn anytime the ‘Z’, direct ‘Z’ like XYZ, you know? You start from the ‘A’. Same like the trekking also.”

“It’s like the foundation.” I say, comprehending.

“Yeah. The foundation. Then you have to, if you want to get higher, higher, higher [then] that’s the self that differs. Some porters, I together work when I was sixteen years, [are] still working porter.”

“Still working as a porter now? They didn’t want to shift into other positions?” I question.

“Yeah, normally the baseline like porters they come knowing very less.” Phurba confirms that this is the entry-level job on the mountain, and not everyone wants to move into another position, or likely does not have the means to do so. “So at the beginning, I wanted to [get] a promotion. So I used like three seasons, three seasons only porter. Then I use to be the [kitchen boy](#). And then I went to some training, some mountain training.”

With an enormous grin, Phurba excitedly exclaims, “And then I saw the time, when I [would] be climber!” His training contributed to his professional growth. “I start to climb the trekking peaks. Then 2008, I started the mountain climbing. Now [I’m] with Madison Mountaineering I’m like a [Sirdar](#). From 2011 I became the Sirdar.”

Understanding that Phurba now holds one of the highest Sherpa leadership positions in the industry, I ask curiously, “How did you become a part of expeditions?”

“When I join the trekking then climbing training, then uhh I start the trekking peaks, and then better money. Then I saw the mountaineering, that time I had my big aim: ‘One day I have to climb Mt. Everest.’”

“That was your aim? You said, ‘I will climb Mt. Everest?’” I ask, trying to temper my researcher tone with admiration and recognition.

“Yeah, yeah!” Phurba squeaks. “I have the big aim, like a goal. That time I don’t look the money, just the top.” Phurba reveals that his motive to climb, at least this very first summit attempt, was not for financial gain. “But that time I’m thinking just ‘one time, one day I climb the Everest.’”

“One day.” I utter, looking off into the distance for a moment, trying to imagine a young, ambitious Phurba.

“One day I climb the Everest.” He repeats and then blurts out with excitement, “But already I climbed it four times!”

“This we can’t buy, it’s really satisfying, you know, to save a life”

Phurba raises a hand from his Gore-Tex covered knee, and sweeps it up and diagonally across his body. “The first try, I succeeded!” he exclaims, reminiscing about the first time he climbed Everest. “It was 2010, I climbed first time from North side. That time my clients were

from the Serbia. When I got to the top that time I'm not so happy. I mean I'm not sure [the] feeling I have." Phurba says, shrugging his shoulders as if the achievement left him feeling indifferent. "But when I get back down to Basecamp, that time all my friends and the kitchen staffs and the Basecamp manager and the members hug me!" His smile radiates pure joy.

"That time I realised, 'Oh I got it, my aim and my goal. I achieved my goal!' and then I feel in that time really, really happy."

"You achieved your goal! Congratulations!" I praise him.

"Thank you. It was very good climbing, [we had] no problems."

As the words escape his mouth, I think about what could have gone wrong, recognising that many expeditions encounter unpredictable challenges. "No problems occurred that particular time. Can you think of an expedition that you had problems, either on Everest or other mountains?" I ask.

"Oh yeah, yeah." Phurba affirms with a nod. "2013 October in [Manaslu](#). I've been with the 360 Expedition Team. I have three Sherpas and three clients."

"You were the Sirdar that time?"

"Yeah. Then with us, some teams have joined the permit." Phurba describes the situation him and his teammates faced during an expedition on Manaslu, the eighth highest mountain in the world. "Not climbing with us, some people come to join the permit." Phurba explains that these individuals were not part of his team and he was not paid to assist them. Rather, they joined his team's government-issued climbing permit, likely to save money. "[They're] from the new Czechoslovakia. But they doesn't have the Sherpa, and they don't use the oxygen, they [were] just self-climbing⁵³."

Phurba's almond shaped eyes grow wide as he begins to relive the memory. "So, we summit the twenty-third September 2013. We summit and back, same day. I continue back to Basecamp with my friends. I met the new Czechoslovakia team; two members but they don't use the oxygen [and] no Sherpa. I gave some water to he, and he drank." Phurba's encounter with these climbers occurred just below the Manaslu summit. "The time was ten o'clock AM," Phurba recalls. "I continued down the Basecamp, but from evening [there was] no radio contact from them. No communication. So we feel like they're missing." Phurba's face grows serious, creating a sense of urgency. I shake my head in disbelief as he continues to reveal more astounding details.

"On the twenty-fourth of September, I go for the rescue to them. We don't know where is he. But, his friend came back." Phurba reports that one of the Czech climbers turned around just below the summit. "No success, and come back, and he contacted us from the last camp. 'My friend is missing, no contact.' So, me and Mingma Tenzi, two Sherpas we decided to go up to find he."

Pemba and I sit on the edge of our seats, gripped by the tale. I reflect on Phurba's noble actions and his willingness to assist the alpine climbers in need. Knowing that these climbers did

⁵³ The style of climbing Phurba mentions is best connected with *alpine climbing* – mountaineering in its most classic form. In these summit attempts minimal technical gear is used. Instead, these climbers are said to rely on a deep skill base, adaptability, and good decision-making throughout the pursuit (Alpine Institute, 2015).

not contribute financially to Phurba, I wonder about what he considers his responsibility on the mountain.

“It’s the twenty-fourth evening. We start at eight o’clock to go up. And the whole night we’re climbing. And the morning is seven o’clock. We got barely below the summit. Like 8100 meters. We found that man is there.” Phurba and his friend Mingma Tenzi found the missing Czech climber, but Phurba confesses the challenges were not over yet. “I [did] not sleep like three nights. I finished the summit then I went up the whole night. There were many places where I felt sleepy. Tired, like I woke in a dream.” Phurba rocks back and forth in his chair, portraying his lethargic and exhausted state.

“The man is there,” Phurba returns his attention to the missing climber. “He’s like uhh sixty-five percent memory out. And his [crampon](#) is also take out, his harness also take out. His crampon and harness he put it in his backpack. He has three bottles, water bottles, just empty bottles no water.” Phurba continues to describe the effects of the thin air, which resulted in the climber unconsciously taking off critical safety gear.

“With no oxygen, just below summit.” Phurba reminds Pemba and me that this man chose to climb with no oxygen. “There was one rock, he managed to stay at the rock. And he’s walking all the time. Walk, walk, walk. That way he doesn’t have any frost bite.”

“But his mind was gone?” I interject curiously, admiring at the Czech climber’s ability to make a survival decision; walking around to stay warm.

“Almost,” Phurba replies.

Phurba chuckles as he lunges off his seat. “First I catch he. We’re trying to give him oxygen, but he does not agree to take the oxygen. I had to catch him, he [was] trying to punch me.”

“Wow.” Pemba mutters under his breath, mirroring my own concern and surprise.

“Oh my goodness.”

“Then we give the water. He drank the water. Then, after drinking the water he make pee. I know in the mountain, after you drink the water then you get pee then his condition is okay.” The climber’s condition was better than Phurba and Mingma had originally thought. “After many requests he agreed to oxygen. We give oxygen to he, then we bring down very fast. We have two boys on the one side, right side and the left side.” Phurba spreads his arms out wide and hangs them over imaginary sets of shoulders. Mimicking a lifeless body, he sinks his chin into chest and allows his body to fall limp. “His position like this. We took him down. We got [to] the fixed line and we rappelled down very fast. From Camp IV to Camp III just one and a half hour we take him down. Then from Camp III we send him by helicopter to Kathmandu valley.”

“Wow.” Pemba and I say in harmony, mesmerised by the heroic story.

“You have a really good heart to go back into the mountain.” I applaud Phurba for his rescue.

Phurba sits tall in his chair, chest puffed out, back straight. His dark brown eyes twinkle as he reveals his motivation. “This is like duties, you know? And so when I was trying to help

somebody and the rescue after gets success, I'm really happy. Just really happy. This we can't buy, it's really satisfying, you know, to save a life."

"If [it's] objective danger, nobody can come from it"

Phurba sinks back into the blue canvas of his collapsible camp chair. His bright white smile hides behind his pursed lips. Clearing his throat he admits in a deep and serious voice,

"This is like adventure mountaineering, it's definitely dangerous."

"Yeah, it's part of the climb." I agree with him. Phurba's assertions about danger resonate with me as I reflect on both the perceived and real risks involved in these adventurous pursuits.

The sound of people shouting beyond the walls of the tent interrupts our conversation; they are likely mountaineers gearing up for their daily acclimatisation and training climb. The noises prompt Phurba into another thought.

"Even the mountain climbers should [have] basic training, basic knowledge." Phurba discusses some of the prerequisites mountaineers should have when attempting to climb Mt. Everest and other 8000 meters mountains. "They need to take the mountain education, like training. Sometimes if you don't have knowledge then you can fall by the lack of trainings, lack of knowledge also." He emphasises the necessity of mountain training, "The training is very important. So every Sherpa, every climbers, they need to learn."

"Because that might help reduce deaths and accidents in the mountain?" I ask for clarification.

"Yeah," he affirms. Phurba pauses for a breath, and then looks directly into my eyes. Speaking softly he admits, "But one thing. The mountain guide, the professional guide also, if [it's] objective danger, nobody can come from it."

"Objective?" I question.

"It's natural." Pemba confirms.

"Yeah, natural" Phurba repeats.

"It's like if you train and it comes, you're gone." Pemba stresses the unpredictable and inescapable nature of these occurrences.

Phurba begins to tell us about a time when he was confronted with objective danger. "In 2010 autumn, I've been to [Cho Oyu](#). That time is a big accident."

With a slow deep breath in, he continues to speak. "That time the Tibetan climbers are fixing. Fixing the route. And September eighteenth they got accident. Big, big avalanche, like 200 meters, fall down!" Phurba exclaims. On this fateful morning, a mass of snow and ice unexpectedly surged through the mountain valley for hundreds of meters, taking with it anyone and anything in its path. "That time, seven Tibetan Sherpas are there." Phurba looks down to his hands, silently accounting for each life on his fingers. "Four Sherpas come down as their own. But, three Sherpas were more injured at the accident place."

"They were injured?" I question in a concerned tone.

"So I went fast to there to rescue! And one Sherpa I bring down. And two of my friends also came there. And three Sherpas, the victim Sherpas, we bring down."

“Was it only Sherpas who were injured, or were there members and clients there too?” I inquire, wanting a further explanation of the damage.

“No no no, just fixing Sherpas. Just fixing the ropes. Fortunately, they...” pausing for a moment, Phurba confirms, “Nobody died. And then we came back down. And then they decided, the Tibetan Sherpas, decided ‘we are not fixing this year.’”

“Why did they decide that?”

“Because they got danger. They feel the danger.” Phurba explains that those in the gravest danger were the Tibetan Sherpas, who had the responsibility of securing and fixing a rope along the unstable Cho Oyu route. “Then all the teams, they get a meeting, and some Western guides they decided that the snow condition is very bad.”

I shake my head disapprovingly with a look of frustration etched on my face. “As part of the climb, you go up against danger like this each time?”

“Yeah,” Phurba starts to agree, but quickly retracts this thought. “Well, I have a feeling like this is an accident, you know? If you sometime you’re flying by air, sometime there is accident. So it doesn’t mean if one time the flight crashes, you’ll never travel by the air.” Phurba’s correlation is difficult for me to accept. Part of me sees the point he attempts to make, in that these types of accidents will not always occur in the mountain. Yet my sceptical self recognises that airline crashes are much less frequent than the avalanches that plague those who climb in the Himalayas.

“Also same like last year...” Phurba pipes up again, “...these accidents here are objective. Actually from last year the [2014 accident](#) is like, for mountaineering it’s like a really big accident in Everest. This is a first time the big accident in the Khumbu Icefall.” Phurba notes that the 2014 accident was an anomaly for Mt. Everest, the largest and most tragic accident to date. “Seventeen Sherpas is dead there. Sixteen at the same place, then one down, so we like to say seventeen total.” Phurba closes his eyes for a moment.

“So seventeen in total. And you said one of your brothers...” My question trails off. Phurba opens his eyes again, connecting with my eyes he says sombrely, “Yeah.”

“I’m so sorry,” I say with heartfelt sympathy.

“I went to a different mountain. That time I was in [Makalu](#).” Phurba admits in a soft, sorrowful tone. “And that time my brother I said to he, ‘Maybe you come. Go with me to Makalu!’ That time from the same company, The Himalayan Guides, they [wanted to] send him to [Manaslu](#) also. And I said this to he, ‘You going to Manaslu?’ But he’s not agreeing with me and he said, ‘I go Everest.’” Phurba shrugs his tense shoulders tightly towards his ears. His melancholy look suggests a sentiment of, what more could I have done?

“Two days before he’s dead, he called me,” Phurba recalls softly. “I was going to the Makalu. On the way he called me. And just he said, ‘I forgot my helmet in Kathmandu.’ ‘Don’t worry you can call in Kathmandu, and somebody, maybe the helicopter directly can bring it,’ I said.” This was the last time that Phurba heard from his brother before he succumbed to the avalanche that surged through the Khumbu Icefall on April 18th 2014.

Staring down at the palms of his hands, Phurba explains, “Many Sherpas are frightened now from that accident. And some people, I think some few peoples, like old mens they stopped to climb. They retired.”

Pemba and I sit in stillness. Tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of this tragic avalanche. In remembrance, all work is to be paused and no one will climb the mountain tomorrow.

Chapter Six: Collective Stories of Living and Dying in the Mountains

In this Chapter, I present the audio-visual representation of the Climbing Sherpas' "collective stories." The short documentary film entitled, *Climbing Sherpa: Stories from the Solukhumbu*, illuminates shared experiences and insights gathered from the Climbing Sherpas' conversations. Presenting this chapter in video format adds a new layer to the previously documented individual stories. Herein, this film presents images and voices of the Sherpas' themselves to be viewed, heard, and experienced first-hand by you, the reader. Click the following link to access the film:

<https://vimeo.com/210223199/49f3b356a8>.

These stories, along with the conversations from Chapter Five, will be further unpacked in the following chapter through a discussion of the key findings.

Chapter Seven: A Discussion of the Collective Stories

In this chapter I discuss my interpretations of the Climbing Sherpas' lived stories, which were represented in Chapter Five and through the short documentary film, *Climbing Sherpa: Stories from the Solukhumbu*. Analysis of the Sherpas' individual narratives reveals fragments of collective stories of what it means to live, work, and at times encounter death on the mountainside. The fabrics of these narratives are woven together by interconnecting through-lines of:

- Climbing to the Top: Narratives of Development, Conquest, and Pride
- Encountering Death: Narratives of Risk, Strength, and Fear
- Choosing to (Dis)continue: Navigations of Power, Death, and Freedom

These three through-lines are used as entry points into a collective discussion, expanding on the unique and contextualized conversations found within the individual narratives that were presented in Chapter Five.

7.1 Climbing to the Top: Narratives of Development, Conquest, and Pride

The through-line of “Climbing to the Top,” illuminates Sherpas' stories of ascension into the commercial mountaineering industry and their numerous summit achievements. These stories contribute to a discourse of development in Nepal, where hopes are set on tourism as a means to improve economic conditions in rural communities (cf. Blank, 1989; Butler et al., 1998; Mair, 2006). These patterns of development seemingly reflect modernisation theory and economic growth influenced by neoliberalism. Sherpas' aspirations and goals of being “more than porters” have led to the development of skills — both technical climbing proficiencies and linguistic communication abilities — that have allowed them to pursue and sustain livelihoods in tourism and mountaineering on the Nepali mountainside. As was also observed by Bott (2009), many of the Sherpas began their mountain careers as [porters](#) or “[kitchen boys](#)” (a cook's assistant) and

eventually progressed into trekking and high-altitude climbing careers. Though economic concerns were prominent within the Sherpas' discussions of their career trajectories, so too were notions of individual conquest and pride, such as tallying the number of successful mountain ascents. As I illustrate below, these storylines reflect global and regional growth of mountaineering as an industry. Beginning with an examination of pre-climbing life in the Solukhumbu, this through-line allows for a deeper exploration of these ideas of development, conquest, and pride.

7.1.1 Life before climbing

Mountaineering and the desire to stand on the top of the world were not always significant to Sherpas' lives. Indeed, Nepal did not open its doors to foreign visitors until the early 1950s. Dorchi exclaimed, "Climbing Everest was not of our ancestors' time." Similarly, Dawa revealed that "In the past there were no expeditions, but *now it's impossible without* [them]." Dawa, a retired Climbing Sherpa from [Phortse](#), was the oldest climber I interviewed. At seventy-eight years old, he had a vivid recollection of what came before the introduction of mountaineering. Throughout our conversation, Dawa reminisced about his international trips to Tibet as well as his regional travel down to [Namche Bazaar](#). "We had no tourists. It was all trading systems, exchanging goods. We used to nurture baby yaks and used to trade them for salts." This illustrates some of the regional and international commerce that existed in the [Solukhumbu](#) before mountaineering and tourism.

Many of these trade relationships represented economic activities that did not rely solely on monetary exchanges; their significance has been previously discussed by authors like Whelpton (2005) and Adams (1992). Trade relations were likely created and maintained with Tibet due to its geographical location (in relation to the Solukhumbu region), Sherpas' shared

lineage with indigenous Tibetans, and their similar linguistic practices (Sherpa is a dialect of Tibetan) (Bhandari et al., 2015). However, in 1959 these relationships were stifled due to the closing of the Tibetan border and the rise in geo-political unrest between the two nations (Whelpton, 2005). In addition to the border closure, the government struggled to improve economic and social conditions for Nepali people during this time (Nepal, 2005; Ortner, 1999; Singh, 1980). Thus, tourism entered the consciousness of Sherpa people like Dawa (e.g., “now it’s impossible without expeditions”) as they began to recognise its value, and the necessity of commercial mountaineering expeditions.

Many of the other Sherpas interviewed did not explicitly mention their involvement with trade, nor did they discuss a time devoid of tourists and expeditions. Instead, the Sherpas between forty and fifty years old emphasised the significance of agrarian livelihoods. “I was a farmer” or “I started from farming” were comments that often preceded discussions of what came before climbing. Da Gelje described expansive farmlands and the variety of crops his family grew, recalling, “First I start farmer. In my village I have big lands. Lots of growing potatoes, corn and vegetables, rice, cabbage, beans, green beans, buckwheat, wheat. So many, many kind of food we grow.” As has been discussed by Nepal (2005) and Ortner (1999), the structure of these mountain economies relied heavily on agriculture and animal husbandry, especially during a time when tourism was not the economic mainstay. From the context of modernisation theory, the Sherpas’ reliance on agrarian lifestyles during this time aligns with the way in which Rostow (1960) and other social theorists describe “traditional” societies, whereby agriculture and subsistence farming constitute the bulk of these communities’ economies.

Common among the narratives of these middle-aged Sherpas, however, were stories of transition. Many mentioned a need to shift from working in these traditional community roles to

positions with tourism companies and associated industries. As Rinchen pointed out, “I started climbing maybe twelve years before. Before is farmer. Farmer, some cutting grass, looking to see the cow. And after that then go to the little trekking, and going to the [Lukla](#) [to] carry the porter.” Nearly twelve years ago, in his thirties, Rinchen shifted from being a farmer into a livelihood reliant on new skills, because of economic incentives. In discussing his own shift into the tourism industry as a porter on a trekking expedition, Da Gelje exclaimed, “People say, ‘you like to carry some load, I give to you money.’ ‘Yes, I can do that!’ I say... first time I carried thirty kilos... I carried the food. One day ten rupees⁵⁴ I got.” The “need for money” is an idea that Ortner (1999) continuously illustrates in her work as a primary incentive for Sherpas’ engagements in jobs related to mountaineering and trekking.

Lastly, the life histories described by the younger generation of Sherpas, those in their twenties and early thirties, varied greatly from the livelihoods discussed by older Sherpa men like Dawa, Dorchi, Phuri, Da Gelje, and Rinchen. In the case of the younger Sherpas, instead of trade and agriculture⁵⁵, importance was placed on educational background prior to holding roles in the trekking and mountaineering fields. Ang Phurba relayed, “Before mountaineering I went to school, but not like a university. I have not been...” Similarly, Lakpa explained, “...I studied at high school. I go to a good facility, then jumped to [a] porter job.” Ang Phurba’s stress on not attending “a university” and Lakpa’s explicit disclosure of “I go to a good facility” hints at what education might represent to Sherpas, a discussion point I expand upon in the “More Than Porters” section of this chapter. Furthermore, these narratives of what came before climbing contribute to the understandings of Sherpas’ changing fortunes, illuminating the shifting

⁵⁴ This Nepali rupee rate equates to approximately less than fifteen Canadian cents (in present day currency exchange rates).

⁵⁵ Although it should be noted that agriculture is still something the entire family helps with when in the village.

socioeconomic priorities of the Solukhumbu, which reflect new patterns of development towards an evolving “modern” society (cf. Harrison, 1992; Rostow, 1960; Weber, 1930, 1978).

7.1.2 Changing fortunes

The first successful summit of Mt. Everest in 1953 is said to have contributed to the transformation of the Solukhumbu into one of the world’s most renowned and sought-after adventure destinations (Bott, 1999; Nepal, 2015, 2016). Dawa recalled his first time encountering tourists in the Solukhumbu. As a young boy, *en route* to collect grass for his father’s cattle, Dawa remembered spotting Bengali people accompanied by Sherpas who had just returned from an expedition in [Darjeeling](#), India⁵⁶. Dawa confessed:

At that time, some [Sherpas] from [Phortse](#) wore a hat, which they brought with them all the way from Darjeeling. I used to get jealous of them wearing those hats... We got nothing, but were excited to see them around. We were very young and amazed to see these new people with fancy clothes.

Dawa’s mention of the tourists from Darjeeling signified beginnings of cultural changes in the remote mountain villages of Nepal as they have been reported and discussed by other researchers (Adams, 1992; Nepal, 2015, 2016; Zurick, 1992). Indeed, Dawa’s attitude toward these visitors, and the value he placed on the hats, portray subtle indications of globalisation (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Nepal, 2016) and colonialism (cf. Aitchison, 2001; Hollinshead, 1992; Nash, 1977) and their effects – the international influences contributing to the first signs of acculturation and modernisation in the Solukhumbu. Now, this “remote” mountain region is home to an imitation Starbucks coffee shop in the village of [Lukla](#) and an Irish Pub situated 3340 meters above sea

⁵⁶ Before the opening of the Nepali borders Sherpa men were known to migrate to Darjeeling, India to assist with ascents as porters in the Indian Himalaya (Bott, 2009; Ortner, 1999).

level in [Namche Bazaar](#). These are just two of many establishments peppered along the [Everest Basecamp \(EBC\)](#) trekking route that offer the comforts of home to foreign climbers and trekkers.

Nepal's (2016) work suggests that direct and indirect tourism-related employment opportunities emerged from the growing demand for adventure tourism. Indeed, the presence of tourism in the Solukhumbu restructured the “traditional” Sherpa economy, playing a critical role in regional development and reshaping employment and income opportunities (Adams, 1992; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Nepal, 2005, Ortner, 1999), mirroring the socioeconomic development theory of modernisation (Harrison, 1992; Sofield, 2003). For instance, livestock transhumance was repurposed as a means of transporting expedition gear and supplies, while a growing number of local employment opportunities emerged (e.g., porter, kitchen boy, Climbing Sherpa, Sirdar).

Important to our understanding of the economic restructuring of the Solukhumbu are some of the realities Sherpas discussed regarding life in mountain communities; they spoke openly about their past and present financial concerns. The “need to earn money,” “family problems,” and “a very difficult time in the village” were storylines articulated by the Sherpas when asked about their decisions to begin working in trekking and mountaineering. Lhakpa Gyaljen started climbing due to his own financial difficulties. He recalled pleading for a job: “I speak to my friend, ‘Oh please give me expedition.’ Then, I am going a lot of expeditions... After the expedition ends, I make a home [in] [Pangboche](#).” Money that Lhakpa Gyaljen earned through his work as a porter, and eventually as a Climbing Sherpa, afforded him with the resources to build his first home. The theme of financial need continually resurfaced throughout the Sherpas’ narratives, particularly those of the currently employed Climbing Sherpas. For instance, during a discussion about retiring due to the risks of climbing, Kami confessed, “My wife, and my family, my mom, everybody say, ‘please now stop.’ Then how to stop that?”

Because I need for the money...” These brief examples support conclusions drawn by Ortner (1999) and Bott (2009), highlighting financial concerns that contribute to Climbing Sherpas’ motivations to participate in the mountaineering industry.

There are, however, related motivations not mentioned by these authors, such as notions of responsibility and sociocultural contexts enmeshed in the Sherpas’ economic situations. For instance, Mingma shared that it was not only his financial problems at home, but also his position as the “only son” that required him to leave his Lama education at the local Gumba to pursue his first porter position on the mountain. He recalled, “...I stayed in the Gumba until I was eight years old and after that *I had to* look after my parents, so I went into trekking and slowly into the mountaineering field.” Even at such a young age, Mingma assumed responsibility for his parents, which he has maintained through his adulthood. His sense of responsibility manifested in the subtleties of his language, and how he told his story: “I had to,” a simple phrase that demonstrates Mingma’s sense of obligation for, or towards something.

“I am the only son,” Mingma exclaimed when asked for clarification about his family dynamic. Being the youngest or only son in a Sherpa cultural context comes with an unspoken responsibility of caring for aging parents and maintaining their properties (S. Sherpa, personal communication, March 22, 2015). Therefore, Mingma’s individual agency is underpinned by subjectivities rooted in Sherpa culture and tradition; his identity as the “only son” becomes integral to his story. Throughout my time in the Solukhumbu, I observed the ways in which relationships played out among families (e.g., who lives with whom, who makes the money, and so forth), and my discussions with the Climbing Sherpas further illuminated these lived experiences. Grounded in notions of collectivism, Sherpas engage in freedoms while navigating cultural traditions and “obligations.” Mingma’s choice to leave the Gumba to provide assistance

to his parents was linked to economic concerns, but also arguably to existential notions: Life, his parent's ability to live (and survive) depended on Mingma's shift into the mountaineering industry.

Existential philosophers posit that individuals construct their own subjective values, and then make decisions on the basis of these value sets (Sartre, 1948; Follesdal, 1981). From this perspective, Mingma's value set encompasses the social and familial complexities of his own situatedness within the Sherpa culture. However, as outlined in Chapter Three, it is also necessary to appraise the structures and power that have an impact on Sherpas' freedom and agency. The consideration of broader political, social, and cultural (e.g., Buddhism) contexts allows us to further understand what constitutes *self*, and subsequently one's agency (Foucault, 1994). Furthermore, the pressures exerted on Mingma to make a particular choice can arguably be connected to larger structural and systemic inequalities that existed (and continue to exist) in Nepal.

Although my fieldwork did not lend to comprehensive and deep understandings of the Sherpas' individual financial concerns, my stay in a variety of Sherpa homes and teahouses while in the Solukhumbu provided additional insights into the complex socioeconomic landscape of the region. To begin fieldwork, I entered into the Solukhumbu from the [Lower Solu](#) region. The nine-hour jeep ride from Kathmandu brought Ngima (my interpreter and guide) and me as far into the foothills as the road infrastructure reached; from there we hiked another six hours to meet our first Sherpa participant in the remote village of [Chyangba](#). In lower villages like Chyangba I stayed in homes comprised of one or two rooms with no running water (i.e. Plumbing) or stable electricity. As I continued to hike towards the [Upper Khumbu](#) region, passing through villages northeast of Lukla and into [Sagarmāthā National Park \(SNP\)](#), I stayed in

more elaborate structures such as multilevel guesthouses. In these spaces, I had access to hot showers, consistent electricity and often WiFi.

The village of Lukla is home to the [Tenzing-Hillary Airport](#), which has been the key access point into the northeastern highlands of Nepal since 1964 (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998). I was not surprised to find that villages north of the airstrip (particularly the villages on the EBC trekking route) were consistently more developed (e.g., more public and private infrastructure, more commercial businesses and shops, larger houses, etc.) than those in the south. My field observations and experiences trekking through both the Lower Solu and Upper Khumbu regions reinforced Rogers and Aitchison's (1998) work, which discusses how geographical conditions contribute to spatial differences, land-use strategies, and widening regional disparities.

From my field experiences, it became evident that accessibility to the Nepali Himalaya underpins the patterns of development in the Solukhumbu. The patterns in these regions portray how environmental beauty and geo-positioning relative to Mt. Everest contribute to varying levels of development efforts (e.g., policies, funding, marketing, etc.) (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Schroeder & Sproule-Jones, 2012). Key players, including the Nepali government and entrepreneurs, capitalise on tourist demand for geographical and ecological attributes – Nepal's "geo-capital" (Bhattarai et al., 2005). As previously pointed out in the literature review, depending on the height and difficulty of a given mountain peak, Nepal's national treasury receives royalties per climb, which provides further motivation to promote development in certain regions over others (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998). Meanwhile, the communities and individuals who face the everyday realities of Nepal's economic disparities see very little of the mountaineering profits. As a result, these region-specific developments attract Sherpas from adjacent regions, many of whom migrate in the hopes of gaining employment.

Labour migration is described by researchers like Nepal, Kohler, and Banzhaf (2002), and was reflected in the Sherpas' stories shared with me. Ang Phurba and Mingma described leaving their own small and impoverished mountain villages in the neighbouring regions of [Sankhuwasabha](#) and [Dolakha](#) respectively, to seek work on Everest expeditions in the Solukhumbu. Interestingly, during the “off season” (i.e. monsoon season June-August) migrant workers like Mingma and Ang Phurba, as well as other Sherpas who originate from the Solukhumbu, reside more permanently in Nepal's capital city, Kathmandu. This differs from Zurick's (1992) research that describes local Sherpa populations as returning to their “traditional subsistence living” once the region empties of tourists in the summer months (p. 616). Although some Sherpas do resume their agricultural responsibilities after the primary tourist season, this is not the case for many of the participants whom I interviewed, especially the younger Sherpas.

Zurick's work is nearly fifteen years old, and the patterns of movement and population distribution of Nepal have likely changed. Perhaps then, the act of relocating to Kathmandu is reflective of increased accessibility to resources and additional opportunities (e.g., seasonal work with other companies in other regions during off-seasons), as many of the mountaineering and trekking organisations operate from Kathmandu's tourist center known as Thamel.

Furthermore, this finding hints at the increasing mobility and accumulated wealth of resident Sherpa populations from the Solukhumbu region and beyond. Sherpas' ability to own multiple dwellings and travel domestically, and even internationally, were discussed throughout many of my conversations and further documented in Nepal's (2016) work, which explores social changes in the Mt. Everest region. Implications of tourism – new mobilities and privileges – have reversed the fortunes of highland ethnic groups. According to Nepal (2016),

Prior to the 1970s more prosperous households in the north-eastern highlands of Nepal belonged to the Rai and Magar ethnicities who occupied more favourable agricultural niches; today, it is the Sherpas who are much more prosperous than the other ethnic highlanders. (p. 291)

From my own observations in the field and my conversations with [Ngima](#), many people of Rai, Magar, and Tamang ethnicities now hold low-paying positions as domestic helpers for Sherpa families, lower-level porters or kitchen staff on trekking expeditions, or yak herders who accompany goods being transported to the highlands. Conversely, Sherpas' positions as high-altitude climbing guides (i.e. Climbing Sherpas) offer higher revenues and have led to a dramatic increase in levels of mobility and social change in the Solukhumbu (Luger, 2000). For instance, each of the Sherpa participants referenced at least one trip abroad (e.g., to the U.S., England, Germany, Malaysia, India, etc.) or that one of their family members now resides outside of Nepal. Kami explained, "My brother, he is in the United States of America... Yeah, he's climbing. My brother also climbing for the Everest, eighteen times the summit." Kami's brother's move to the United States occurred after his eighteen successful summits; international migration is a privilege and opportunity that likely would not have transpired without such achievements (a point I expand on in the "Reaching the 'Top'" section).

The globalised metanarrative of modernisation, socioeconomic development that follows an evolutionary process from a traditional society to a modern one, has seemingly been mirrored in the Sherpas' stories, whereby the Solukhumbu has "developed" by means of increased tourism and mountaineering (Harrison, 1992; Rostow, 1960). However, the economic opportunities, and their associated fortunes of such development, are only as far reaching as the communities who reside in proximity to the iconic geographical wonders like Mt. Everest. In addition to proximity,

it is apparent that accessibility of such economic opportunities as they relate to physical (e.g., movement) and social (e.g., privilege) mobilities needs to be further explored. I begin this conversation within the sub-sections “More Than Porters” and “Good Communication”: however research exploring the perspectives of other local mountain populations (e.g., Rai, Tamang, Magar), or Sherpas who specifically reside in the lower regions year-round, would provide further insight into the sociocultural and geo-political complexities of mountain communities, as well as the industries that hire these populations. Additionally, such an exploration may paint a clearer picture of the systemic inequalities and disparities that still prevail in the mountain regions of Nepal.

7.1.3 More than porters

Climbing Sherpas’ re-tellings of their childhoods generally follow a linear progression of employment. Comparable to Bott’s (2009) research participants, the Sherpas in this study described a similar pattern; they entered into the trekking industry as [porters](#) or [kitchen boys](#) during their teenage years and gradually progressed into positions with more responsibilities, higher risks, and a more lucrative payout. Referring to his first porter position Lakpa exclaimed, “I started from the bottom line.” Ang Phurba discussed the necessity of these entry-level positions: “First I work, I start from the porter... I like to say the porter is like the base of trekking... You can’t learn direct ‘Z’ like XYZ, you know? You start from the ‘A’. Same like the trekking also.”

Many of the Sherpas recognised that being a porter was an entry point into the trekking and mountaineering fields, but they nevertheless reiterated the idea of becoming *more than* porters. For instance, Ang Phurba reflected, “So at the beginning, I wanted to [get] a promotion. So I used like three seasons, three seasons only porter. Then I use to be the kitchen boy, and then

I went to some training, some mountain training.” Ang Phurba’s strong desire for a “promotion” led him to pursue mountaineering training, which ultimately reduced his time working as a porter. Furthermore, his use of the word promotion illustrates an understood hierarchy within mountaineering support teams. Similarly, this hierarchy was apparent in Lakpa’s response to a question related to stopping mountain climbing, Lakpa explained: “If I do other business, *I have to start from zero, you know? So if I stop now, then I have to find other job... Then you start from porters.*” Lakpa compared the porter position in mountaineering to a basic starting position in other businesses. During our conversation, he turned down the idea of working in alternative industries, stressing how he has already dedicated many years, money, and energy to his career as a mountain guide, and that he had no desire to return to a bottom rung role.

Porters generally carry trekkers’ duffels or transport slats of beer, tanks of gasoline, and bushels of toilet paper to replenish the local restaurants and guesthouses *en route* to the [EBC](#). Bott’s (2009) work suggests that jobs like these are “unskilled and poorly valued in the Khumbu” whereas the position of a high-altitude climbing guide (referred to as Climbing Sherpa in this project) is deeply valued and respected (p. 298). Mingma described some of the responsibilities involved with this coveted mountain role: “*We take clients’ luggage, oxygen, food, tents...everything we have to look after. After the camps are set then we fix the ropes on the way. After the team finishes fixing the rope up to the summit, then we target the summit.*”

Kaji also discussed assisting clients, the international mountaineers that pay huge sums of money to attempt these summits. He explained, “I help clients up...*we take care for them. We have to help all the persons.*” The respect and value that comes with a Climbing Sherpa position is likely linked to: increased risks; responsibilities like securing clients’ lives; higher wages, which have been quoted by the World Bank as more than ten times the annual per capita income

in Nepal (Frohlick, 2003); and the potential for successful mountain summits. However, when I asked Dorchi (a retired climber) what it meant to be a Climbing Sherpa, he ironically compared this position with the work of [Dzopkyoks](#) (hybrid yak/cows), which are used to transport expedition and clients' equipment up to the Mt. Everest basecamp. "We are called Climbing Sherpas, but from Basecamp to Camp IV we are the Dzopkyok. We *have to* carry all the things [Laughs]." He burst into laughter at the comparison as he explained that from basecamp and higher, Climbing Sherpas must carry the loads of equipment while negotiating the unstable high-altitude and mountainous terrain.

The opposing values placed on the "porter" and "Climbing Sherpa" positions were reinforced by the participants throughout my conversations. Rinchen recalled, "...before I carry as the porter. I needed the Everest expedition. I summit successful and never will do the porter. Now every year I do the mountaineering guide position. And now I do the camera man." The juxtaposition of Rinchen's statement of "never will do the porter" and his current occupation as mountaineering guide highlights his intention to never again return to the mountain as a porter, while also distinguishing himself and his worth from lower-ranking positions. Research by Neale (2002) and Ortner (1999) indicates that despite Buddhism's opposition to competition, this quest to be recognised amongst others is intrinsically part of Sherpa culture. Furthermore, Rinchen's mention of "needed the Everest expedition" and "successful" summits indicate what Sherpas might have to do to transcend lower-level roles. Successfully standing on Mt. Everest contributes to the trust an organization or company places in an individual, which likely increases their chance to get hired again in a similar position for future expeditions. These findings reflect understandings gathered by Frohlick's (2003) anthropological work.

As in many career paths, Sherpas who wish to rise through the ranks must actively work towards their goals and aspirations. For instance, Ang Phurba explained, “If you want to get higher, higher, higher then that’s the self... Some porters, I together [worked with] when I was sixteen years, [are] still working porter...but at the beginning, I wanted to get a promotion.” Ang Phurba compared his own career path with other Sherpas who had not moved into higher-ranking positions on the mountainside. Within his narrative of personal development emerged the notion of will. Ang Phurba revealed, “I saw the mountaineering, that time I had my big aim: One day I have to climb Mt. Everest.” Similarly, Dorchi described how he persistently begged his Uncle Wangchu to take him on an expedition, admitting, “I was determined to climb Everest, at least once.” *Will*, as a psychological construct, inextricably bound with freedom, appeared as conscious actions taken by Sherpas through appeals of effort and determination (Farber, 1976; Yalom, 1980). This notion of will seemingly underpinned many of the Sherpas’ ascensions into the mountaineering industry, and arguably continuously contributed to their abilities to stand atop Mt. Everest.

Though stories like Ang Phurba’s illuminate Sherpas’ experiences of will (and freedom), his discussion of some porters’ complacency (or lack of movement) compels questions around power, privilege, and the complex systems that underline these individuals’ lives. Perhaps the lack of movement is an indicator of some Sherpas not having the means to “develop” and acquire the necessary skills and resources to secure higher ranked roles within the mountaineering industry (e.g., financial means, skills, education, networks, etc.). Lhakpa Dorji’s ability to write English, Lakpa and Da Gelje’s notable strength, Phuri’s previous work as domestic help in Namche Bazaar, and Dorchi’s relation to his late Uncle Wangchu Sherpa (a Sirdar on many Mt. Everest mountaineering expeditions), are each an example of how the Sherpas within this study

began to ascend into their mountaineering careers. Depending on Sherpas' skill sets, and arguably networks and personal connections, employment opportunities arose on the mountainside.

Throughout the course of some of my conversations, however, I sensed an undercurrent of complex politics among Sherpas. The effects of an understood hierarchy had implications for Climbing Sherpas' progress and growth within the industry. Da Gelje explained, "*I didn't get a chance*. That time, I'm not a summitter. So, people take only summitter people. *I never got a chance*. I'm only carrying loads up and down." When I asked Da Gelje, who decides who gets "a chance" to accompany clients to make a summit bid, Da Gelje admitted, "the leader [International Guide] and Sherpa leader [ie. Sirdar]." Da Gelje described the Sirdar of his 1998 expedition as "very very bad," and that summit bids are sometimes contingent on having your own Sirdar status. Indeed, Da Gelje finally made it to the summit of Mt. Everest in 2005, the year he was promoted to Sirdar. Likewise, Lhakpa Dorji recalled navigating this Sherpa climber hierarchy with his Sirdar, Sonam Gilme. Lhakpa Dorji discussed being worried as he requested a position for an upcoming climbing season. "Then I tried to talk with him, 'Um, I'm sorry. I have nothing now, and I'd like to. If I get the chance, I want to go as kitchen boy in the expedition to [Mt. Everest] Basecamp.'" Lhakpa Dorji was granted the "chance" to join Sonam Gilme that particular year, and even promoted to a Climbing Sherpa position. Stories like Lhakpa Dorji and Da Gelje's depict the potential challenges of ascending the ranks of the mountaineering industry. Becoming more than a porter on Mt. Everest is perhaps linked in part to *will*, but along side this determination, power relations must be recognised.

7.1.4 Good communication

The restructuring of the economy in the Solukhumbu prompted a need for education and the development of communication and linguistic skills, particularly in English. Rinchen explained, "... before I speak no English. We speak the English to carry [as] the porter." Prior to Rinchen's employment he was unable to speak or write in English at all, but developed these skills while working as a porter for trekking expeditions. During my conversations with the elder Sherpas, education and a proficiency in the English language were discussed as essential to finding work in mountaineering and trekking industries within the Solukhumbu. For instance, Dorchi, a retired climber (who communicated with Ngima and I in Nepali), described the shift in expected job qualifications: "Nowadays, one should have good communication skills in English. There were very few people before who were able to speak good English, but even without good English they were hired for work. But nowadays there is no work without English." Accordingly, Lhakpa Dorji described how his literacy gave him leverage to secure a trekking position in 1979, and strengthened the trust between him and his employer. "I've been to school here in Phortse for four years... He [Sonam Gilme, Lhakpa's Sirdar] couldn't write his bill for his trekking. Then he trust [me], we had about three or four Sherpas, but he trust me...to make the bills." Here, Lhakpa Dorji not only referenced his capacity to communicate in English, but also highlighted the efficacy of his previous education.

While the ability to speak English is seemingly an increasing requirement for the tourism industry, access to education still remains a privilege in mountain regions like the Solukhumbu. For some Sherpas, attending school means hiking several hours or even days to the closest village school, while for others it entails moving away from their village to Kathmandu for a chance to receive a better education. Ang Phurba described his commute from his home to the

closest village school: “From my village, the school is really far away, and there’s not a school in my village. Just from my village to my school I need[ed] to walk like one day.” As we learned from his individual story in Chapter Five it was his remote location and the limited village infrastructure that eventually led Ang Phurba into the mountaineering industry, in hopes of raising funds to help support the future education of his younger siblings.

Kaji also left his home for an opportunity to go to school but unlike Ang Phurba, he moved from his home village of [Dandakharka](#) to pursue his education in Kathmandu. Privileges, like the ability to migrate to Kathmandu for boarding school, are contingent on many factors (including personal and fiscal resources), which became evident through my field observations and conversations. For instance, Rinchen openly recognised his poor socioeconomic status and his wish to send his youngest son to a “good school in Kathmandu.” While staying at Rinchen’s home, he asked me to take photographs of his son to petition for a donor from Canada to assist with tuition payments. The candour of Rinchen’s requests prompts the need for further investigation of education and privilege within the Solukhumbu region as they connect to mobilities. Moreover, these discussions bring to light the need to better understand not just the role of education and English proficiency but its meaning.

From the Sherpas’ stories and discussions, we gain greater insight into the rising demand for education in Sherpa communities. Education (and often English language skills) is a prerequisite for employment on the mountain, specifically in tourism and mountaineering expedition positions. Furthermore, despite the presence of Ngima, my Nepali-English interpreter, several Sherpas chose to speak with me in English throughout their interviews (e.g., Rinchen, Kaji) even though it was not quite clear at times and difficult to comprehend some of their points during our conversations. Within these storylines, the “hows” of narrative production have been

illuminated, and Sherpas' performance and narrative circumstances provide additional meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Riessman, 2008). The ways in which Sherpas spoke about their educational institutions and their articulation of certain re-tellings (e.g., Rinchen's decision to speak to me in only English, Ang Phurba's mention of not attending university, Lakpa's emphasis on going to a "good facility", etc.) within their individual narratives exposes Sherpas' awareness of what a "higher" or "good" education can do for them. Additionally, these linguistic considerations also illuminate the Sherpas' perceptions of foreign researchers, tourists, or mountaineering clients, and their values of education (in particular the ability to communicate in English). English language proficiency appears to be another indicator of modernisation's sway – effects that some development scholars critique as measuring progress by the values of Western societies, while also reifying colonialism (cf. Harrison, 1992; Nisbet, 1972; Telfer, 2002); a point that is briefly revisited in the next section.

7.1.5 Reaching the 'top'

[“Ek dam ramro”](#) Dorchi exclaimed. A Nepali phrase meaning “very, very good” preceded Dorchi's description of standing on Mt. Everest's summit: “At the top without oxygen, it was so tall. What to tell you the feeling was always good.” The allure of Mt. Everest continually attracts mountaineers worldwide. Decisions to attempt to stand on its summit are inextricably linked with the meanings attached to climbing and successfully reaching the top of the world. Just as foreign mountaineers chase their Everest dreams, the motivations for Sherpas to climb are increasingly related to notions of pride and conquest. Mingma suggested that Sherpas feel proud to stand on the world's tallest mountain. “That's why it's good for me too,” he confirmed. Many Sherpas confessed that they took on their first few pursuits as a personal challenge or goal. Ang Phurba, recalled, “That [first] time I don't look the money, just the top.

That time I'm thinking just one time, one day I climb the Everest." Rinchen reminisced, "First time top is important for life. Important for life, record also, that time I'm very happy. And next many times climbing is my job." These emergent storylines disrupt previous research understandings of money being the key driver for Sherpas' participation in mountaineering expeditions (Bott, 2009; Ortner, 1997, 1999). Instead, Sherpas' stories have begun to converge with those of their foreign (primarily Western) clients in terms of cultural meaning and identity (Beck, 1992; Neale, 2002), and are enmeshed with narratives of risk, a point discussed further in the "Risk-taking as Projects of Self" section.

As described in early British mountaineering discourses, acts of climbing were used to demonstrate a physical superiority (Hansen, 1995; Holt, 2008). Similarly, many Sherpas yearned to build a "name" for themselves and to be recognised as "famous," which ultimately distinguished them from others. Phuri admitted, "They will give money, but also name." Dorchi disclosed that one of the reasons he pursued mountaineering was to see if he could make a name for himself and his family. He explained, "...it's something my grandparents did not have." Dorchi sought to transition from an unknown family to one of "big name, or *Ming gripu*," which translates to local recognition among other communities and villages (Neale, 2002, p. 16). Neale's (2002) research reveals that for some Sherpas, local recognition made a lifetime of work worthwhile. For other Sherpas, however, there is the aspiration to be acknowledged globally – as world-class mountaineers.

In our conversations, the Climbing Sherpas often defined themselves in relation to the summit of Mt. Everest and other prestigious pursuits of infamous mountains. For instance, many of the Sherpas tallied the number of their successful mountain ascents, which is portrayed in the video montage in the first few minutes of the documentary film. Kami boasted, "Sixteen for the

Everest, three summits for the K2, ten summits to Cho Oyu from the Tibet side, four times the summit of Makalu. Almost my 8000 meters almost finished. Only two left, Lhotse and Annapurna I.” Kami discussed his desire to reach the summit of each of the world’s tallest mountains – the fourteen independent mountains that stand over 8000 meters above sea level. With only two more mountains to successfully ascend, Kami could hold the unique title of summiting all of the world’s 8000-meter peaks; to date, this accomplishment has only been achieved by thirty-four mountaineers, a statistic that includes two Nepali-Sherpa climbers (Jurgakski, 2017). Da Gelje also referred to this world record. He exclaimed, “[For the] 8000 meters, I got a summit [on] Everest seven times, Lhotse one time, Cho Oyu three times, Kangchenjunga eight times, and Dhaulagiri one time, Pumori one time.”

Understanding the conquest of mountains as sport rather than solely as work contributes to illuminating the complexities of Sherpas’ stories and how negotiations of their place within mountaineering challenges the relationship between “us” and “them” in these spaces (Frohlick, 2003). Tashi exclaimed, “I already have done thirty-five expeditions. Everest, I went fifteen times, but nine times I’ve done the summit. It’s my dream when I’ve done [it] ten times, then I stop. If I done it ten times, I also might be counted as the famous one.” Here, Tashi’s use of the word “dream” seems to signify aspirations of success. This could be financial success, but also dreams of participation in global economies of pleasure, recreation, and mobility. In some of the Sherpas’ stories, it became apparent that summit success secured future climbing opportunities beyond the ranges of Nepal. For instance, as mentioned earlier Kami’s brother’s eighteen successful summits on Mt. Everest led to new mobilities (e.g., he now holds residency in the United States, climbs other mountains internationally, etc.). This was also the case for Tashi

Sherpa. After his tenth summit on Mt. Everest in the Spring of 2016 he was sponsored to travel to the United States and pursue the peak of Mt. Denali in Alaska.

Big names like the late [Babu Chiri](#), [Ang Rita](#), and [Apa](#) are increasingly acknowledged within international mountaineering arenas; Mu and Nepal's (2015) research, however, suggests that many Climbing Sherpas' achievements still go unrecognised. Though the more experienced adventure tourists and trekkers within their study described Sherpas as indispensable, the majority of research participants revered foreign mountaineers for their accomplishments (and the risks they took) much more than they did Sherpas, referring to their roles on the mountain as "supportive" (Mu & Nepal, 2015, p. 8). As the Sherpas of this study have articulated their own mountaineering capabilities and successes, Mu and Nepal's finding raises questions of race, class, and colonialism in mountaineering.

Although the scope of my research did not explore international perceptions of Climbing Sherpas' abilities and achievements, the ways in which Sherpas' told their stories – often unsolicited, leading with their summit counts – provided insight into ways they negotiate their identities as the "Others" who climb. As part of his own negotiation, Tashi sent me an email in June just before he and his fellow Sherpa teammates, Nima Tenji and Tenzeeng, became the first Nepali-Sherpa mountaineers to successfully summit Mt. Denali via the West Rib on June 21, 2016. It read: "We are climbing [Mt. Denali] with the aim to spread the news in the world that we Sherpa are not just porter to help the foreigners climb the mountain with grand success" (T. Sherpa, personal communication, April 3, 2016). These findings coincide with Frohlick's (2003) discussion of Babu Chiri Sherpa, who was regarded as an "Everest climber" rather than a "world-class mountaineer" (despite countless other international mountain summits) by the predominately white-Western mountain community at a "peak bagging" panel discussion (p.

537-8). Where “tourist” is recognised as a cultural category based on ethnic, racial, or class distinctions, so too is the category of “mountaineer” by the logic of specific western mountaineering discourses (Frohlick, 2003; Hepburn, 2002). Thus, it appears that future research must directly engage the intersectionalities (race, class, gender, etc.) of mountaineers to deepen scholarship (cf. Frohlick, 2003; Guggleberger, 2015) around what it means to be a mountaineer within these global playscapes,

Ideas of identity and meaning are enacted and practiced within mountaineering and adventure tourism industries not only by international climbers, but also by Sherpas who are proud to reach the top of the world and wish to be recognised for it. Within each of these summit ascents are notions of conquest, and thereby tracings of colonialism. In Guggleberger’s (2015) words, “the simple existence of the mountain challenges the individual’s will to explore and discover the terrain and to make it to the top” (p. 601). However, it is important to consider that historically, Sherpas were not climbing mountains prior to the influence of international mountaineers and tourists. Mountaineering is not rooted in indigenous values, and in the Sherpa context, it was understood as religiously problematic (Ortner, 1999). As the race to the top of the world began and tourism development became the answer to socioeconomic concerns, the colonialisng of Nepal, its land and people, commenced, thus shifting traditional values of the nation.

Indeed, notions of conquest (like bagging peaks) in Nepal may have been introduced by the Western world (Hansen, 1995; Guggleberger, 2015); however, Climbing Sherpas continue to prove themselves to be skilled mountaineers in their own right. Furthermore, while many Sherpas are dependent on the revenues introduced and sustained by mountaineering and adventure tourism, the development of tourism has arguably led to their growth, successes,

privileges, and mobilities, which continue to be inextricably tied to these respective industries. Now setting the bar for climbing achievements through setting records, Climbing Sherpas, without whom Nepal's mountaineering industry would cease to exist, are deserving of increased recognition on a global scale.

7.2 Encountering 'Death': Narratives of Risk, Strength, and Fear

Intersecting the Sherpas' narratives of development, conquest, and pride is the complex through-line: "Encountering Death". The Climbing Sherpas' depicted fragile and precarious situations with which they often engage in their heavily tourism-based livelihoods. Sherpas' adaptability to high-altitudes contributes to their strength on the mountain, however the risk of bodily harm or death, calls attention to their physiological and mental capacities and thereby their performances of strength and courage as strategies to minimise fear. Moreover, confrontations with death, or the idea of it can induce such fears. In this section, I analyse the Sherpas' stories about death as they have been represented in each of the thirteen conversations presented in Chapter Five. Drawing on existential thought as expressed in the works of existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (1980) and sociologist Peter Berger (1967), I consider Yalom's ideas of "boundary situations," or what Berger describes as "fateful moments" or "marginal situations." However, I first examine the risk trajectories of Sherpas, including risk-taking as contemporary projects of *self*.

7.2.1 Risky business?

Risk, perceptions of risk, and mitigations of risk, have been important subjects in the study of tourism (cf. George, 2003; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Mu & Nepal, 2015). There has, however, been limited research that explores risk as perceived by Sherpas, or more specifically the risk-reward trade-off for high-altitude workers. A notable exception is Bott's (2009) work. In

her explorations of risk, Bott considers how Sherpas' narratives of risk relate to those of their Western clients in terms of cultural meaning, identity, and self-making – a discussion that is further explored below. Risk can be conceptualised as “actual” risk, or the likelihood of an event, and “perceived” risk, which reflects an awareness of dangers situations and often contributes to the appeal of adventurous pursuits like mountaineering (Bently & Page, 2008; Carter, 2006; Robinson, 2004). Findings from this study reveal Sherpas' encounters with both perceived and actual risk while working on the mountainside.

Risk is an inherent factor in Sherpas' working conditions. Nepal, situated along the Himalayas (the boundary of two massive tectonic plates) is a country fraught with geophysical and geomorphological features that make it extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and mountain hazards including unpredictable storms, landslides, earthquakes, and avalanches (Bjønness, 1986). Global warming further destabilises these high-mountain environments through ice melt and new weather patterns, contributing to their unpredictability (Fischer, Kääb, Huggel, & Noetzli, 2006; Ritter, Fiebig, & Muhar, 2012). Avalanches in the Himalayas are known for frequency and destructive potential, but have not been considered as a major natural threat in much of the disaster research and literature (Ganju & Dimri, 2004). Ganju and Dimri (2004) argue that this is in part due to the limited interactions humans have with high-mountain environments. However, as was established in previous sections of this discussion, the adventure tourism industry of Nepal continues to draw mountaineers and trekkers (and thus Sherpas as guides and porters) onto high peaks. Consequently, interactions with these mountain environments are ever increasing, ultimately contributing to the potential for disaster in the Himalayas.

Many Sherpas emphasised the devastating nature of Himalayan avalanches as they told stories of camps, friends, colleagues, and clients being swept away. Tashi recalled the tragic 2012 [Manaslu](#) avalanche (cf. Arnette, 2012; Marolt, 2012), recounting:

All the Camp III was swept. The avalanche came so fast you know, like winds maybe in seconds... I get [to] Camp III to survey [the] avalanche. There were thirty-one peoples. Immediately out of there I get nineteen alive, but most of them have broke the neck or most of them are hurt. Then twelve is missing.

Tashi described his tireless rescue attempt, unearthing buried bodies lost beneath the snow.

Additional risks negotiated by Sherpas while working on the mountain include: the chance of slipping off a cliff or into crevasses, being caught in storms, running out of oxygen, and consequently suffering from altitude sickness. These events illustrate the risky nature of mountaineering, exposing Sherpas to hazardous mountain conditions that threaten their lives. For example, Phuri explained, “My last expedition in 1988, I went to Tibet. I went to [Cho Oyu](#). I almost died there. I fell into a crevasse. There was heavy snow above and I didn’t see the crevasse, and then I fell into it.” The depths of the crevasse left Phuri feeling “very scared” as he negotiated the potential loss of his own life. This example corresponds with Ebert and Robertson’s (2013) work, which suggests that “loss” is a fundamental element to understanding risk. The notion of loss also resonates with Kaji’s retelling of the [2014 Mt. Everest avalanche](#). He reflected, “I’m lucky to turn back ten minutes before. So many people were lost.” Here, Kaji points out that there was a significant physical loss of people due to an unpredictable avalanche.

Throughout my conversations, the Sherpas continually referred to the avalanche on Mt. Everest on April 18th 2014. Although many of the stories reflected the reports I heard and read about in news and media outlets (Krakauer, 2014; Prettyman, 2014), the visceral realities of risk

and its consequences were felt and further understood through the Sherpas' first-hand retellings. Many of the Sherpas were working or had friends and family on Mt. Everest that particular day. However, Mingma was the only Climbing Sherpa I interviewed who was physically harmed in this particular avalanche. He described being rescued and then evacuated to a Kathmandu hospital with a fractured hand and the need for stitches on his head. Ang Phurba lamented the loss of his brother as he described his efforts to convince his brother not to climb Mt. Everest that year. He shared, "That time I was in [Makalu](#). And that time my brother, I said to he, 'Maybe you come, go with me to Makalu'... But he's not agreeing with me and he said, 'I go Everest.'"

In Da Gelje's recounting of the 2014 avalanche, he described the hazardous nature of the site where the avalanche occurred; an unavoidable section of the commercial climbing route up to the Mt. Everest summit. While drawing an imaginary map with his hands, Da Gelje explained:

This is [Icefall](#), this is Nuptse, this is Lola. So last year, the [Icefall Doctor](#) opened the route like that. And when the avalanche came here, people died here. All the Sherpas climbing with loads go through this place [Khumbu Icefall]. From here cracks ice and then people died. Sixteen⁵⁷ people died.

Many of the Climbing Sherpas referenced the danger of the Icefall, located at the head of the Khumbu glacier. Due to treacherous crevasses, ever-shifting ice blocks, and the hanging [seracs](#), the Khumbu Icefall is considered one of the most dangerous sections of the well-traveled commercial route on the south side of Mt. Everest. Interestingly, some of the Sherpas believed that many of the deaths in 2014 could have been avoided, suggesting the route was poorly planned due to the newly hired Icefall Doctors; it was secured too far left.

⁵⁷ The exact number of people that died due to this accident has been disputed. Within their stories, some of the Sherpas have referenced sixteen and others have claimed seventeen Sherpa and Nepali climbers died.

Nevertheless, Da Gelje pointed out that “all the Sherpas, climbing with loads go through this place.” Certainly international mountaineers, who climb as part of commercial expeditions, also pass through the Khumbu Icefall. However, those whose lives are in greatest jeopardy are the Icefall Doctors who diligently fix ropes and repair routes in the Khumbu Icefall, and the Climbing Sherpas who repeatedly carry loads of gear and equipment across this precarious section eight to thirty times per expedition (Bisharat, 2016; Peedom, 2015).

Several of the Sherpas spoke to this repetitive act of risk-taking. For instance, while furiously waving a magazine up and down Rinchen exclaimed, “Up-down-up-down we do ... we [go] [South Col](#) over near 7800 meters. Up-down-up-down... I [go] up-down in one expedition, maybe twenty times the Icefall.” In this particular situation, Rinchen was working as a Climbing Sherpa and High-altitude Camera Specialist for a Malaysian television group who required large equipment, including a 35kg generator, to be hoisted through the Icefall and up the mountain: equipment insignificant to the sport. This scenario highlights the complex dynamics of risk, which according to Bott (2009) are affected by the “economic power imbalance” implicit in the relationship between commercial expeditions and their hired support (e.g., Climbing Sherpas and porters) (p. 288). Therein exists an assumption that Sherpas like Rinchen should be expected to take on the additional risk and physical encumbrance of transporting extraneous equipment up the mountainside.

Ortner (1997) claims that indeed there was always a power differential, but also a profound difference of meaning that contributed to the narratives of risk on the mountain. “For the *sahibs* [Western mountaineers], the risk of death is what makes the sport glorious... ordinary life pales before the intensity of mountaineering; for the Sherpas, mountaineering is simply the best-paying way to support ordinary life” (Ortner, 1997, p. 140). Ortner articulates that the

disjunction between *sahibs* and Sherpas' motives, and the imbalance of power in mountaineering, has characterised and constructed Western (and I add international climbers') perceptions and treatment of Sherpas in relation to the levels of mortal risk.

Correspondingly, financial incentives compel Sherpas to assume greater responsibilities, and consequently an increased level of risk as we learned in Rinchen's case. Ang Phurba confessed that the lure of "better money" was what led his brother to work on Mt. Everest that fateful day in 2014. Dorchi, a retired Climbing Sherpa, recalled:

Thirty kilograms while climbing up, and some carried forty, fifty kilos while descending down...due to greed and money, some [Sherpas] would often carry one hundred kilograms. They [Clients] use to pay in American dollars, and if they pay \$20, \$50, or \$100 then people would carry double the weight they usually could.

Dorchi reflected on how the need for income contributed to the sizeable loads he and other Sherpas agreed to carry up and down the dangerous terrains. These findings coincide with some of the insights that emerged from Bott's (2009) interviews with Sherpas, who related their own risk-taking directly to earning money. One Sherpa participant from her study claimed, "...it's like a game with risk. It's a challenge to risk life and I'm happy to take the risks because of money" (p. 296). Here money is again highlighted as a key force driving Climbing Sherpas to participate in an industry that so often places their lives at risk.

7.2.2 Risk-taking as projects of 'self'

Notions of pride and conquest, as discussed in the "Reaching the 'Top'" section of this discussion, support Bott's (2009) findings that Sherpas are ready to take risks not only for commercial expeditions and their monetary benefits, but also for individual gain and meaning. Mountaineers often acknowledge the risks associated with their pursuits as acceptable and "part

of the game” (Ebert and Robertson, 2013, p. 47) and thus, climbing becomes a form of “deep play” (Geertz, 1973). As was discussed in the previous section (and within much of Ortner’s work) Climbing Sherpas’ motives to play the game were formerly perceived as being largely tied to moneymaking efforts. However, Bott (2009) and Frohlick (2003) suggest that this claim oversimplifies Sherpas’ positions on the mountain, and reinforces the problematic tendency in tourism studies to render tourism’s “hosts” as static and immobile. The findings from my study support that Sherpas also experience mountaineering as a form of deep play, as it is understood by Jeremy Bentham and within Geertz’s (1973) work. Mountaineering involves stakes that are so high it does not appear worthwhile to play; yet people play anyhow. The chance of an accident, or even death, contributes to the meanings and personal insight derived from the sport (Ortner, 1997).

Indeed some Climbing Sherpas engage in bodily risk because of its perceived meaning and implications for identity and self-making. In these instances, climbing can be understood as an individualised “project of self,” which is connected to the reproduction of social identities through risk performance (Bott, 2009; Palmer, 2004; Rhinehart, 2003). As discussed in Elsrud’s (2001) work on behaviours of backpackers, acts of risk-taking are used as tools for, and symbols of, distinction between *self* and the *self* of others. Within their experiences of risk on Mt. Everest, the Climbing Sherpas’ distinguished themselves through interconnecting stories of risk, pride, and conquest. To illuminate this nexus, I return to Tashi’s discussion about summiting Mt.

Everest ten times:

My dreams when I’ve done ten times then I stop, I’m thinking that. If I done it ten times, I also might be counted as the famous one...My plan is that last year [2014], that if I’ve

done [the summit ten times], then I'd stop, and after I *have to* go guiding, just basecamp and below.

At the time of our interview (March 24, 2015) Tashi had already successfully summited Mt. Everest nine times. As a result of the 2014 avalanche he did not achieve his dream, and therefore planned to attempt the summit again during the spring 2015 climbing season. This also proved to be another failed attempt due to the April 25th, 2015 earthquake.

Tashi's mention of stopping and his vision of "guiding below basecamp" illuminates understandings of the risks involved with his high-altitude mountaineering job, while the disastrous avalanche and earthquake that stopped him from reaching his goal further emphasise the risky and potentially fatal nature of his continued attempts. Conflicting with these risks however, were Tashi's desire to stand on the summit ten times to be recognised as famous, his decision to climb Mt. Everest again in the Spring of 2016 (which was successful), and his eventual travel to the USA in June 2016 to climb Mt. Denali. Emerging from Tashi's risk-taking were tales of meaning that illuminate a process of identity construction to distinguish himself from other Sherpa mountaineers. This finding aligns with Elsrud's (2001) notion of participants' tales of risk and adventure, whereby novelty and difference were storylines told in their own efforts to narrate identity.

Individualised projects of self, and meaning-making schemes are discussed by Ortner (1999): she concludes that it is the paying climbers who are fascinated with the meanings they derive from mountaineering. However, she is explicit in her claim that for Sherpas there is "nothing noble about the risk at all" (p. 139). Stories highlighted throughout my findings challenge this claim. Sherpas are increasingly being acknowledged, locally and globally, for their own adventures and independent mediations of bodily risk; the death of the renowned [Babu Chiri](#)

[Sherpa](#) is one such example. In my conversation with Rinchen, he discussed Babu's final climb, and believed that Babu's death occurred during another world record attempt. In mountaineering spheres, Babu set himself apart from other climbers through his engagement with excessive physical danger and the performance of extreme risks. In addition to the recognition Babu received from the Climbing Sherpas with whom I spoke, Babu has a remembrance memorial at Chukpa Lare⁵⁸ and is known widely for two world records: the fastest Mt. Everest summit from basecamp along the Southeast ridge (16 hours and 56 minutes), and spending twenty-one hours on the summit without supplemental oxygen (Everest History, 2004a; Guinness, 2017; Mu & Nepal, 2015). Sherpas' narratives of risk-taking for record-setting achievements advance adventure tourism discourses, which recognise danger as a new element of the "tourist gaze" (Bott, 2009, p. 289). Carter (2006) indicates that adventure tourists intentionally seek out fear, thrills, and risk in the pursuit of novel experiences. These aspects of risk strengthen the appeal of mountain pursuits for Sherpas as well as adventure tourists and mountaineers.

7.2.3 Performing strengths

Dawa recalled working as a porter for Sir Edmund Hillary's expeditions: "[a]t that time *we followed* Hillary with duffels as big as a huge man. We could run as fast as [we could] without any load. We were young and strong." While there are inherent risks involved in mountaineering, the mitigation of such risks lies heavily within the strength – be it physical, intellectual, psychological, or emotional – of those who partake in mountain pursuits. As such, Sherpas' value as guides and porters on the mountain is greatly dependent on a perception of the strength they possess. Lakpa described his entry into mountaineering when he was recruited to help rescue a missing woman. Though at the time he lacked formal training, he recalled, "I was a

⁵⁸ Chukpa Lare is a sacred memorial site located just above 4,200 meters, which dedicated to honour the lives of fallen climbers on Mt. Everest (See for example: [Saikaly, 2014](#))

strong man, so they took me along.” Throughout their stories, personal strength was a defining factor of the Sherpas’ capabilities on the mountain. Dorchi claimed, “I was not educated at that time, but I was strong.” Lhakpa Dorji described how his strength contributed to increased responsibilities: “I’m so strong at that time. *They chose me* [to climb] above the Camp II.” Authors like Bhattarai and colleagues (2005) and Ortner (1999) indicate that Sherpas’ adaptability to high-altitudes contributes to their physical strength, which positions them as ideal employees for mountaineering and trekking expeditions.

Sherpas’ constructions of themselves as “strong characters” (Goffman, 1967. p. 229) reflect the early twentieth-century representations that circulated in the West, such as “Tiger[s] of the snow” or superhuman, possessive of unlimited endurance (Adams, 1996, p.75; Neale, 2002). Adams (1996) points out that these qualities of strength, however, were often underpinned by a dynamic of subservience. Although there is no doubt that physical strength plays a critical role in negotiating the risks of mountaineering, it is important to acknowledge that these narratives of strength and what it means to be Sherpa have been jointly created between the Sherpas and “their purchasing observers” (Adam, 1996, p. 73). I return to this point at the end of this section, briefly highlighting Goffman’s (1959) understandings of performance.

In addition to physical strength, avoidance of accidents (and ultimately death) on the Nepali mountainside is navigated by Sherpas’ intellectual strength through the acquisition of relevant and local mountain knowledge. Rinchen illuminated the importance of local knowledge and experience in mountaineering. He explained, “[Khumbu Icefall Doctors](#) and me are friends. We are everyday near camp talking. He [the Icefall doctor] says ‘please this way is very danger’...” Rinchen’s personal connections with experienced climbers and Icefall Doctors were critical in negotiating the perils of Mt. Everest safely, thereby contributing to the actions he took

and the instructions he gave his clients. Additionally, Sherpas considered basic climbing skills indispensable, and at times were imperative to survival. Lakpa described,

The avalanche came, and then I think, ‘Oh this is an avalanche so I have to get out quick.’ In the training, we do some avalanche training, how to manage to get out... I was able to jump on the left side, that’s why I survived.

Within their stories, the Sherpas talked about the importance of training as part of their own expedition preparations, but also advised others of its significance. “Being an instructor, I always promote training. You know without knowledge, without skills, without educations, it’s difficult. It’s a danger job... training is to minimise. You cannot lose accident, but we minimise,” Lakpa claimed. Da Gelje urged young aspiring Climbing Sherpas to invest in basic mountaineering training. “After training, no danger,” he claimed. Lakpa and De Gelje’s words draw a correlation between competence and the perception of safety and risk, a finding reflected in much of the mountaineering and adventure tourism literature (Carter, 2006; Martin & Priest, 1986; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Pomfret, 2006).

Within the mountaineering and adventure tourism literature, the level of risk is said to decrease when competence is high. However, the commercialisation of adventurous activities like mountaineering has begun to complicate this basic logic (Carter, 2006). Adventure tourists increasingly hire professional guides for their expertise and competence as a strategy to reduce risks, which ultimately contributes to their participation in the adventurous, but dangerous activity (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Mu & Nepal, 2015; Pomfret, 2011). Guides can be understood as responsible leaders, guardians, and trustees of clients’ safety (Beedie, 2003; Carnicelli-Filho, 2013; Pond, 1993). International and Sherpa guides lead paying clients up a predetermined route on Mt. Everest, while additional Sherpas carry their equipment and food supplies. Here, client

risk, or at least the perception of risk, is marshalled by the presence of strong and capable guides and presumptions about the touristic nature of the Everest endeavour.

Routes and safety lines set by Climbing Sherpas can also lead to a false sense of security whereby even experienced international climbers become less meticulous in their process. For instance, Tashi explained the consequences of overlooking rudimentary skills required for climbing Mt. Everest, like securing one's harness to a safety line of rope while ascending or descending the mountain. "Sometimes the mountaineers, some do not realise they have not clipped the safety and mistakenly he is dead." Furthermore, Tashi revealed, "Some is new..." as he described times when clients come to Nepal with limited mountaineering experience and understandings of the actual risks involved in summiting Mt. Everest. As "Climbing Sherpas," Kaji explained, "We *have to* help all the persons. We *have to* carry oxygen. Sometimes, we *have to* give the training at basecamp."

In addition to holding position titles of "guide," as mentioned earlier Sherpas are racially, and often uncritically, idealised as strong and courageous climbers. Thus, understandings of risk become even more complex as we consider the ways in which the Sherpa identity – manifested in representations of strength and courage – is constructed and performed. Goffman (1959) explained when individuals encounter others they attempt to control the impression that others will form of them by constructing a presentation of their self. Often referring to these as "front stage" performances, Goffman (1959) suggests individuals use expressive equipment like appearance and manner, adhering to a set of social expectations or a script that already exists.

Goffman's ideas around performance can be used to understand Sherpas' experiences on the mountain as they navigate risks. For instance, Tashi explained what he believes to be preconceived notions of Sherpas held by international climbers:

All of the Euro countries, all the places know that these Sherpa people are born in this altitude place. ‘They know to challenge for the mountains. They have the energy for the challenge for the mountain.’ And then the European peoples they recommend for the Sherpas. Then [from] there on, we all have the profession of climbing.

Tashi’s narrative highlights the innate strength and aptitude for the mountains that Sherpas’ are believed to possess, including the ability to acclimatise to high altitude environments.

Correspondingly, Rinchen portrayed a manner of courage in his retelling of his first climb on Mt. Everest: “Not scary, I do. My first climb it was not so danger, I am strong.” Scripts of extraordinary abilities, strength, and courage continue to circulate among international climbers, but are also re-storied in Sherpas’ conversations and through their performances of strength.

Accordingly, Sherpas identities are constructed between the interplay of Sherpas and Westerners, and their relationships to one another (Adams, 1996; Bott, 2009)

Furthermore, Tashi’s statement indicates that these scripts create assumptions that are fixed to racial and ethnic identities, and contribute to problematic, grand narratives whereby “being Sherpa” seemingly qualifies an individual to work on the mountain. Conversely, Phuri clarified that extreme adaptability to altitude is not inherent to all Sherpas. “The people from lower parts, when they go, they sometimes die due to height,” he described, stressing the potentially fatal consequences for Sherpas from the lower valleys (e.g., Lower Solu) who choose to work at higher altitudes. Phuri’s narrative challenges the circulating representations of Sherpa, but also reveals a connection to geography; an insight that calls for more attention to Sherpas’ patterns of mobility, which are increasingly changing (as mentioned in the “Changing Fortunes” section).

Lastly, contrary to what one might expect when considering the integral role of Sherpas as guides, their career trajectories did not always include a great deal of formal training. “That time is no training school, nothing you know?” Da Gelje confessed. Dorchi recalled, “I went to Everest in 1992 from the Tibet side. I didn’t know how to wear the ice-shoe, the [crampon](#). I didn’t even know how to repel either...I learned to go up and down by myself.” Narratives like Da Gelje and Dorchi’s were common among the older, retired Sherpas, many of whom remembered moments of “learning to climb” or having “never used” equipment prior to their first Mt. Everest ascents. These storylines provide further insight into Sherpas’ identity constructions and, importantly, how risks are managed on the mountainside. However, as Da Gelje qualified, times are certainly different now; many of the younger Sherpas discussed attending training facilities, and the building of Phortse’s very own [Khumbu Climbing Center](#) is nearing completion.

7.2.4 Fear and death anxiety

As previously discussed, there is a widespread perception of Sherpas as “superhuman” with regard to their physical capability at high altitudes. While they possess a tremendous level of strength and adeptness for the mountain environment, they are also invariably human, and as such are equally susceptible to human emotions, including feelings of fear and anxiety when faced with situations that pose extreme risk or danger (as any other mountaineer might be). This human side of Sherpas is seemingly one which the industry (e.g., mountaineering outfitters) as well as the Sherpas themselves, strive to suppress from their public image and identity; perhaps in part because the perception of “strength” plays a critical role in Sherpas’ employability. In Carnicelli-Filho’s (2013) work around “emotion management” of adventure guides, he proposes “a guide who loses the ability to manage emotions such as fear and anxiety can be seen as

inadequate for real or perceived risk activities” (Carnicelli-Filho, 2013, p. 193). This would, of course, have major implications for business prospects for Sherpas as professional guides and experts, whose industry relies on clients placing their trust and lives in Sherpas’ hands. Therefore, Sherpas as well as the mountaineering industry itself often bolster the performance of emotional strength on the mountainside.

As discussed in the review of the adventure tourism literature, when risk is perceived as being higher than competence and skill, fear and anxiety ensue (Carter, 2006; Mu & Nepal, 2015). Fear feels dangerous (cf. Buda, 2015), and if not properly managed can itself add increased risk and danger to an already dangerous situation. Therefore, a large part of Sherpas’ roles on the mountainside is, in a sense, to minimise risk through the mitigation of fear experienced by their clients and themselves (Carnicelli-Filho, 2013). Effective management of fear becomes a necessity in an industry situated in dangerous environments where bodily risks can easily lead to fatalities.

“Dangerous! Mountain here is too danger,” Lhakpa Gyaljen said adamantly. Da Gelje recalled the fear that accompanies this danger as he described one of his first expeditions:

When I’m climbing to Camp III, first time. Very, very, very difficult. I am very afraid...Before, I was never a climbing guide there. Very danger. ‘How do I go down?’ Very difficult for my body and my mind. So just I’m thinking after that, ‘Okay not only me. I have many friends, many people here. What are they doing? I must also follow that.’[That’s] my thinking.

As Da Gelje inwardly manages his emotions and thoughts, he watches fellow climbers to perform the necessary skills to appear outwardly competent and capable. Similarly, Dorchi recalled a slow and dangerous climb he endured with limited vision. “My eyes were swollen

from 6:00pm onward.⁵⁹ I couldn't shout or cry. It's a shame to cry." The deliberate acts of Da Gelje and Dorchi can be understood as "emotional work", which is used to actively control the degree and quality of emotions or feelings to achieve a particular impression (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). Drawing on Goffman's understandings, Elsrud (2001) explained, "a strong character is not generated through facing the risk whining, shivering, and crying," rather, risk and fear are managed with courage, composure, and "gameness" (p. 603).

Beneath the surface of these performances lie narratives of fear and anxiety, which are experienced and felt by Sherpas as viscerally as they are by their foreign clients. For instance, in answering a question about what his job was like, Phuri let out a gasp and proclaimed, "It's a scary one, man! I'm scared, along with the foreign climbers." As he continued to describe his push towards the Mt. Everest summit, Phuri depicted his experience of feeling fear. "It's very dangerous. Look, we *have to* put the ladders [over the crevasses] to cross. Due to fear sometimes our body was a little bit shaky too." According to Buda (2015), "Through fear, danger can be identified, and consequently dangerous things or situations that cause fear can be detected...Fear is embodied: muscles tighten; heart races; pulse quickens; breath shortens; eyes widen" (p. 46).

Dorchi described some of the techniques Climbing Sherpas use to eliminate these feelings. "While climbing Everest and [Makalu](#), only tiny ropes are used...We were not allowed to look down, and even while descending I came backwards." Additionally, Kami explained that this sense of fear wanes in time: "The first time I was a little bit scared, but then after that... more and more acclimatise, more technical, more experience, and now I'm not scared." As Kami pointed out, experience can dissipate some of the fears felt by Sherpas, as well as increase their chances of survival.

⁵⁹ The painful symptoms Dorchi described are a result of *snow blindness*.

Fear must also be navigated off the mountain, when Sherpas return to their home lives. From my conversations it became apparent that families, particularly the women, do not often hear about the dramatic and dangerous side of the mountaineering industry. Da Gelje admitted, “So, my wife don’t know, she don’t know...the danger [Laughs].” Wives of the Climbing Sherpas had limited understandings of the kinds of risks their husbands were facing on a daily basis, suggesting a performance of strength and courage is upheld even within their own households. However, of the family members who were well aware of the inherent risks, they expressed their own fears, frequently encouraging their husbands to leave the mountaineering industry. Kami lamented, “My wife, and my family, my mom, everybody say, ‘please now stop.’” Sherpas’ narratives indicated emotions of fear as pervasive, and at times “heart- and gut-wrenchingly present and personal” (Smith, Davidson, Cameron, & Bondi, 2009, p. 3; see also Buda, 2015). This became evident in the way stories were told, through humour and at times complete avoidance of subjects and topics that might be perceived as “personal” or “sensitive.”

When discussing their own brushes with death, many of the Sherpas retreated to laughter, rather than expressing vulnerability and fear. “My last expedition I went to [Cho Oyu](#). I almost died there [Laughs].” Phuri laughed ironically about the thought of almost dying as he relayed the story of his last expedition to me and his family. Later in our conversation, Phuri suggested that his position in the crevasse did make him fear for his life, but laughter accompanied his original narration. In many of the Sherpas’ stories, laughter and humour replaced fear, sorrow, or disbelief, reactions that felt rather incongruous. For instance, Da Gelje recounted his rescue attempt of a dying Russian mountaineer. “No move. No life. So I give... CPR, breath to him... Many times I do that [Laughs].” While erupting in a bout of laughter, he continued and confirmed, “No, no, not coming back.” Within stories about death, laughter seemingly serves as

a natural nervous response to the uncomfortable-nonpareil and inevitable nature of death (Berger, 1967; Stone, 2009; Yalom, 1980) – a mere attempt to silence fear.

In Kaji's interview, I inquired about his family. He responded, "I have only dad, I don't have a mom. She was dead in 2007." The opportunity to dig deeper presented itself but my intuition, and perhaps my own experiences with death, prevented me from asking more about his mother. Lewis (2000) suggests this lack of reflection on death is indeed linked to the fact that death has been largely removed from our modern lives. As it is difficult to engage in talking about death, it is further suppressed from the public domain and becomes "muted" or "bad luck" (Lewis, 2000, p. 60; see also Lee, 2002; Stone, 2009; Walter, 1991). Ortner (1997) considers these acts of silencing death, where displaying emotion towards it on the mountain is looked down upon. Instead of recognising death as inevitable, it is deemed a taboo subject (Lee, 2002; Stone, 2009; Walter 1991).

The "fear" – and subsequently the laughter, silence, or avoidance – expressed by Sherpas can be understood as "death anxiety," "mortal terror," or "fear of finitude," all which speak to the awareness of the fragility of our material existence (Yalom, 1980, p. 42). According to Yalom (2008), the concept of mortality has haunted individuals from the beginning of history, and the fear of death often manifests indirectly, "...masqueraded as another psychological symptom; other individuals experience an explicit and conscious stream of anxiety about death (Yalom, 2008, p. 284). "My father. My father was very sick, and he died, six months after... So, I have it VERY difficult in the village." A tear rolled down Da Gelje's cheek, and emotion pervaded his speech as he described his father's passing, and the grave situation he and his family were left with; at this point in the interview, I turned the camera off. When Da Gelje returned to his seat to continue the interview he demanded with a chuckle that I ask him easier

questions, and the subject of death was quickly left behind. Although death is slowly making its way back into social consciousness (cf. Lee 2002, 2004), Stone (2009) suggests that breaking our modern silence (including the use of humour) on death “compromises a defence mechanism for individuals against their inevitable passing” (p. 26).

7.2.5 Boundary situations as point zero

Death remains the great extrinsic facet of mortal existence, an unavoidable condition that must be addressed (Berger, 1927). Sherpas’ confrontations with mortality are propelled by urgent experiences or what Yalom (1980) identifies as “boundary situations,” which include, but are not limited to, one’s own death (Yalom, 1980, p. 8). For instance, Lhakpa Dorji illustrated his boundary situation, describing a time when clients left him stranded on the South Summit of Mt. Everest:

They [the clients] leave me behind, and they run before, down. Then I am alone... I’m so tired and I get the ice in my goggle, the sweat. When I almost get to the last camp I couldn’t see, then I fell down. I fell down from that. It’s about 250m, about nearly 300m I fell down, like rolling down. I don’t know how long I was dead. I thought [it’s] like a dream, like when I woke up I had no goggles. I had no ice axe... Then after that I get to [camp at] [South Col](#) at 6:30pm. Then other members, about three members in the South Col, they don’t care me. They didn’t know where I was... When I was there I am so cold, I no can walk that time. I tried to make a cup of ice and tried to make the water. I couldn’t eat anything, I didn’t drink the water. The whole night I couldn’t sleep.

Similarly, Lhakpa Gyaljen reflected on his own boundary situation – unpredictable mountain circumstances that led to a stroke induced by the cold, and eventually paralysis on the right side of his body. He explained,

The group leader was a Tibetan guy named Nima Tsheri, he asked me to take the satellite to summit and said he would pay me 20,000 Chinese Fegok [similar to Yen]... I didn't know that something like this would happen. The satellite was small. As small as the lid of a pot, so I carried that, my clothes, food and went.

In Giddens' (1991) words, "Death becomes point zero: it is nothing more or less than the moment at which human control over human existence finds an outer limit" (p. 162). During moments of confronting death on the mountainside, the Sherpas expressed their lack of control over their inevitable demise. Lhakpa Dorji recalled, "I could have died, from the South Summit isn't very safe," while Lhakpa Gyaljen explicitly admitted that he "didn't know" that something like this could have happened.

As the Sherpas' narratives reveal a lack of power and control over their unfolding situations, concerns around their mortality emerge. Dawa recalled working for a commercial expedition team on Mt. Everest, "I remember an avalanche. I tried to stop myself from being taken with an ice axe, trying to get it into snow, but it was fresh snow so it took all of us down..." Here, Dawa's urgent attempt to stop himself from being swept away depicts his understanding and concern for what an avalanche might mean, his potential mortal end. Comparably, Kaji lamented about the 2014 Everest avalanche, "I saw my life. I'm also there when the snow is falling down, when the avalanche was coming there."

Boundary situations like these threaten what Giddens (1990) refers to as "ontological security." Individuals' rely on structure and security in order to make sense of their lives and

daily experiences; however, while climbing, risk-taking, and more poignantly, when confronting death, Sherpas may be exposed to dread, fear, or heightened anxieties (Giddens, 1991; Stone, 2009). Additionally, those affected by disasters, death, and the like, find themselves “betwixt and between” their life prior to the event and an uncertain sense of the future (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015; Turner, 1979, p. 465). According to Jencson (2001) these moments mark the transition of an individual from one status to another, which is often accompanied by considerable stress, doubt, and fear about an uncertain future. This was highlighted in Dawa’s story, as he continued to describe the events that unfolded after he was engulfed by an avalanche:

I was found out at the head of avalanche with my body upside down. When I woke up, it was morning, and I was lying down with oxygen and glucose water on...I was pretty homesick after that accident. I wanted to go home.

Dawa’s near miss triggered what he articulated as “homesickness,” a longing for what he had known before the expedition, while he contemplated his current position on the mountain. This sense of fear and uncertainty was emphasised in other Sherpas’ narratives as well. For example, Mingma described, “At the time when the avalanche was coming, I was thinking of where to run and how to save my life. Nothing else was in my mind.” The desperation in Mingma’s actions was triggered by the disastrous potential of the avalanche; survival was the only thing that mattered in those heightened moments of uncertainty. Similarly, in his discussion around falling into a crevasse Phuri admitted, “I felt very scared. What to do?” In both stories, fear and anxiety were expressed, while the question of what might come next highlights a lack of certainty and order within those moments.

A glimpse of death or a taste of risk illuminates the mutability of human beings (Lewis, 2000; Varley, 2006). Thus, death becomes a psychological and physical issue for both the

collective and individual self. As discussed within this through-line, the Sherpas' encounters with death, including the risks implicit to mountaineering, evoked embodied emotions and at times performances of strength and courage. However, the uncertainties that accompany boundary situations – Sherpas' encounters with death – foster potential to radically challenge social constructions within mountaineering (Berger, 1967). Standing on these boundaries, Sherpas can contemplate their own existential position within the material-physical world (Berger 1967; Yalom, 1980). In Yalom's words, "though the physicality of death destroys and individual, the idea of death can save him" (1980, p. 159). These ideas are explored next.

7.3 Choosing to (Dis)continue: Navigations of Power, Death, and Freedom

What becomes apparent in this final through-line is that death, accidents, and disasters have the potential to create possibilities for agency and action. Drawing on understandings of *liminality*, an anthropological concept introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and further conceptualised by Victor Turner (1969), I explore how Climbing Sherpas and their communities navigate death and death-defying moments. In these moments of uncertainty, some Sherpas began to understand the meaning of life differently, while others exercised their power more freely. However, it is still necessary to recognise the broader economic, social, and cultural contexts previously discussed, which continue to regulate Sherpas' practices and choices on the mountainside. Furthermore, as the Sherpas experience instances of luck while on the mountain, many of them believe that accidents (and subsequently death) are linked to fate: a notion that also has implications on their freedoms. Prior to these discussions around the interplay of death and freedom, I briefly explore the inherent power relations of commercial mountaineering on Mt. Everest.

7.3.1 The paying and the paid

We are both subject *to* and the subjects *of*, the workings of power (1980; Downing, 2008). Accordingly, poststructural thinkers like Michel Foucault, reject possibilities of effacing power relations and returning to a true, just, and free condition (Foucault, 1994). Thus, Sherpas' stories of freedom and agency can be seen as inextricably linked to notions of power, and the relationship between those who pay, and those who are paid to climb. As in many industries, the exchange of money seemingly establishes a hierarchy of power on the mountainside. Foreign mountaineers pay tens of thousands of dollars for the privilege of climbing Mt. Everest, and Sherpas are paid to help enable them to do so (Shaffer, 2013). Emerging from these power relations, are international climbers' expectations that a "service" will be provided to them – that they will have the opportunity to stand on the summit. For Sherpas, however, there is a balance between providing the service expected while managing the responsibility of safety, navigating the significant risks that accompany these extreme endeavours.

Due to adventure tourists and mountaineers' economic advantage over Sherpas and their communities, these tourists tend to perceive that they have the "control" within mountaineering encounters (cf. Brown, 2013). Likewise, within these mountainside dynamics some Sherpas also hold the perception that those who pay have or hold the power. This was particularly apparent in Phuri's narrative. In his story of a 1965 Mt. Everest expedition, he described a large accident that killed many Sherpas from Phortse. Despite the great loss, and the induced fears in the both the international and Sherpa climbers, Phuri declared that the remaining members of the expedition team continued up the mountain the very next day. "The foreigners *demand*ed that they wanted to go on, so we went," Phuri explained. Dawa also described a time he and fellow Climbing

Sherpas were required to continue up the mountain after witnessing a tragic death of their friend. He explained:

It was around noon when an avalanche got him, not the clients. It dropped him at the corner of Camp III, but he was still alive. He was carried down by Sherpas up to the [Icefall](#), but it was hard for the Sherpas to take him through the Icefall so he was brought back to Camp I for the night. The same night he passed away... they discussed among themselves, the [Sirdar](#) and the members [clients]. We [Sherpas] were there to climb anyway so the Sirdars *made us go up*.”

Phuri’s use of the word “demanded” and Dawa’s admission with the phrase “made us” indicates an exertion of force or coercion.

Notions of force are echoed in some of Ortner’s (1997) discussions around power on the mountain: “When Sherpas refuse to climb out of fear and demoralization, and yet, for whatever reasons, the *sahibs* [Western mountaineers] absolutely require that they continue, the sahibs have often resorted to force to keep them moving” (1997, p. 142). Although, in Phuri’s example, the Sherpas’ bodies may not have been subjected to torture or violence, the docility he described, “so we went”, indicates the presence of “disciplines,” methods used to control or correct the operations of the body (Foucault, 1972; Rabinow, 1984, p.181). Additionally, Dawa’s explicit confession of “the Sirdars made us go” despite the passing of a fellow Sherpa draws attention the complex power relations on the mountainside, raising questions around who is exercising disciplinary power on the mountain. At first glance, this form of power and force appears to be practiced by the Sirdars (Sherpa Leaders). However, if we were to consider the discussion that occurred after the accident, between the clients and the Sirdars, it is the clients who seemingly become the “observers” who discipline. As disciplines enact control over Sirdars, and thereby

their team of Climbing Sherpas, opportunities for increased docility-utility arises (a point I turn to shortly) (Foucault, 1977; Taylor, 2011).

The majority of the Sherpas interviewed did not express an overt sense of being dominated (or power being forced upon them) by their paying clients. However, like in Phuri and Dawa's examples, the subtleties of the Sherpas' language insinuated complex power relations and modes of discipline on the mountainside. Tashi admitted, "...my sight is also doing well *for* my clients. Some clients told me, 'I work many years, then I have to make budget, then I came to climbing,' like that...but if he can't succeed then his whole goal is dumped." Within their roles as Climbing Sherpas, some Sherpas felt compelled to behave in a particular way "for" clients. Furthermore, the clients' disclosures of "what they did" or "sacrificed" for a chance to climb, contribute to the previously established power dynamic: one, which is structured by monetary exchanges. Accordingly, such expectations discipline and control Sherpas, as they strive to fulfill their scripted roles and responsibilities. Mingma explained as Climbing Sherpas,

"We have to watch and help them either by teaching and training; teaching them the way of walking, how to wear the clothes, and how to use the gear. It's our responsibility from basecamp onwards. Also, it's our main role to take them to the summit..."

The words "have to," an English phrase associated with obligation and things done out of necessity, were articulated in many of the Sherpas' narratives when referencing job responsibilities and client-relationships on the mountain; the effects of power on the mountain were evidenced through the ways in which Sherpas told their stories

Furthermore, the meanings of being Sherpa – strong, fearless, and dependable, coupled with "a will subordinated to and bent in the service of Western desires" (Adams, 1996, p. 13) – have seemingly been internalised by the Sherpas, and at times led to decisions that propelled

them (and their clients) into dangerous situations. For instance, Lhakpa Dorji recalled hoisting a sick client up Mt. Everest: “One member is very weak. He is vomiting at the last camp. But, still we pull up him... We take him all the way to the summit.” This instance illuminates an example of a “relation of docility-utility”; whereby discipline allowed for an increase of the economic productivity of the body (Foucault, 1977, p. 137); Lhakpa Dorji helped to achieve the clients’ summit dream, but at the same time he was subjected to these dreams, along with clients’ expectations, and foreign perceptions of how Sherpas should behave and perform on the mountain. These workings of power and discipline contribute to the ways in which Sherpas exercise freedoms in mountaineering, “as if they are being watched” (Downing, 2008, p. 82). It is evident that the effects of power can deepen our understandings of Sherpas’ experiences on the mountainside, and therefore future research with a primary focus on the ways Sherpas are disciplined could be valuable to furthering the understandings presented herein.

Relatedly, while existential thought would extend that Sherpas are “free” to walk away from their clients, or the mountaineering industry at large, many of the Sherpas described feelings of being entrapped by economic constraints. Such constraints are in part results of modernisation and globalisation, which has made Nepal highly dependent on the revenues derived from the mountaineering and tourism industries. During our conversations around unexpected accidents while climbing, I posed questions to the Sherpas about their choices to continue to work as Climbing Sherpas for clients, supporting commercial mountaineering expeditions. From these inquiries, storylines lines of “needing money” re-emerged. Kami indicated, “Yeah, I’m thinking about that [stopping]. You know? But I need...to make the money.” Shaking his head back and forth Lhakpa Dorji admitted that he was scared when he thought about death, but suggested that “they’re [the risks are taken] for the money, you know

it's [your] future.” Additionally, when I asked Lhakpa Gyaljen if he ever considered retiring from mountaineering prior to his stroke, which left him paralysed and unable to work, he replied: “So we need[ed] more money, more money, Going, going, going. Little bit, little bit, little bit of work. Going up.” This statement was juxtaposed with a comment around the inflation of goods within the Solukhumbu (e.g., “...everything is very expensive, our village”). [Pemba](#) (my interpreter) further clarified that Lhakpa Gyaljen continued to climb with expeditions to earn money to sustain life on the mountain as prices in Namche Bazaar continued to increase.

As this discussion chapter commenced with Dawa's memories of a life before climbing, he described: “...now it's *impossible without* expeditions.” Such a statement, along with the storylines above, signify an established level of dependency on mountaineering and tourism, while also depicting perceived understandings of these industries' economic viability. Seven of the thirteen interviewed, were currently employed by mountaineering companies as Climbing Sherpas, and supplemented this work with positions on trekking expeditions. Ironically, it is the very industry that Sherpas depend upon, which created the socioeconomic circumstances – the inflation of goods and services for local village populations – that in turn leads them back into their risky positions on the mountain, time and time again. I argue, however, that as “ideas of death” are considered alongside the negative consequences and disciplinary power associated with the mountaineering and tourism industries, we may arrive at moments for critique – a pause to take stock of the processes of modernisation and continued development within the Solukhumbu.

7.3.2 Death as liminal moments

While death often produces anxieties and fear around “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991), it is this existential condition, and “the idea of death” that can “save” us. (Yalom, 1980, p.

159). *Liminality* is regarded as a cultural apparatus characterised by heightened reflexivity in which individuals are able to reflect on and critique the normative social structure, as well as explore new possibilities (Turner, 1987). As a liminal moment, a close encounter with death encourages individuals to return to their fundamental priorities and thoughtfully deliberate what is truly important and meaningful (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2011; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). Thereby, individuals emerge from their “boundary situations” – their run-ins with death or the idea of it – with “additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1969, p. 351). From devastating and uncertain moments, the Climbing Sherpas expanded their sense of self and community, and mountaineering accidents became purpose-revealing experiences producing moments of transformation and survival.

Throughout our conversations, the Sherpas’ stories of unexpected accidents and their own encounters with death illuminated the transformational potency of liminality. When asked what was going through his mind after the avalanche, Mingma said:

At the time I thought, I got ‘new life’, a second chance, being a survivor of the disaster.

When I got hurt on the head, I was afraid that the pain on my head would be dangerous, but after the check-up, the results were good and positive, which made me happy.

Those affected by death, disaster, and the like find themselves “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1979, p. 465); for Mingma, his visit to the hospital and the waiting for results, became, “the symbolic realm in which possibility and the ambiguous – the simultaneous presence of the familiar and unfamiliar, the existing and new – not only prevail but are heightened” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011, p. 525). Death (or the idea of it) appeared to be a psychological issue for Mingma, evoking embodied emotions (e.g., fear, happiness), while also providing opportunities for reflection on how life is being lived and could be lived differently. Such opportunities can be

understood as liminal moments, “suspensions of quotidian reality” fostering space to think about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, but also how they feel about the way they have been living (Turner, 1987, p.102). Encounters with death impel Sherpas to actively consider the possibilities of constructing a new life.

Death enacts a vast influence upon existence and our conduct. Individuals can reconsider what they know and understand about the ways in which they live and grow (Yalom, 1998).

Dawa indicated a change in his own conduct after his brush with death. His feeling of “homesickness,” as was described earlier, eventually led him to walk away from his position on the mountain, forfeiting income from that particular expedition. Dawa recalled:

The next morning, I walked down to my home in [Phortse](#) through [Pangboche](#), where I had a cousin. I got to my cousin’s home and at the same moment they were talking about me being taken by the avalanche. One of my cousins was crying, thinking I was gone forever. They were happy to see me back... After that I didn’t return up.

Dawa explained that this particular Everest excursion marked his final mountaineering expedition, in part due to much family pressure. Here Dawa’s individual experience of “knowing” death propelled family and other community members into questioning his employment on the mountain. In some sense, liminal moments allow *self* and community to pause, to turn a lens on one’s condition, prompting new possibilities with hopes to ultimately alter cultural resources (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999).

Encounters with death afford Sherpas opportunities to re-think (and perhaps one day a re-structure) their lives, as they individually contemplate continued work on the mountainside and collectively deliberate the increasing tourism development within the Solukhumbu.

As discussed in the previous through-line, death can become a catalyst that shifts

perceptions around realities through encounters with boundary situations, or what Berger (1967) calls “marginal situations.” These situations radically challenge social constructions and “objectivated” definitions of reality and how one understands the world, others, and self (Berger, 1967, p. 44). As Phuri depicted his own boundary situation (falling into a crevasse) during our conversation, he admitted that it was not until that very moment that he decided to quit working on mountaineering expeditions. Phuri explained:

There was heavy snow above and I didn't see the crevasse, and then I fell into it... I felt very scared. One American doctor and I, two of us fell down. The [other] climbers were very quick. As soon as it occurred they were ready with rope to pull us up. I was lucky.

They had really good hearts. We returned back from there... After that I didn't go.

Climbing [Cho Oyu](#), the world's sixth tallest mountain, was Phuri's last commercial mountaineering expedition. Similar to Dawa, his accident provoked a shift. When asked why he retired, Phuri responded, “I felt scared! After that I had to go to [Makalu](#). There was a phone call and message from the office, but I didn't go, I was too scared.” Phuri's time in the crevasse can be understood as an unexpected rupture, a shocking break or happening in his usual routine of his work on the mountain (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). In Sherpas' frightening moments of facing possible death, lies the potency of liminality. Phuri was challenged to make sense of life, which led to a disruption in how he engaged his responsibilities on the mountain. Betwixt-and-between, Phuri displayed a capacity to step back and consider consciously what regulates his behaviour (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011). Confronting one's mortality, or the anticipated risk of dying, contributed to the ways in which the Sherpas created meaning and enacted freedoms on the mountainside.

7.3.3 Life is important

Centered on the pursuit of what it is like to be human, existential philosophers understand existence as phenomenological in nature and related to experiencing (Fennell, 2009; Giles, 1999; Pervin, 1960; Sartre, 1949). Unfolding from the Sherpas' narrations of encountering death were the meanings that these experiences emphasised for them about existence itself. "Life is important," Rinchen said with conviction as he described with disbelief a Chinese climber's decision to continue up [Mt. Everest in 2014](#) after the mountain closure; she was critiqued for hiring Sherpa and Nepali support (and even a helicopter), paying nearly triple the standard rate to climb. "I think that money is important, but must take care the life more," Rinchen further explained, confirming that he himself would not have accepted the large sum of money to assist this particular climber during this time (after the avalanche). Referring to the same climber, Tashi suggested that he too disagreed with her decision:

She [the Chinese climber] is going for the challenge, but from my side this is not good...somebody's accident and somebody still climbing is not good. It's good for her, but actually no respect the other persons. Somebody's life is gone there, but why you do like that?

To be able to question something an individual needs to be able to reflect upon it (Levy, 2002; Sartre, 1943;). Tashi's questioning of the Chinese climber's actions, and Rinchen's explicit reference to "taking care of life more" in spite of economic gains that the continuation of climbing would have generated, illuminate signs of ethical and moral reflection. Giles (1999) points out that through existential consciousness we perceive the world about us, and our relation to others, but also how we contemplate the "struggle with our ethical concerns" (p. 9).

Instead of continuing to climb, Tashi recognised that in moments when death does

prevail, it is a time to honour life – respecting those who lost theirs’ on the mountain. To do so, Tashi detailed the measures that he and fellow Sherpas might take after one’s passing: “We Respect...we give some sharing to the heart of the family, we give some talking good, maybe some doing help, maybe somebody’s doing the help for their families, like making fundraise... Do help is best.” Tashi’s description, as I mentioned in Chapter Five, resembles the ways in which my own culture and family navigate death, attributing meaning to the lives of our lost loved ones: sharing memories and pictures of them, speaking kindly of them through funeral eulogies, and cooking dinner for distressed family members.

According to Yalom (1998), the condition of death “makes it possible for us to live life in an authentic fashion” (p.187). Here, rather than thinking of authentic as of an undisputed origin, we might think of authentic as a purposive and responsible mode of human life. For instance, this was illustrated in Ang Phurba’s story about rescuing a Czech climber (whom he was not originally responsible for as a client) on Manaslu in 2013. Ang Phurba exclaimed, “This is like duties, you know? And so when I was trying to help somebody and the rescue after gets success, I’m really happy. Just really happy. This we can’t buy, it’s really satisfying, you know, to save a life.” In Mingma’s retelling of negotiating his decisions as a guide, he stated:

If the client’s condition is not fit and good, then we will tell them, and request them to return back. If the clients have got the energy and are fit then we help them to the top and then descend down safely. In this, money is not the big thing, but life is very important.

Likewise, Tashi articulated that there are times when some of his own clients choose to climb in spite of dangerous conditions, or being advised to turn around. He rebuked, “Do not think like that. The mountain is still here, but important is our life.” The notion of life is again positioned as significant to the ways in which Sherpas conduct themselves in their roles as guides, making

responsible choices to mediate dangers, including the risk of death, for their clients' and themselves. Within these excerpts, Sherpas' choices resemble an authenticity as they engage in rescues and climbing "safely" to sustain life (a point expanded upon in the next section). Moreover, these acts insinuate a need for ontological security (cf. Giddens, 1991), control, and stability. Death threatens this sense of security, and the ability to give meaning to one's life, and thus Sherpas attempt to avoid the risk of death while on the mountainside.

Broaching their own potential death or the deaths of others, the Climbing Sherpas experienced liminal moments: a period of time in which they could re-think pre-existing practices, assumptions, and beliefs (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015). Within such moments of reflection, meanings were attributed to a continuation of living. Moreover, as meaning is restored to life, they recognise their own control, freedom, and responsibilities within situations on the mountain: indeed, individuals are the creators' of their world – identity and values (Sartre, 1943).

7.3.4 Individual freedom and collective agency

Existentialists attribute agency and free will to individual consciousness (Sartre, 1949). As suggested in the previous section, the meanings connected to life and continued living can contribute to Sherpas' decisions to discontinue a climbing pursuit. At the doorstep of death, the Sherpas' actions on the mountain reflected what Sartre (1943) understands as authentic freedom: "I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification" (p. 259). For instance, Rinchen discussed a time when a paying client, against his recommendation, resumed climbing towards the Mt. Everest summit during a storm – a dream that could not be stopped by hazardous risks or a knowledgeable guide. In response to how he navigated this scenario, Rinchen declared, "Not going I...*People not listening*. Why I do this? 'No, go yourself.' Life is

for life, I don't go, I don't go. Please, money is nothing." When Rinchen was faced with a sufficient level of risk (of death) on the mountain, despite the presence of various forms of power (e.g., money, client gaze, etc.), he made a choice from his own conscience, taking responsibility for his own life.

Similarly, Lakpa describes how when clients "don't listen" this becomes "their own responsibility." Mingma explained, "[Clients] can get angry if they are not supported physically...If they [proceed to climb] forcefully then tomorrow's mistakes will be ours. In this matter, if [the client] is forceful, then we will not be responsible." Here, the Sherpas' individual agency, their actions and words, disrupt the power and structures that have traditionally contributed to their actions and relationships on the mountainside. In liminal moments on the mountainside, power is shifted and new freedoms and actions are enacted.

Mälksoo (2012) recognises, "the strength of liminality as the phase of pure possibility underscores the potential power of agency in the liminal process," in which existing realities are restructured to create new ones (p. 489). Narratives of agency emerge within the Climbing Sherpas' navigations of death. For example, Lhakpa Dorji, who was left by his clients and fell nearly 300 meters while descending Mt. Everest, explained his reactions during a subsequent mountaineering expedition. He exclaimed:

I thought that time, no more...I was in Camp II, and they pressured me [to join] another team for another summit. I said 'NO!' Then they bring me to Basecamp and they talk a lot of questions. 'Please go do another summit.' And I said, 'NO!'

The positive and transformative aspect of death and disaster is illuminated in the power and agency enacted by Lhakpa Dorji. As he navigated away from the undesirable trajectory of the mountaineering industry, despite the potential economic loss he might have incurred, Lhakpa

Dorji created a new reality for himself. Similarly, Lhakpa Gyaljen expressed personal decisions that emerged from his questioning of the stark realities that pervade the mountaineering industry. He explained, “I question. Too danger, no more going to the expedition...the trekking, trekking is better.”

The prevailing agency and freedoms of Sherpas can also be seen on a larger, community scale. For instance, in 2014 the mountaineering industry was effectively blamed for the deaths of the Sherpa and Nepali climbers. Mingma explained, “Lots of Sherpas died on the same day, so everyone decided not to continue... Since that route was not safe, we were not ready to risk our life.” Tashi recalled, “That time I was on my way to basecamp, the others, my friends, all of them did for a meeting, then after all of the expeditions quit.” Kaji expounded upon why expeditions on Mt. Everest were halted in 2014: “After that, Everest was closed. Not by the government, by the Climbing Sherpas. They all said ‘let’s not climb this time’...in the mountain we have to respect for tourist, and tourist also have to respect Sherpa.” Therein, the climbing community (in particular the Nepali and Sherpa climbers) moved from the initial shock of the disaster through a liminal moment, which constituted a formative experience for the collective.

Cheung and McColl-Kennedy (2015) suggest that during periods of disaster and displacement, a strong collective bond is formed. Lakpa reflected on how the climbing community transitioned from this tragic accident, recognising some of the reasons why Climbing Sherpas collectively decided to stop climbing in 2014:

That year, you know it’s so many accidents, so all the climbers they decide to close. It was black year, bad luck, so many friends lost... You lose some business, but sixteen, seventeen people died, and after if you continue, you know people psychologically affected, not good feeling.

Those affected by a difficult event may be stripped of their familiar institutions, routines, and resources, a grim situation that entails individuals to come together to find new ways to deal with the challenges of the circumstances of their new emerging worlds (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). A social and collective resilience was activated as the Sherpas disregarded the pressures of commercial climbing teams. Rinchen acknowledged that working on Mt. Everest is not the only employment opportunity in the Solukhumbu region. He proclaimed, “Money is pay, okay, but safety is life...Life is important. Money we will make next year. Next day. Another job, many jobs, not only mountaineering Everest.” Evoked by the very act of imagining new boundaries, economic concerns that were previously understood as one of the forces contributing to the Sherpas working in the mountaineering industry, were suspended.

Rather than being seen as static and vulnerable (cf. Adams, 1992; Brown, 2013; Ortner, 1999), Sherpa communities harness individual and collective agency – practicing freedoms to help themselves self-organise in a bottom-up fashion in their constant process of becoming something else (Rogers, 2012; Zebrowski, 2015). Thus we can see how liminal moments can be central to the adaptive capacities that contribute to community resilience as a process of “becoming” (Mulligan, Steele, Rickards, & Funfgeld, 2016; Rogers, 2012). These understandings bolster notions of evolutionary resilience, which “suggests that faced with adversities, we hardly ever return to where we were” (Davoudi, 2012, p. 302).

7.3.5 Complex practices of freedom: Choosing to continue

On March 15 2015, I sat interviewing Mingma, well aware that he was still working as a Climbing Sherpa and planned to return to Mt. Everest for the 2015 spring season, only a short year after being engulfed by an avalanche and urgently evacuated to the Kathmandu hospital. As was pointed out in the “Death as Liminal Moments” section, Mingma was granted a “new life”

as a survivor of the 2014 avalanche, what he referred to as a “second chance.” His realisation of this new chance created great joy and relief for him. Yet Mingma’s personal brush with death was not a boundary situation that engendered a shift in his behaviours or climbing trajectory as it had done for some of the other Sherpas (e.g., Dawa, Lhakpa Dorji, Phuri). Instead, decisions like Mingmas’ contradict and complicate some of the findings previously highlighted in this discussion, exposing the varying and complex practices of freedom on the mountainside.

Freedoms are practiced within a conscripted context. As long as the economic viability of the Solukhumbu is tied to tourism and mountaineering industries, many Sherpas will “choose” to continue to climb; there are no alternative employment options in the region that offer them such financially lucrative prospects. This choice was expressed by Climbing Sherpas throughout my study as their rationale for entering into the industry, taking extra risks during commercial expeditions (e.g., carrying bigger loads), as well as adhering to paying clients’ dreams and requests to carry on. In part then, choosing to continue up the mountain is very much reflective of the revenues gained from climbing as high-altitude guides, findings that expand upon those of Ortner (1999) and Bott (2009). However, I argue that this choice to continue is also enmeshed in other “freedoms” that come with this continuation. As we saw in the sections above, interconnecting storylines of conquest and pride give rise to the Sherpas’ creation of *self*, in addition to other privileges and mobilities, all of which distinguish them from others within the Solukhumbu region. Additionally, Sherpas climb for the perceived freedoms of future generations. Tashi believes that the “fame” and thereby the increased financial gains he acquires from continued climbing will have benefits for his fourteen-year old son and ten-year old daughter. He explained, “If I done it [summit Everest] ten times, I also might be counted as the famous one. Then maybe in future, I can easily tell my story for my sons and daughters. Then

they get good school, freedom, everything.” Here, Tashi’s deliberate intention for continued climbing reveals insight around his own practices of freedom and, as in Frohlick’s (2003) research, challenges the ideas around static and immobile host populations within tourism.

Relatedly, Mingma pointed out, “It is our will to climb the tallest mountain, helping the foreigners. If I am happy then I go, if I’m not happy then I just stay away from the mountain.” Therein, Mingma’s freedom – the choice to go or stay – is illuminated. As Mingma takes responsibility for his own actions and choices on the mountain, he enacts free will as it is understood by existential thinkers (Sartre, 1943; Yalom, 1980). However, interestingly Mingma’s decision to continue to climb is underpinned by another freedom: the “freedom to climb” in and of itself. Mountaineering is an expensive sport. Given the price of government permit fees, oxygen, food, and gear that go into supporting these high-altitude pursuits, many Sherpas would arguably be unable to afford to climb without foreign climbers and their investments. Mingma explained, “The foreigners come to climb the mountain with a high investment. It’s good because during the season without our money, but the foreigners’ investments, we get the chance to climb 7000, 8000 meter peaks.” Likewise, Kaji admitted, “I don’t want to quit, I would like to climb more mountains that are 8000 meters. It’s very powerful. I’m very happy to make the summit.” The international mountaineers’ ventures make climbing, and subsequently summiting available to Sherpas. Moreover, Sherpas are *paid* to do what the majority of the world’s mountaineers and aspiring adventure tourists *pay* to do.

Indeed these continued ventures into the Himalayas are dangerous and risky, with the most frequent kinds of deaths being sudden and shocking. Yet the Climbing Sherpas justify their choice to continue to work in the mountaineering industry because like most mountaineers, they are aware of these dangers, and consider them as acceptable risks that are “part of the game”

(Ebert & Robertson, 2013, p. 45). Ang Phurba acknowledged, “This is like adventure mountaineering, it’s definitely dangerous.” Significant to the developing discourse around death and freedom, however, are Sherpas’ frequent references to dangers as “objective” or “uncontrollable,” while escaping their potential deadly consequences is often attached to notions of “luck” and “fate.”

“The mountain guide, the professional guide also, if [it’s] objective danger, nobody can come from it,” Ang Phurba explained. When asked to for the meaning of objective danger, he responded, “it’s natural.” Objective dangers in mountaineering are caused by geophysical and geomorphological processes, and include threats such as storms, falling rocks, breaking ice, or avalanches, situations in which climbing skills often become irrelevant (Bjønness, 1986).

Mingma declared, “How much experience you have as a mountain guide cannot guarantee when an avalanche will come. Nobody knows if an avalanche is coming today, it’s natural.” Within our conversations the Sherpas continuously recognised the shifting and unpredictable conditions of the natural environment through statements like “accidents will not occur all the time,” “I know very well [the conditions of] an expedition can change every hour,” and “you can’t predict.” Although these storylines clearly depict that accidents and disasters do not occur all the time, the probability of death becomes a persistent threat because of the mountain’s unpredictable nature.

Accordingly, for many Sherpas, unexpected deaths are a result of forces that cannot be controlled – a matter of “luck” and sometimes “fate.” In their retellings of confronting death, the Climbing Sherpas often connected their current life situations to the notion of luck. For instance, Phuri described why he believed he survived his fall into the crevasse: “The foreigners were doctors at that time, so I was lucky. They had really good hearts”. Luck also spared Kaji on the

tragic day of the [2014 Everest avalanche](#). He recalled, “I’m lucky to turn back ten minutes before. So many people were lost.” The use of the word luck and the idea of “being lucky” illuminate insights around how the Climbing Sherpas may conceptualise their own power, and subsequently freedom, on the mountainside. Luck is a term that can be associated with an unpredictable or uncontrollable force, an event that seemingly effects or influences life, favourably or unfavourably (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Later on in our conversation, I revisited Mingma’s mention of his “second chance” in hopes to better understand why he decided to continue to climb in 2015. He replied, “Well, I am lucky that I got a second life, but this time [2015 climbing season] it’s a new route. Accidents will not occur all the time, this is in fate.”

Similar to coincidental fortunes or misfortunes of luck, Mingma’s expression of fate speaks towards his lack of control. Differing from luck, however, fate assumes an eventual inevitability, and hints at a supernatural power. Dorchi conveyed both luck and fate in his description of an accident he witnessed:

While passing the route at the Dam, ice used to break frequently. Many people died.

Nothing happened to us because of God. People used to move ahead of us to take the things Camp I to Camp II. There we had to climb downwards, one man was sandwiched and his head was hurt and there was lots of blood all over. But luckily he was alive.

According to Dorchi, his life and the man’s, sandwiched by the ice, were spared by God.

Likewise, Da Gelje also touted his odds in the mountains, “I’ve been one-hundred, two-hundred times trekking. Never accident. One hundred times at the peaks and pass, maybe I have one-hundred people and porters I manage. No accident. Then I’m very happy, my God.” Here, Dorchi and Da Gelje’s brief mention of a “God” portrays a unique interplay between death, power, and freedom. Death continues to be an inevitable condition beyond human control (cf.

Yalom, 1980), however the temporal dimensions of death become attached to a supernatural “all controlling” power, which plays into Sherpas’ freedoms on the mountain.

The ways in which the Sherpas narrated luck, god, and fate implied ideas of fatalism – in which a sense of powerlessness is assumed whereby individuals have no influence on their future or their actions (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Rather than lucky coincidences, or environmental and objective hazards, accidents and death are presumed to be outcomes of predestined fate. Kaji admitted, “Some people are scared. Sometimes there will be accident, I’m not sure.” While the notion of fate may induce fear in some, by the same token, the idea of fate can be freeing; if we are all going to die anyway, why not take the risk and climb. The effects of luck, religiosity, and fatalism on Climbing Sherpas’ existential experiences of death and freedom are areas of research that call for more attention.

Taken together, the three through-lines presented herein offer insight into the complexities of life and death on the Nepali mountainside. Climbing Sherpas’ stories reveal interplay of development, pride, responsibility, power, and death in their experiences of freedom. Emergent storylines portray the socioeconomic impacts of the ever-growing mountain adventure tourism industry in the Solukhumbu region, drawing attention to Sherpas’ dependency on its revenues as well as the meaning of education and the English language in securing positions on the mountain. Sherpas’ discussions of their climbing trajectories furthers our understandings of adventure tourism and mountaineering: the Climbing Sherpas are proud to reach the top of the world and wish to be recognised for it. Their decisions to climb for identity and meaning, despite the understood risks, are arguably reflective of the global and regional growth of mountaineering. Moreover, as modernisation and globalisation influence the development of these regions, Sherpas’ narratives challenge the understandings of local and host populations’

mobilities, power, and freedoms, particularly within tourism and mountaineering contexts.

Although encounters with death sometimes induced fears for Sherpas, their navigations of these moments also contributed to new practices of freedom. Therefore, death as liminal moments may become transformative as Sherpas and their communities use these moments to take stock of the purpose of their lives. Accordingly, death shifts Sherpas' perceptions around their realities, potentially mobilising agency and challenging the status quo of the "Everest Industry." I expand on these research contributions in the final conclusion chapter presented next. In this chapter, I offer some concluding thoughts around the overall study, extending theoretical, methodological, and practical insights as well as research limitations and possible areas for future research.

Chapter Eight: A Re-thinking of (Continued) Development on the Mountainside

As portrayed through this research, understanding encounters with death and disaster as liminal moments offers opportunities to come to terms with one's "full of potency and potentiality" (Turner, 1979, p. 466). These moments can be adaptive and transformative as individuals and communities find a source of renewal and begin to acknowledge the power of their collective agency to create a new setting or structure: one that could be regarded as better than the old (Mälksoo, 2012). Nevertheless, in a world fraught with socioeconomic and environmental uncertainties, it is necessary to continuously consider a range of countervailing possibilities. As articulated in the final section of the discussion chapter (Chapter Seven), death and disaster may not always generate new and emerging possibilities for individuals and their communities.

On April 25 2015, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit the interior of Nepal, killed over 8,800 people, injured more than 22,000, and displaced hundreds of thousands from their damaged homes (BBC, 2015; National Emergency Operation Centre, 2015). In this disastrous moment, the reflexive pauses that transpired during the Climbing Sherpas' confrontations with death were quickly replaced with appeals for increased tourism and further development. As an integral contributing factor to Nepal's economy, the tourism industry was not pardoned from the devastation, which prompted a rapid decrease in the numbers of tourist and mountaineer arrivals. Ironically, this decrease in demand was met with urgent pleas for continued tourism (despite Nepal's broken state) by global organisations (e.g., Tourism Concern, 2015), local community members (e.g., Tshering Sherpa, 2015) and the Sherpa participants from this study (as seen in the film).

The analysis of the Climbing Sherpas' narratives reveals an interplay between death,

power, and freedom. Encounters with death – as liminality – exposed spaces to critique development and modernisation processes as they continue to take hold in Nepal’s adventure tourism industry. In their encounters, even if for only a moment, it was as though the Sherpas were reduced to a universal or uniform condition to be transformed. Herein, perceptions of structure, law, power, progress, as they were usually understood, shifted in meaning, and the Sherpas in their “authentic” state freely engaged their worlds, making decisions based upon their own subjective value sets (Fennell, 2009; Sartre, 1946; Turner, 1969). However, the aftermath of the 2015 Nepali earthquake illuminated tensions and contradictions of tourism and mountaineering development within Nepal, as well as the ways societies, under the influence of neoliberal economic schemes, continue to navigate existential concerns like death. In the wake of this tragedy, Nepal, again, firmly embraced tourism as its “saviour”: a way to survive when there were seemingly no alternatives (cf. Mair, 2006; Tshering Sherpa, 2015). This state of dependency raises urgent questions of sustainability, transformability, and resiliency atop further explorations around death and freedom as they relate to power.

In the remaining space of this discussion, I first return to the main contributions made by this research, outlining key theoretical, methodological, and potential practical implications, including outcomes for the Sherpa participants and myself. Next, I review some of the limitations of this work, and then offer ideas for future research extending from this study. As tourism continues to tout its economic promise, and many of the Climbing Sherpas remain reliant on these revenues, I end this chapter with new questions for tourism scholars, developers, governments, Climbing Sherpas, commercial industries, and community members to consider as they continue to navigate the consequences of tourism-led development in the Solukhumbu.

8.1 Research Contributions, Insights, and Implications

In the last decade or two, researchers and media have slowly begun to make room for understanding Climbing Sherpas as mobile subjects (Frohlick, 2003, 2004; Guggleberger, 2015), free acting agents (Peedom, 2015), proud risk-takers (Bott, 2009), and individuals who are capable of constructing and sharing their own narratives. I situate my project within these discourses: as work that challenges and expands current conceptualisations of the mountaineer, exploring Climbing Sherpas' experiences of living and dying in mountaineering. As illustrated in the thirteen narratively-written conversations and the short documentary film *Climbing Sherpa: Stories from the Solukhumbu*, freedom and agency are part of what contributes to the complexities of mountaineering, where at times, death and disaster provide *a pause* for Sherpas to consider the status quo, and their continued involvement in an industry that so often places their lives at risk. This moment of pause is where I begin my discussion of theoretical contributions.

8.1.1 Theoretical contributions

One of the major theoretical contributions of this work is the application of liminality within tourism and mountaineering contexts. Liminality provided this research with a conceptual framework to look at Sherpas' experiences of death and freedom on the Nepali mountainside. This exploration highlighted the transformative potency of liminal moments, creating space to reconsider power imbalances on the mountain, within tourism industries, and beyond. As Sherpas navigated their own boundary situations, power relations shifted and they demonstrated individual freedom and collective agency in their responses to the pressures and demands of Nepal's commercial mountaineering industry. Rather than being seen as static and always vulnerable, the Sherpas harnessed an agency and power, which at times was vital to sustaining

their lives. Thus, liminality, as it is taken up in this project, reveals new insights around the tension of merging philosophies of existentialism and poststructural understandings of power: death as liminal moments can disrupt the effects of power, imparting new practices of freedom.

These theoretical insights provide broad contributions to our current understandings in tourism and recreation disciplines. For instance, Climbing Sherpas' stories counter assumptions of immobile host populations, disrupt oppositional binaries of East/West and us/them, and open up space for "questioning the nuanced social and cultural interactions between Sherpas and Westerners or indeed the agency of the former to negotiate the powers and seductions more normally associated with the latter" (Bott, 2009, p. 299). Furthermore, exploring death as it relates to power on the mountainside draws attention to tourism (and its associated industries) as a mechanism for economic development, which need not be taken for granted. As the research findings highlighted, access to the means (both personal and societal) for development indeed help to shape the power to choose to engage in risky activities. Therefore, as commercial mountaineering increasingly blurs with adventure tourism, understanding how freedoms, choices, and responsibilities are exercised within client-guide relationships is integral, particularly for the safety of both parties. Lastly, these understandings of liminality, as a theoretical space for reflection, may provide contributions to disaster and resiliency discourses – a point I expand upon below.

Death as an aspect of existence, and an idea that links quite closely with conceptualisations of liminality, offers additional theoretical implications and insights. Like the existentialists (Yalom, 1980), thanatologists (Berger, 1967; Shilling, 1993), and tourism scholars (Stone & Sharpley, 2008) suggested, there is certainly something to be learned from reflecting on death. Indeed, the *idea* of death can save an individual (Yalom, 1980). The Sherpas' retellings of

their confrontations with death were often underpinned by anxiety and fears, even if hidden by laughter, performances of strength, or moments of silence. Anxieties around mortality are not new findings, but reverberate concepts put forward by sociologists (Berger, 1976) and existential psychotherapists (Yalom, 1980). The recognition of these emotions as viable human responses is crucial in mountaineering and tourism discourses, especially when Sherpas engage in a livelihood that often threatens their lives. The mediation of emotions is instrumental to navigating risks and danger as paid guides. The stories of Sherpas outwardly performing competence and calm, while inwardly managing their thoughts and emotions about a situation, support the ideas around “emotion management” put forward by Carnicelli-Filho (2013), which further draw upon Hochschild’s (1983) performance of emotional labour.

After an encounter with death, *life*, for some of the Sherpas, was replenished with new purpose. As depicted in much of the findings discussion, the importance of life was acknowledged, so much so that some of the Climbing Sherpas risked their own, to save the lives of others – those of fellow Climbing Sherpas, international mountaineers, and even individuals not directly tied to them by a monetary-exchange (e.g., Da Gelje’s rescue attempt). For some, the structure of life took on different forms after they walked away from the mountaineering industry once and for all. Lhakpa Dorji is no longer employed as a Climbing Sherpa, rather he is the owner of Namaste Lodge, a guest house catered primarily to trekking tourists in the village of Phortse. As articulated in the final clips of the film, Da Gelje’s time as a high-altitude Climbing Sherpa has also concluded, and he now focuses most of his energy towards building his own expedition company, and advocating for the safety and wellbeing of mountain workers and their families through the High Altitude Mountain Workers Welfare Association (an organisation he co-founded). These new life trajectories showcase Sherpas’ agency, as well as highlight the ways

in which the Climbing Sherpas' created new meanings for their lives as they now earn a living away from the dangers of the high peaks.

The study of death holds great potential as a conduit for coming to know and understand the experiences and challenges of life – subjects more traditionally focused on by social scientists in their research and scholarship (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). “Knowing” death has potential to fundamentally shift perceptions of our own realities and how we make meaning for our lives. Certainly, in the face of death, the inescapable and inevitable processes of our mortal demise are brought to the fore. Further, the uncertain and unpredictable nature of death can be paralysing, as it was for me even months after my experience in the earthquake. Yet this mortal terror can also be felt as motivating, generating a momentum to engage in living, creating meaning through life projects and action. As death remains out of Sherpas' control (e.g., “it's in fate”), and the rewards for standing atop Himalayan mountains generate so much possibility for their lives, taking the chance to climb along with their paying client counterparts is well worth the potential risks. At the doorstep of death, individuals question meaning and meaninglessness from new spaces. From these existential storylines, we can glean insight into “how existence” is practiced in complex tourism and leisure pursuits like mountaineering.

8.1.2 Methodological contributions

Recognising the potency of the meanings derived from reflecting on death, the challenge became epistemological and methodological as I attempted to create space for audiences (e.g., dissertation committee, Sherpas, mountaineers, expedition companies, and policy-makers) to be moved to new boundaries to confront the existential fabrics of mountaineering and existence more broadly. The experiential nature of existence in and of itself, and the sensuous contexts of my emplaced conversations with the Climbing Sherpas, led to the use of innovative narrative and

visual methodologies. This approach considers more directly the issue of audience engagement in the dissemination of research findings and enables the reader or viewer to embody and experience more directly the messages contained within. Furthermore, the use of multimedia technology (e.g., visual and audio recordings; *Final Cut ProX*) allowed me to honour the multi-layered, complex, and contingent nature of narratives, affording valuable insight for analysis and interpretation processes.

Visuals have only recently been incorporated in tourism research methodologies (e.g., Dwivedi & Yadav, 2009; Pocock et al., 2012; Rakic' & Chambers, 2010, 2012; Scarles, 2010). Yet they afford alternative methods to share participant understandings and further explore issues of representation, voice, and power within research. The film, constructed directly from the thirteen audio and video recorded interviews, maintains the verbal and visual presence of the Climbing Sherpas, importantly privileging their stories and perspectives and decentering the dominant voices (e.g., international mountaineers, media, tour companies, researcher) that are generally represented in tourism and mountaineering discourses. Moreover, while visual representations of the Climbing Sherpas respect the stories and the “human life” they represent (Bochner, 2001, p. 132), they also provide Sherpas' with a digitised keepsake that can honour the legacies of these individuals in perpetuity. These digitised representations further give rise to practical implications – a point I turn to next.

8.1.2.1 Practical insights & implications

Correspondingly, Williams and Lew (2015) suggest that places and images of places are fundamental to practices of tourism, and thereby the way places are known and understood is essential to their sociocultural sustainability. Tourism places are actively produced and constructed through tourists' presence and actions at a particular site, which in turn, reinforce the

nature and character of those sites. Place is further formed based on media depictions (e.g., films, magazines, travel books, internet, etc.), and the narratives told by organisations who seek to sell the destination in a light that is attractive to potential tourists (Urry, 1990; Williams & Lew, 2015). Therefore, one of the intended practical implications of this research is to encourage researchers, marketing organisations, and tourists to consider how Sherpas' voices and experiences contribute to the narratives and depictions of the Solukhumbu region of Nepal. The Climbing Sherpas have a vital role to play with regard to the sustainable development of Nepal's mountaineering and adventure industries, and as such, it is imperative they continue to have opportunities to represent themselves, their cultures, and experiences within academic, as well as media canons. Such methodological insights also apply to, and warrant deeper consideration of, how we engage the voices of people in marginalised communities in other tourism and leisure contexts.

Lastly, an additional practical implication of using documentary film as a medium for knowledge translation is that it offers accessibility to a larger audience. Indeed, tourists, mountaineers, expedition companies, and governments, will have opportunities to view the filmed accounts that illuminate the Sherpas' realities, including some of their struggles and concerns. Therefore, as Nepal's tourism economy continues to rely on relationships in which Sherpas ultimately play an integral role in safeguarding the lives of expedition teams, practical industry standards and governmental policies influencing freedoms within relationships may be reconsidered. Similarly, director Jennifer Peedom has taken up such initiatives in partnership with Tourism Concern, the charitable non-governmental organisation that advocates for ethical tourism. On March 14th 2017, Tourism Concern screened Peedom's documentary film, *Sherpa: Trouble on Everest*, as part of one of their major campaigns: "Tourism wrongs: Porters' Rights"

(Tourism Concern, 2017). As a thought provoking entry point, I presume the film impelled in-depth critical dialogue around the working conditions faced by the Nepali high-altitude trekking and mountaineering guides and porters.

As Tourism Concern (2017) proclaims, "...for real change, tourists need to demand higher standards and vote with their feet if they find that companies they are using are not implementing improved porter conditions" (para. 4). I argue that these responsible behaviours may only transpire through increased education, and thus access to research outputs as educational resources must be shared more broadly to consumers and tourists, perhaps via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Vimeo, Youtube) and company webpages. After viewing the first cut of my film, Da Gelje and his son Pasang, who now co-own their own expedition company, emailed me: "Please send us the link once your video is completed. And also, if you permit, we would love feature your video in our webpage" (P. Sherpa, personal communication, August 10, 2016). Commercial mountaineering and adventure tourism companies are beginning to recognise that they too have a responsibility to inform their future clients of the mountainside complexities, and thereby the potential consequences of these pursuits. Moreover, the creation of this film and its use in my classes, has led to new pedagogical practices, encouraging students to more critically consider tourism and its various impacts.

8.2 Limitations and Future Research

Although there are a number of theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions stemming from this study, there are also several limitations to consider. Firstly, the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this study are predominately informed by Western philosophies and thought (e.g., Sartre, 1948; van Gennep, 1960) as are my researcher subjectivities and positionality (cf. Miller, Grimwood, & Arai, 2015). Indeed, the insights that

emerged from this research further our understandings of mountaineering and tourism industries of Nepal. However, it is important to acknowledge that Sherpas, as ancestral descendants of Tibetans, are very much still engaged in Tibetan cultural practices including shared linguistic dialects, dress, religion, and philosophy (Bhandari et al., 2015; Ortner, 1999). Thus, how religious and cultural practices (e.g., *pujas*), and more broadly Buddhism, are taken up by these cultures, indicate alternative ways of thinking about, and understanding freedom, which arguably have implications on the ways Sherpas navigate death. The implications of Eastern beliefs are hinted at in Chapter Two (literature review) as Ortner (1999) describes what it means to profane the mountain; she also indicates that Lamas had concerns about climbing the Himalayan mountains from the time expeditions first commenced in Nepal. Moreover, religiosity, spirituality, and ideas of fate were briefly hinted at in the final section of the discussion chapter. The effects of ideas like religiosity and fatalism had implications on Sherpas' experiences of freedom in mountaineering, and thus call for more research into these experiences.

As such, an area of future research that extends from this work is the consideration of using Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism, and how they might inform research in the Himalayas and in other Sherpa cultural contexts. From my own limited understandings of Buddhism, I imagine that a project underpinned by these philosophies and worldviews will foster new theoretical lenses to analyse Sherpas' experiences of death, responsibility, and freedom on the mountainside. Furthermore, future research in these regions can, and should, embrace perspectives and practices of decolonisation to disrupt colonial and postcolonial thought, while centering indigenous epistemologies and knowledges (cf. Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Smith, 1999, 2008). It can be argued that taking seriously the epistemic perspectives and cosmological insights of local and indigenous peoples, such as the Sherpas, would unearth new layers of

critical thinking around the research topics that may interest our own Western scholarship. Accordingly, Mutua and Swadener (2004) suggest that decolonising research is about decentering western academic-globalised-anglicised assumptions through “a process of listening deeply and humbly to Indigenous colleagues and friends” (p. 8).

Relatedly, additional limitations in this study include the limited collaboration between the Climbing Sherpas and myself in the construction of the findings, as well as the challenges that came with language and cultural differences. In the proposal stages of this research, I intended for this project to unfold much more collaboratively, involving Sherpas in the production of visuals (e.g., using go-pro cameras to capture their own visual stories) as well as the analysis and interpretation processes. In the field, methodological procedures unfolded differently as many of the Sherpa participants were quite busy. I perceived this to be the case for some of the men who still worked in the mountaineering field, but this factor was not considered for the retired climbers, who I found often busy tending to their crops and cattle. Moreover, with the unexpected 2015 earthquake, I was evacuated out of Nepal, removing the opportunity to return to the mountains in the month of May to sit with some of the Sherpa participants to discuss content to be included in the narratives and film. Sitting down with these individuals again would have made this research more collaborative in nature, shifting some of the power within the project, as well as gleaning additional insights around Sherpa cultural contexts (e.g., being the “only son”; Dorchi’s sickness related to cutting a tree near his water source; the importance of *pujas*, etc.).

As I described in detail in the methodological chapter, my decision to hire guides and interpreters was done to assist with the navigation of local and cultural practices, however, these intermediary roles also created moments of challenge. This became even more apparent, once

back in Canada. Nearly, a year after I returned from my fieldwork, I hired a Canadian-Nepali friend to help with translating the Nepali conversations to English subtitles for the film. Interestingly, the interviews that were translated and transcribed from Nepali to English by my interpreters while in the field did not always match the translations provided to me after the fact. Again, this solidified new understandings that translation/interpretation is a craft that involves much more than language proficiencies. Rather, these roles must be reserved for individuals who have strong interpersonal skills as well as comprehensive understandings of the meanings entrenched in the languages and cultures in which they wish to interpret. Future research taken up in these cross-cultural interview contexts could engage collaborations with local universities or organisations, who might have more in-depth understandings of what it means to be an interpreter in interview-based projects. These collaborations would likely afford more comprehensive interpretations and translations, while the individuals or students employed might still be rooted in the regional and cultural contexts (e.g., Sherpa), thereby potentially lending additional insights and departure points within interviews and field observations.

Lastly, the predetermined scope of this project inevitably limited some of the viable explorations within this research. While this research focused specifically on Climbing Sherpas' experiences of death and its relationship to power and freedom in mountaineering, many new and pertinent lines of inquiry were raised in the process, which lie just beyond the reach of this project. Though many of these opportunities for future research have been outlined in the discussion chapter, and even hinted at within the literature review, I will summarise the areas of research that I think are most pressing for tourism scholars to consider. This research has highlighted the necessity to directly engage the intersectionalities (race, class, gender, etc.) of mountaineers to deepen already existing scholarship (cf. Frohlick, 2003; Guggleberger, 2015)

regarding what it means to be a mountaineer. Who can be a mountaineer in these global playscapes? More specifically, research can implement critical race or postcolonial theories to explore more broadly the ways in which orientalism and Western presumptions influence or affect Sherpas' experiences on the mountainside as employed Climbing Sherpas or porters on Himalayan expeditions, as well as world-class mountaineers on other global peaks. Additionally, a theoretical stance underpinned by feminist thought would afford critical interrogation of the gendered experiences and complexities that continue to exist in Nepal, mountaineering and, more broadly, adventurous and risk-taking contexts. For instance, notions of masculinity underpin even the mere division of "soft" and "hard" adventure as described in much of the adventure tourism literature (cf. Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Hill, 1995). I contend it is important for tourism scholars to more critically think about the gendered ideologies that likely contribute to who can *be* a mountaineer, while also revealing the dynamic interplay of individuals' expressions of fear and strength and the social relations that shape risk-taking.

Moreover, although this research begins to hint at the understood hierarchies (e.g., international climbing guides and clients, Sirdars or Sherpa leaders, Climbing Sherpas, Kitchen Boys, and porters) in Himalayan expeditions, more research is needed to examine the power dynamics within these hierarchies, which work to discipline and constrain mountain climbers and workers' freedoms in different ways. As seen in their stories, beneath the performances of strength are viscerally felt anxieties and fears, and as Climbing Sherpas and mountain workers continue to climb against these internal defences, questions of power are ever apparent. In addition, although I hinted at Foucault's notions of docile bodies and surveillance in the discussion of the findings, additional research with these specific ideas in focus might reveal more insights into the relationship between docility and utility. Are mountain workers being

disciplined for the purpose of increasing the economic productivity of the body (Foucault, 1977)? In the case of mountaineering, by bringing more paying foreign clients to the top of Mt. Everest, the Nepali governments earn more royalty dollars, commercial expedition companies secure future clients, and Sirdars and Climbing Sherpas gain monetary bonuses for successfully reaching the summit with clients (P. Sherpa, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

According to Foucault (1977), “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific techniques of a power that regards individuals as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (p. 170). By targeting bodies, through mechanisms like “surveillance,” disciplinary power produces, constitutes, and controls individuals. Future research could consider more closely the effects of such disciplinary power, particularly on the mountainside, but more broadly in tourism contexts that use individuals’ bodies for means of production.

Lastly, the final research opportunity I will touch upon is related to mobilities, privileges, and development. As described in the discussion chapter, village proximity to large mountains like Mt. Everest provides some populations with opportunities to capitalise on Nepal’s geography. However, it is apparent that accessibility to such economic opportunities as they relate to physical (e.g., movement) and social (e.g., privilege) mobilities needs to be further explored. More specifically, research should be aimed at exploring the perspectives of other local mountain populations (e.g., Rai, Tamang, Magar), or Sherpas who specifically reside in the lower regions year-round, which would provide further insight into the sociocultural and geopolitical complexities of such communities. Additionally, from this future research, I imagine that insights around the systemic inequalities and disparities that still prevail in Nepal’s mountainous regions will emerge, which again shifts attention back to the question of, “why tourism”? I tend to this question, along with some final thoughts below.

8.3 Concluding Thoughts

Although some of the Climbing Sherpas demonstrated agency to walk away from their dangerous high-altitude mountaineering positions, many of them often turned to industries and entrepreneurial ventures that were still very much associated with tourism. As illuminated above, this reliance on tourism was ever apparent after the tragic earthquake of April 2015. Just after the earthquake, Ang Tshering Sherpa, a chairman of the Climate Alliance of Himalayan Communities, shared a report explaining that more than 70% of local residents of the Solukhumbu region depend on tourism for their annual income. Thus as a primary way forward, Ang Tshering petitioned for “tourists to return [to Nepal and the Solukhumbu] to boost the economy” (Ang Tshering, 2015). It is this paradox of tourism that raises more questions around its continued development and positioning as the “saviour” in so many developing countries. Should researchers and developers be pushing a tourism-led agenda (Mair, 2012)? Moreover, what happens when there are presumed to be no obvious alternatives for communities?

Underlining each of the aforementioned questions are ideas of sustainability, resiliency, and transformability. Social-ecological resilience is part of what contributes to the complexities of these mountain communities. However, rather than thinking of resiliency as returning to a stable state as it is understood in physics and ecology (cf. Holling, 1973), the focus of these communities (and their sustainability) should be on their ability to adapt and transform (Adger, 2000; Davoudi, 2012; Holling 1996). Adaptability and transformability are important characteristics of resilient systems that begin to shift away from the simplistic “bounce back” or “bounce forward” equilibristic views (Davoudi, 2012; Mulligan et al., 2016). According to Hiller (2015), transformability is an aspect of resilience in which communities “steer away from undesirable trajectories by creatively transforming structure” (p. 11). Applied in planning

studies, she suggests that this capacity of resilience is a performative process that can be seen as the most progressive in conditions of uncertainty and change. Liminality, as explored in this thesis, can further be seen as a central part of individuals' and communities' adaptive capacities, and a potential site for "transformability", contributing to a process of becoming (Mulligan et al., 2016).

However, as hinted above, in the face of extreme adversities with *no alternatives* set in place, "bouncing back" or "bouncing forward" seems to be perceived as the most viable option. As much of the world continues to fiercely push towards modernity and increased development, governments, developers, and communities continue to promote the promise of tourism rather than *pausing* to re-think the restructuring of their economies. At times, this also appeared to be the case for some of the Climbing Sherpas (e.g., Kami, Lhakpa Gyaljen) who continued to work in the commercial mountaineering industry despite their expressed desires to quit. In these examples, institutions' ideologies and their effects impinge upon freedom – the freedom to transform. Therefore, according to critical theorists and psychologists Watkins and Shulman (2008), the crucial question of freedom and liberation, then,

involves the transformation of fatalism into critical consciousness, an awakening of agency and the power to perform our roles differently, and a quickening of imaginations of desire. In order to effect changes, we need to learn how to create safe and protected spaces where people can experiment with stepping outside inherited scripts and unconsciously assumed identifications to consider alternative performances. (p. 25)

With these conceptualisations of liberation in mind, we can begin to challenge the ways we understand sustainable development and community resiliency. Moreover, we may begin to question our own inherited scripts and responsibilities as critical tourism researchers, asking

ourselves more questions. As tourism scholars and researchers oriented by social justice, what is it that we are fighting for? Do we continue to aid in the researching and planning of tourism developments because our economic and academic status depends on it? Or rather should we more thoughtfully consider the needs and freedoms of the communities with whom we work, preparing ourselves to think beyond tourism-led solutions? This research has, perhaps, played a small part in helping us begin to address such critical questions.

References

- Abraham, G. D. (1911). Review of Swiss Mountain Climbs [Book by Val Fynn]. *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 2, 177-178.
- Adams, V. (1992). Tourism and Sherpas. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19(3), 534-554.
- Adams, V. (1996). *Tigers of the snow and other virtual Sherpas: An ethnography of Himalayan encounters*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Addison, G. (1999). Adventure travel and ecotourism. In J. Miles and S. Priest (Eds.), *Adventure programming* (pp. 415-440). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Adger, W.N. (2000). Social and ecological resilience: Are they related? *Progress in Human Geography*, 24, 347-374.
- Adventure Travel and Trade Association. (2013). Adventure tourism market study. *ATTA and The George Washington University*. Retrieved from <http://files.adventuretravel.biz/docs/research/adventure-tourism-market-study-2013-web.pdf>
- Aitchison, C. (2001). Theorizing other discourses of tourism, gender and culture: Can the subaltern speak (in tourism)? *Tourist Studies*, 1(2), 133-147.
- Albers, P.C., & James, W.R. (1988). Travel photography: A methodological approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15, 134-158.
- Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation. (2017). *The Khumbu Climbing Centre*. Retrieved March 15, 2017 from <http://alexlowe.org/p/projects/item/1/the-khumbu-climbing-center.htm>
- Alpine Ascents. (2017a). *Island Peak, Nepal*. Retrieved January 19, 2017 <https://www.alpineascents.com/climbs/island-peak/>
- Alpine Ascents. (2017b). *Lakpa Rita Sherpa*. Retrieved from January 19, 2017 <https://www.alpineascents.com/guides/lakpa-rita-sherpa/>
- Amoamo, M. & Thompson, A. (2010). (re)Imagining Māori tourism: Representation and cultural hybridity in postcolonial New Zealand. *Tourist Studies*, 10(1), 35-55.
- Apa Sherpa Foundation. (2016). *Apa Sherpa full biography*. Retrieved March 15, 2016 from <http://apasherpafoundation.org/apa-sherpa-full-biography/>
- Apollo, M. (2014). Climbing as a kind of human impact on the high mountain environment-based on the selected peaks of Seven Summits. *Journal of Selcuk University Natural and Applied Science*, 1061-1071.
- Apollo, M. (2015). The clash - social, environmental and economical changes in tourism destination areas caused by tourism: The case of Himalayan villages (India and Nepal). *Current Issues of Tourism Research*, 5(1), 6-19.
- Apollo, M. (2017). The true accessibility of mountaineering: The case of the High Himalayas. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 17, 29-43.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Arnette, A. (2011, Feb. 17). Comparing the routes of Everest [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2011/02/17/comparing-the-routes-of-everest/>
- Arnette, A. (2012, Sep. 23). Avalanche kills 11 on Nepal's Manaslu [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2012/09/23/avalanche-kills-many-on-nepals-manaslu/>
- Arnette, A. (2013a, Aug. 19). Oxygen on Everest: Reviewing the options, updated [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2013/08/19/oxygen-on-everest-reviewing-the-options/>
- Arnette, A. (2013b, Mar. 15). Can I be rescued on Everest? [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2013/03/15/everest-2013-can-i-be-rescued-on-everest/>
- Arnette, A. (2013c, Apr. 12). Crossing the ladders of Everest [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2013/04/12/everest-2013-crossing-the-ladders-of-everest/>
- Arnette, A. (2016, Dec. 30). Everest by the numbers: 2017 edition [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2016/12/30/everest-by-the-numbers-2017-edition/>
- Ashenfelter, O., 2006. Measuring the VSL: problems and prospects. *The Economic Journal*, 116, C10-C23.
- Ashworth, G.J (2002). Holocaust tourism: The experience of Krakow-Kazimierz. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 11(4), 363-367.
- Asian Development Bank. (2011). Handbook of style and usage. *Asian Development Bank*. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/31385/hsu.pdf>
- Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., & Housley, W. (2008). *Contours of culture: Complex ethnography and the ethnography of complexity*. Plymouth, UK: Altamira Press.
- Bandyopadhyay, J. & Gyawali, D. (1994). Himalayan water resources: Ecological and political aspects of management. *Mountain Research and Development*, 14(1), 1-24.
- Banks, M. (1998). Visual anthropology: Image, object, and interpretation. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 9-23). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Banks, M. (2001). *Visual methods in social research*. London: Sage.
- Banks, M. (2007). *Using visual data in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Barcott, B. (1996). Cliffhangers: The fatal decent of the mountain-climbing memoir. *Harper's Magazine* (August), 64-69.
- Barton, S.S. (2004). Narrative inquiry: Locating Aboriginal epistemology in relational methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 45(5), 519-526.
- Bauman, Z. (1996) 'From the Pilgrim to the Tourist: Or a Short History of Identity'. In S. Hall and P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 18-36). London: Sage.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). Postmodern adventures of life and death. In G. Scrambler & P. Higgs (Eds.), *Modernity, medicine, and health* (pp. 216-31). London, UK: Routledge.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.

- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1996). Individualization and 'precarious freedoms': Perspectives and controversies of a subject-oriented sociology. In P. Heelas, S. Lash, & P. Morris (Eds.), *Detraditionalization: Critical reflections on authority and identity* (pp. 23–48). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Beech, J. (2009). Genocide tourism. In R. Sharpley and P.R. Stone (Eds.), *The darker side of travel: The theory and practice of dark tourism* (pp. 207-223). Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.
- Beedie, P. (2003). Mountain guiding and adventure tourism: Reflections on the choreography of the experience. *Leisure Studies* 22(2),147-167.
- Beedie, P. (2008). Adventure tourism as a 'new frontier' in leisure. *World Leisure*, 3, 173-183.
- Beedie, P. & Hudson, S. (2003). Emergence of mountain-based adventure tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(3), 625-643.
- Benington, J., & Geddes, M. (1992). Local economic development in the 1980s and 1990s: Retrospect and prospects. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 6(4), 454-63.
- Bentley, T. A., & Page, S. J. (2008). A decade of injury monitoring in the New Zealand adventure tourism sector: A summary risk analysis. *Tourism Management*, 29(5), 857-869.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin Books.
- Berger, P.L. (1967). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bernbaum, E. (1997). The spiritual and cultural significance of mountains. In B. Messerli and J.D. Ives (Eds.), *Mountains of the world: A global priority* (pp. 39-60). London: Parthenon Press.
- Bhandari, K. (2010). Tourism in Nepal: Post-monarchy challenges. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 8(1-2), 69-83.
- Bhandari, S., Zhang, X., Cui, C., Bianba, Liao, S., Peng, Y., ... Su, B. (2015). Genetic evidence of a recent Tibetan ancestry to Sherpas in the Himalayan region. *Science Report*, 5, 16249.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2013). Border crossing: Bridging empirical practices with de/colonizing epistemologies. In N.K. Denzin & M.D. Giardina (Eds.), *Global dimensions of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 115-134). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.
- Bhattarai, K., Conway, D., & Shrestha, N. (2005). Tourism, terrorism, and turmoil in Nepal. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(3), 669-688.
- Bisharat, A. (2016, Apr.). After two years of deadly Everest avalanches, Nepal introduces new safety measures. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from <http://adventureblog.nationalgeographic.com/>
- Bjønness, I. M. (1986). Mountain hazard perception and risk-avoiding strategies among the Sherpas of Khumbu Himal, Nepal. *Mountain Research and Development*, 277-292.
- Blaikie, P., Cameron, J., & Seddon, D. (1981). *Nepal in crisis: Growth and stagnation in the periphery*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Blank, U. (1989). *The community tourism industry imperative: The necessity, the opportunities, its potential*. Pennsylvania State College: Venture.
- Blench, R. (2001, May 17). 'You can't go home again': Pastoralism in the new millennium. *Overseas Development Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6329.pdf>
- Blom, T. (2000). Morbid tourism: A postmodern market niche with an example from Althorpe. *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 54, 29-36.
- Bochner, A.P. (2001). Narrative's virtues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(2), 131-157.
- Bott, E. (2009). Big mountain, big name: Globalised relations of risk in Himalayan mountaineering. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 7(4), 287-301.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Distinction*. London: Routledge.
- Boyd, K. (2015, Mar. 1). What is photokeratitis, including snow blindness? *American Academy of Ophthalmology*. Retrieved from <https://www.aaopt.org/eye-health/diseases/photokeratitis-snow-blindness>
- British Broadcasting Corporation. (2015, May 15). Nepal earthquakes: Devesation in maps and images. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32479909>
- Brohman, J. (1996). New directions in tourism for third world development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23(1), 48-70.
- Brown, C. (2014). Sherpas: The invisible men of Everest. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/special-features/2014/04/140426-sherpa-culture-everest-disaster>.
- Brown, D. F. (2013). Tourism as colonizers in Quintana Roo, Mexico. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 57(2), 186-205.
- Brymer, E. (2010). Risk taking in Extreme sports: A phenomenological perspective. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 13(1-2), 218-238.
- Buckley, R. (2006). *Adventure tourism*. Oxfordshire, UK: CABI.
- Buda, D. M. (2015). The death drive in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 50, 39-51.
- Burke, J., & Walker, P. (2014, Oct. 17). Nepal blames 'cheap tourists' for falling victim to snowstorm in Himalayas. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/17/nepal-cheap-tourists-snow-disaster>
- Burtscher, M., Philadelphy, M., Nachbauer, W., & Likar, R. (1995). The risk of death to trekkers and hikers in the mountains. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273(6), 460, doi: 10.1001/jama.1995.03520300030031.
- Butler, R., Hall, C.M. and Jenkins, J. (Eds.). (1998) *Tourism and recreation in rural areas*. New York: Wiley.
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (2012, Sept, 13). Canadian Everest victim used inexperienced company, lacked oxygen: Senior Sherpa expressed fears about climber dying in summit attempt. *CBC News, Canada*. Retrieved from

- <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/exclusive-canadian-everest-victim-used-inexperienced-company-lacked-oxygen-1.1195149>
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (2014, Apr. 22). Everest avalanche: Sherpa guides, Nepal officials meet. *CBC News, World*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/everest-avalanche-sherpa-guides-nepal-officials-meet-1.2617320>
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (2015, Feb. 27). New Mount Everest route not considerably safer, says veteran climber. *CBC News, Calgary*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/new-mount-everest-route-not-considerably-safer-says-veteran-climber-1.2975711>
- Carnicelli-Filho, S. (2013). The emotional life of adventure guides. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 43, 192-209.
- Carter, C. I. (2006). Playing with risk? Participant perceptions of risk and management implications in adventure tourism. *Tourism Management*, 27(2), 317–325.
- Caton, K. (2012). Taking the moral turn in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(4), 1906-1928.
- Caton, K., & Santos, C.A. (2008). Closing the hermeneutic cycle? Photographic encounters with the other. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(1), 7-26.
- Cederholm, E. A. (2004). The use of photo-elicitation in tourism research: Framing the backpacker experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(3), 225-241.
- Census India. (2011). *District census handbook: Darjiling* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/1901_PART_B_DCHB_DARJILING.pdf
- Chad, D. (2000). *Nepal's tourism: Uncensored facts*. Varanasi, India: Pilgrims.
- Chambers, D. & Buzinde, C. (2015). Tourism and decolonization: Locating research and self. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 51, 1-16.
- Chaney, D. (1996). *Lifestyles*. London: Routledge.
- Chapman, P. (2010, May 19). Who really was first to climb Mount Everest? *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/7735660/Who-really-was-first-to-climb-Mount-Everest.html>
- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chase, S. E. (2011). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cheung, L., & McColl-Kennedy, J.R. (2015). Resource integration in liminal periods: Transitioning to transformative service. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29 (6/7), 485-497.
- Choron, J. (1964). *Modern man and mortality*. New York: Macmillan.

- Christiansen, D. (1990). Adventure tourism. In J. Miles and S. Priest (Eds.), *Adventure education* (pp. 433-442). State College PA: Venture Publishing.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35–75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clark, A. (2012). Visual ethics in a contemporary landscape. In S. Pink (Ed.), *Advances in visual methodology*. London: Sage.
- Coalter, F., Dimeo, P., Morrow, S., & Taylor, J. (2010). The Benefits of Mountaineering and Mountaineering Related Activities: A Review of Literature: A Report to the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. *British Mountaineering Council*, Department of Sports Studies, University of Stirling.
- Cohen-Solal, A. (1988). *Sartre: A life*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Cohen, E. (1988). Authenticity and commodification in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15, 371-386.
- Cohen, E. (1993) The study of touristic images of native people: Mitigating the stereotype of a stereotype. In D. Pierce and W. Butler (Eds.), *Tourism research: critiques and challenges* (pp. 36-69). London: Routledge.
- Cole, S. & Eriksson, J. (2010). Tourism and human rights. In S. Cole and N. Morgan (Eds.), *Tourism and inequality: Problems and prospects* (pp. 107-125). Cambridge, MA: CABI.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Collier, J., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Collister, R. (1984). Adventure versus the mountain. *The Alpine Journal*, 89, 123-125.
- Cooper, A. (1997). *Sacred mountains: Ancient wisdom and modern meanings*. Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books.
- Crang M. (2003). The hair in the gate: visibility and geographical knowledge. *Antipode* 35(2), 238-243.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mix method approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Beyond boredom and anxiety: experiencing flow in work and play*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cush, D., Robinson, C., & York, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- D' Aliesio, R. (2012, Sept. 13). Grieving man rebukes guides for failing to halt wife's Everest trek. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/grieving-man-rebukes-guides-for-failing-to-halt-wifes-everest-trek/article4544432/>
- Daly, K. J. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dangar, D. F. O., & Blakeney, T.S. (1957). The rise of modern mountaineering and the formation of the Alpine Club. *Alpine Journal*, 62, 26.
- Dann, G. (1999). Writing out the tourist in space and time. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 159-187.
- Davidson, L. (2008). Tragedy in the adventure playground: Media representations of mountaineering accidents in New Zealand. *Leisure Studies*, 27(1), 3-19.
- Davis, W. (2014, Apr. 26). As equals on the mountain, the Sherpas deserve better. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/as-equals-on-the-mountain-the-sherpas-deserve-better/article18209186/>
- Davoudi S. (2012). Resilience: A bridging concept or a dead end? "Reframing" resilience: Challenges for planning theory and practice interacting traps: Resilience assessment of a pasture management system in northern afghanistan urban Resilience: What Does it Mean in Planning Practice? Resilience as a Useful Concept for Climate Change Adaptation? The Politics of Resilience for Planning: A Cautionary Note. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13(2), 299-333.
- Dickson, T. (2004). If the outcome is predictable, is it an Adventure? Being in, not barricaded from, the outdoors. *World Leisure*, 4, 48-54.
- Diggory, J., & Rothman, D. (1961). Values destroyed by death. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(1), 205-210.
- Downey, G. (2005). *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in cunning from an Afro-Brazilian art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Downing, L. (2008). *The Cambridge introduction to Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Duane, D. (2005). Career climber. *Sierra Magazine*, September Issue.
- Dwivedi, M., & Yadav, A. (2009). Online images of tourist destinations. In M. Saunders, P. Lewis, & A. Thornhill (Eds.), *Research methods for business students* (5th ed.) (pp. 313–316). Harlow: Pearson.
- Dwyer, O., & Alderman, D. (2008). *Civil Rights memorials and the geography of memory*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press.
- Ebert, P. A., & Robertson, S. (2013). A plea for risk. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 73, 45-64.
- Elliott, D., Harris, K., & Baron, S. (2005). Crisis management and services marketing. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19(5), 336-345.
- Ellis, C. (1999). Heartful autoethnography. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(5), 669-683.

- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C., & Berger, L. (2003). Their story/my story/our story: Including the researcher's experience in interview research. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Postmodern interviewing* (pp. 51-65). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ellis, C.S., & Bochner, A.P. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 429-449.
- Elmes, M., & Frame, B. (2008). Into hot air: A critical perspective on Everest. *Human Relations*, 61(2), 213-241.
- Elsrud, T. (2001). Risk creation in traveling: Backpacker adventure narration. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(3), 597-617.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. (2014). *Sherpa*. Retrieved November 29, 2014 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sherpa-people#ref790062>
- Eng, R. C. (Ed.). (2010). *Mountaineering: The freedom of the hills* (8th ed.). Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers Books.
- Everest History. (2004a). The Sherpas of Everest series: Babu Chiri Sherpa. Retrieved March 15, 2017 from <http://www.everesthistory.com/sherpas/babuchiri.htm>
- Everest History. (2004b). The Sherpas of Everest series: Ang Rita Sherpa. Retrieved March 15, 2017 from <http://www.everesthistory.com/sherpas/angrita.htm>
- Everest News. (2003). Everest south side (Nepal) camps. Everest News. Retrieved from <http://www.everestnews.com/everestnews/camps.htm>
- Farber, L. (1966). *The ways of the will*. New York: Basic Books.
- Feighey, W. (2003). Negative image? Developing the visual in tourism research. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 6(1), 76-85.
- Fennell, D. (2009). Chapter 12: Ethics and tourism. In J. Tribe (Ed.), *Philosophical issues in tourism* (pp. 211-226). Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.
- Fennell, D. A. (2014). *Ecotourism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Finnegan, W. (2003). The economics of empire: Notes on the Washington consensus. *Harper's Magazine*, May, 41-54.
- Fischer, L., Käab, A., Huggel, C., & Noetzli, J. (2006). Geology, glacier retreat and permafrost degradation as controlling factors of slope instabilities in high-mountain rock wall: The Monte Rosa east face. *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences*, 6, 761-772.
- Fisher, J. F. (1990). *Sherpas: Reflections on change in Himalayan Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foley, M., & Lennon, J. (1996a) JFK and dark tourism: A fascination with assassination. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2, 198-211.
- Follesdal, D. (1981). Sartre on freedom. In P.A. Schilpp (Ed.), *The philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (pp. 392- 407). La Salle, IL: Open Court.

- Foucault, M. (1973). *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The birth of a prison*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume I: An introduction*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1994). The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth: The essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*. New York: The New Press.
- Friedman, M. (1962). *Capitalism and freedom*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Frohlick, S. (2003). Negotiating the 'Global' within the global playscapes of Mount Everest. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3(5), 525–542.
- Frohlick, S. (2004). Who is Lhakpa Sherpa? Circulating subjectivities within the global/local terrain of Himalayan mountaineering. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5(2), 195–212.
- Frow, J. (1995). *Cultural studies and cultural value*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Frow, J. (1997). *Time and commodity culture: Essays in cultural theory and postmodernity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fuchs, G., & Reichel, A. (2011). An exploratory inquiry into destination risk perceptions and risk reduction strategies of first time vs. repeat visitors to a highly volatile destination. *Tourism Management*, 32(2), 266-276.
- Fyfe, G., & Law, J. (1988) Introduction: On the invisibility of the visible. In G. Fyfe and J. Law (Eds.) *Picturing power: Visual depiction and social relations*. London: Routledge.
- Ganju, A. & Dimri, A.P. (2004). Prevention and mitigation of avalanche disasters in Western Himalayan region. *Natural Hazards*, 31, 357-371.
- Garrod, B. (2007). A snapshot into the past: The utility of volunteer-employed photography in planning and managing heritage tourism. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 2(1), 14-35.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Macmillan.
- George, R. (2003). Tourists' perceptions of safety and security while visiting Cape Town. *Tourism Management*, 24(5), 575–585.
- Geurts, K. L. (2003). *Culture and the senses: Bodily ways of knowing in an African community*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giles, J. (1999). *French existentialism: Consciousness, ethics and relations with others*. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V.
- Glover, T. D. (2003). Taking the narrative turn: The value of stories in leisure research. *Loisir Et Société*, 26(1), 145-167.

- Godde, M. F., Price, M.F., & Zimmermann, F.M. (1996). *Tourism and development in mountain regions*. New York, NY: CABI Publishing.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor books.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual*. New York: Anchor.
- Government of Canada. (2010). Panel on research ethics Tri-Council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans (2nd ed.). Retrieved from: <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policypolitique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default>.
- Grasseni, C. (2004). Skilled visions: An apprenticeship in breeding aesthetics. *Social Anthropology*, 12, 41-55.
- Gray, J. M., & Wilson, M. A. (2009). The relative risk perception of travel hazards. *Environment and Behavior*, 41(2), 185-204.
- Great Nepal Travels. (2017). *Everest base camp trekking package* [Map image]. Retrieved from <http://www.greatnepaltravels.com/everest-base-camp-trek.html>
- Gregg, G. S. (2011). Identity in life narratives. *Narrative Inquiry*, 21(2), 319-328.
- Griffin, L. (2015b). Thamserku, southwest face, shy girl. *American Alpine Journal*, 14, 89. Retrieved from <http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212874/Thamserku-Southwest-Face-Shy-Girl>
- Griffin, T. (2015). *The experience of hosting friends and relatives for immigrants* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
- Grimwood, B., Yudina, O., Muldoon, M., & Qiu, J. (2014). Responsibility in tourism: A discursive analysis. *Annals of Tourism*, 50, p. 22-38.
- Grotzbach, E., & Stadel, C. (1997). Mountain peoples and culture. In B. Messerli and J.D. Ives (Eds.), *Mountains of the world: A global priority* (pp. 17-38). London: Parthenon Press.
- Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Guggleberger, M. (2015). Climbing beyond the summits: Social and global aspects of women's expeditions in the Himalayas. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 32(4), 597-613.
- Guinness World Records. (2017). Highest mountain. Retrieved February 3, 2017 from <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/highest-mountain>
- Hall, C.M., & Jenkins, J.M. (1995). *Tourism and Public Policy*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hansen, P. H. (1995). Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the invention of mountaineering in mid-Victorian Britain. *The Journal of British Studies*, 34(3), 300-324.
- Harper, D. (2000) Reimagining visual methods: Galileo to Neuromancer. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 717-732). London: Sage.
- Harper, D. (2005). What's new visually? In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 747-762). London: Sage.

- Harris, M. (2007). *Ways of knowing: New approaches in the anthropology of experience and learning*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Harrison, D. (1992). International tourism and less developed countries: the background. In D. Harrison (Ed.), *Tourism and the less developed countries*. England: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Harrison, D. (1996). Sustainability and tourism: reflections from a muddy pool. In L. Briguglio, B. Archer, J. Jafari, & G.Wall (Eds.), *Sustainable tourism in islands and small states* (pp. 69-89). London: Pinter.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heinen, J. T., & Mehta, J.N. (2000). Emerging issues in legal and procedural aspects of buffer zone management with case studies from Nepal. *Journal of Environment and Development*, 9(1), 45-67.
- Heinen, J.T., & Kattel, B. (1992). Parks, people, and conservation: A review of management issues in Nepal's protected areas. *Population and Environment: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 14(1), 49-83.
- Hell, N. (2012, Apr. 26). Tragedy at 29,000 Feet: The 10 worst disasters on Everest. *Outside Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.outsideonline.com/1930356/tragedy-29000-feet-10-worst-disasters-everest>
- Heller, S. (2016, Apr. 13). Everest's Icefall Doctors establish 2016 route through Khumbu Icefall, in *Rock and Ice: The Climber's Magazine*. Retrieved from: <http://www.rockandice.com/climbing-news/everests-icefall-doctors-establish-the-2016-khumbu-icefall-route>
- Hepburn, S. (2002). Touristic forms of life in Nepal. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(3), 611-630.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007). The practice of feminist in-depth interviewing. In S.N. Hesse-Beber & P.L. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (pp. 1-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hill, B. J. (1995). A guide to adventure travel. *Parks and Recreation*, September Issue, 56-65.
- Hiller, J. (2015). Performances and performativities of resilience, In R. Neunen, K. van Assche, & M. Duinevald (Eds.), *Evolutionary governance theory: Theory and applications* (pp. 167-184). London: Springer.
- Hilton, J. (1933). *Lost Horizon*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, Inc.
- Hobbs, J.J. (2007). *Fundamentals of World Regional Geography*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), 551-575.
- Hodgson, N. (2010). Voicing the self: Foucault, Cavell and an ethics of citizenship. Happiness and personal growth: Dialogue between philosophy, psychology, and comparative

- education. Retrieved from <http://repository.kulib.kyotou.ac.jp/dspace/handle/2433/143034>
- Holling, C.S. (1973). Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4, 1-23.
- Holling, C.S. (1996). Engineering resilience versus ecological resilience, In P.C. Schulze (Ed.) *Engineering Within Ecological Constraints* (pp. 25-62). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Hollinshead, K. (1992). 'White' gaze, 'red' people' – Shadow visions: the disidentification of 'Indians' in cultural tourism. *Leisure Studies* 11(1), 43-64.
- Hollinshead, K. (1999). Surveillance of the worlds of tourism: Foucault and the eye-of-power. *Tourism Management*, 20, p. 7-23.
- Holstein, J.A., & Gubrium, J.F. (1995). *The active interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Holstein, J.A., & Gubrium, J.F. (2012). *Varieties of narrative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Holt, L. W. (2008). Mountains, Mountaineering and Modernity: A Cultural History of German and Austrian Mountaineering, 1900–1945 (PhD thesis). The University of Texas at Austin.
- Howard-Grenville, J., Golden-Biddle, K., Irwin, J., & Mao, J. (2011). Liminality as cultural process for cultural change. *Organization Science*, 22(2), 522-539.
- Howes, D. (Ed.). (2005). *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg.
- Ingold, T. (2000). *The perception of the environment*. London: Routledge.
- Irving, A. (2010). Dangerous substances and visible evidence: tears, blood, alcohol, pills. *Visual Studies*, 25(1), 24-35.
- Jackson, D. P. (2004). *A saint in Seattle: The life of the Tibetan mystic Dezhung Rinpoche*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Jarvie, G., & Maguire, J. (1994). *Sport and leisure in social thought*. London: Routledge.
- Jencson, L. (2001). Disastrous rites: Liminality and communitas in a flood crisis. *Anthropology and Humanism*, 26(1), 46-58.
- Jenks, C. (1995). The centrality of the eye in Western culture. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *Visual culture* (pp. 1-25). London: Routledge.
- Jezewski, M.A., & Sotnik, P. (2001). *The rehabilitation service provider as culture broker: Providing culturally competent services to foreign born persons*. Buffalo, NY: Center for International Rehabilitation Research Information and Exchange.
- Johnson, R. (2006, Nov. 5). Hill skills: Your first axe and crampons. *British Mountaineering Council*. Retrieved from <https://www.thebmc.co.uk/hill-skills-your-first-axe-and-crampons>
- Johnston, B. R., & Edwards, T. (1994). The commodification of mountaineering. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21(3), 459-478.

- Josephides, L. (1997). Representing the anthropologist's predicament. In W. James, J. Hockey, & A. Dawson (Eds.), *After writing culture: Epistemology and praxis in contemporary anthropology*. London: Routledge.
- Josselson, R. (2008). *Irvin D. Yalom: On psychotherapy and the human condition*. New York, NY: Jorge Pinto.
- Josselson, R. (2011). Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing story. In Wertz, F.; Charmaz, K.; McMullen, L.; Josselson, R.; Anderson, R.; McSpadden, E. *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis* (pp. 224-242). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Jurgakski, E. (2017). Climbers: First 14. *8000ers.com* Retrieved March 15, 2017 from <http://www.8000ers.com/cms/download.html?func=startdown&id=155>
- Kaiser, J. (2003, May 28). At the world's top. *Inland: Jyllands-Posten*. Retrieved from <http://www.jyllands-posten.dk/premium/indland/ECE4081546/P%C3%A5-verdens-top/>
- Kaplan, S. (2015, Feb. 18). After searing tragedy, Everest's deadliest route is now off-limits. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/18/after-searing-tragedy-everests-deadliest-route-is-now-off-limits/?utm_term=.86867c0297cd
- Kelly, C. J. (2000). "Thrilling and marvellous experiences": Place and subjectivity in Canadian climbing Narratives, 1885- 1925 (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
- Kennedy, M. (2005, Mar.). Mountain profile: Ama Dablam. *Alpinist Magazine*. Jackson, WY: Alpinist LCC.
- Kennett-Hensel, P. A., Sneath, J. Z., & Lacey, R. (2012). Liminality and consumption in the aftermath of a natural disaster. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 9(1), 52-63.
- Krakauer, J. (1996). *Into thin air*. New York, NY: Villard Books.
- Krakauer, J. (2014, Apr. 21). Death and anger on Everest. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/death-and-anger-on-everest>
- Kyareng, D. (2011, Aug. 25). Jomolungma: The Mount Everest [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://denpaikyareng.blogspot.ca/2011/08/jomolungma-mount-everest.html>
- Lee, R. (2002). Modernity, death, and the self: Disenchantment of death and symbols of bereavement. *Illness, Crisis and Loss*, 10, 91-107.
- Lepp, A., & Gibson, H. (2008). Sensation seeking and tourism: Tourist role, perception of risk and destination choice. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 740-750.
- Leslie, D. (2012). The responsible tourism debate. In D. Leslie (Ed.), *Responsible tourism: Concepts, theory and practice* (pp. 17-35). Oxfordshire, UK: CABI.
- Levy, N. (2002). *Sartre*. London, UK: Oneworld.
- Lewin, K. (1947). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, N. (2000). The climbing body, nature, and the experience of modernity. *Body & Society*, 6(3-4), 58-80.

- Lieblich, A., Mashiach-Tuval, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Lieu, C. (2016, Apr. 21). Untold stories: The making of the movie Sherpa. *Alpinist Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web16b/newswire-the-making-of-the-movie-sherpa>
- Loewenstein, G. (1999). Because it is there: the challenge of mountaineering for utility theory. *KYKLOS*, 52(3), 315-344.
- Löfgren, O. (1999). *On holiday: A history of vacationing*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Lonely Planet. (2017). *Kathmandu* [Online travel guide]. Retrieved March 15, 2017 from <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/nepal/kathmandu>
- Loomis, M. (2015, Apr. 22). What is the SPCC and why does it control the route through the Icefall? *Outside*. Retrieved from <https://www.outsideonline.com/1969601/what-spcc-and-why-does-it-control-route-through-icefall>
- Luger, K. (2000). *Kids of the Khumbu: Sherpa youth on the modernity trail*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Mandala Book Point.
- MacCannell, D. (1976). *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. New York, NY: Schocken.
- MacDougall, D. (1998). *Transcultural cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- MacDougall, D. (2005). *The corporeal image: Film, ethnography, and the senses*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- MacKay, K. J., & Couldwell, C. M. (2004). Using visitor-employed photography to investigate destination image. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42, 390-396.
- Macquarrie, J. (1972). *Existentialism*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.
- Mair, H. (2006). Global restructuring and local responses: Investigating rural tourism policies in two Canadian communities. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9(1), 1-43.
- Mair, H. (2012). The challenge of critical approaches to rural tourism studies and practice. In I. Ateljevic, N. Morgan, & A. Pritchard (Eds.), *The critical turn in tourism studies: Creating an academy of hope* (pp. 42-54). London, UK: Routledge.
- Mälksoo, M. (2012). The challenge of liminality for international relations theory. *Review of International Studies*, 38, 481-494.
- Mapcarta. (2011). Kharikhola [Map data]. *Mapcarta: Google Imagery*. Retrieved from <http://mapcarta.com/28339062>
- Marolt, M. (2012, Oct. 11). The problem with climbing Manaslu. *Outside Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.outsideonline.com/1910241/problem-climbing-manaslu>
- Martin, P., & Priest, S. (1986). Understanding the adventure experience. *Journal of Adventure Education*, 3(1), 18-21.
- Mayhew, B., & Bindloss, J. (2009). *Lonely planet: Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*. Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

- Mbaiwa, J.E. (2011). Changes on traditional livelihood activities and lifestyles caused by tourism development in Okavango Delta, Botswana. *Tourism Management*, 32, 1050-1060.
- McAdams, D.P. (2012). Exploring psychological themes through life-narrative accounts. In J.A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* (pp. 15-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McCormack, C. (2004). Storying stories: a narrative approach to in-depth interview questions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(3), p. 219-236.
- McGuigan, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Cultural methodologies*. London: SAGE.
- McKeown, J. (2015). Single and ready to mingle? A feminist exploration of singlehood, dating, and leisure (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
- Meethan, K. (2001). *Tourism in global society: Place, culture, consumption*. London: Palgrave.
- Mega Adventures International. (2017). *About us*. Retrieved February 15, 2017 from <http://megaadventuresintl.com/about-us/>
- Mellor, P., & Shilling, C. (1993). Modernity, self-identity and the sequestration of death. *Sociology*, 27, 411–431.
- Michie, M. (2014). *Working cross-culturally: Identity learning, border crossing, and culture brokering*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Miller, M.C. (2016). From the mountains to the screen: Re-storying visuals in critical tourism research. *The Critical Tourism Studies North America Inaugural Meeting*. Huntsville, Ontario, Canada, August 4th, 2016.
- Miller, M.C., Grimwood, B.S.R., & Arai, S. M. (2015). Ascetic practices for reflexively navigating power, privilege and freedoms in leisure research. *Leisure/Loisir*, 39 (3-4), 338-402.
- Millington, K., Locke, T., & Locke, A. (2001). Occasional studies: adventure travel. *Travel and Tourism Analyst*, 4, 65–97.
- Mitchell, C. (2011). *Doing visual research*. London: Sage.
- Mitchell, R. G. (1983). *Mountain experience: the psychology and sociology of adventure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994). *Picture Theory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Monz, C. (2000). Recreation resource assessment and monitoring techniques for mountain regions. In P. Godde, M. Price, & F. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Tourism and development in mountain regions* (pp. 47-68). New York, NY: CABI Publishing.
- Morphy, M. & Banks, M. (1997). Introduction. In M. Banks & H. Morphy (Eds.), *Rethinking visual anthropology* (pp. 1-35). London: Yale University Press.
- Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2009). *Tourism and sustainability: New tourism in the third world*. London: Routledge.

- Mu, Y., & Nepal, S. (2015). High mountain adventure tourism: Trekkers' perceptions of risk and death in Mt. Everest region, Nepal. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 21(5), 500-511.
- Muldoon, M., & Mair, H. (2016). Blogging slum tourism: A critical discourse analysis of travel blogs. *Tourism Analysis*, 21(5), 465-479.
- Muller, T. E., & Cleaver, M. (2000). Targeting the CANZUS baby boomer explorer and adventurer segments. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 6(2), 154-169.
- Mulligan, M., Steele, W., Rickards, L., & Funfgeld, H. (2016). Keywords in planning: What do we mean by 'community resilience'? *International Planning Studies*, DOI:10.1080/13563475.2016.1155974
- Mutua, K. & Swadener, B (2004). *Decolonizing research in cross-cultural contexts: critical personal narratives*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Napier, A. D. (2006). Avant-garde or Savant-garde: The eco-tourist as Tarzan. In L. Vivonco & R. Gordon (Eds.), *Tarzan was on eco-tourist* (pp. 75-90). Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- NASA. (2017a). The earth observatory: Images [Map mages]. NASA. Retrieved from <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=82581>
- NASA. (2017b). The earth observatory: Features. NASA. Retrieved from <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/8000MeterPeaks/page6.php>
- Nash, D. (1977). Tourism as a form of imperialism. In V. Smith (Ed.). *Hosts and guests* (p. 37-52). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press
- National Emergency Operation Centre (@NEoCOfficial). (2015, July 16). Death toll. Injured toll. #NepalEarthquake [Tweet] Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/NEoCOfficial>
- National Planning Commission. (2012, Nov). National population and housing census: Village development committee/municipality. *Government of Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20130418041642/http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/National%20Report.pdf>
- National Public Radio. (2013, Aug 14). On Mount Everest, Sherpa guides bear the brunt of the danger. *NPR Fresh Air*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2013/08/14/206704533/on-mount-everest-sherpa-guides-bear-the-brunt-of-the-danger>.
- Neale, J. (2002). *Tigers of the snow: How one fateful climb made the Sherpas mountaineering legends*. London: Abacus.
- Nelsson, R. (2011, July 21). Mount Everest: Named after the first surveyor general of India. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/from-the-archive-blog/2011/jul/21/mount-everest-name-1856>
- Némethy, M., Pressman, A. B., Freer, L., & McIntosh, S. E. (2015). Mt Everest base camp medical clinic "Everest ER": epidemiology of medical events during the first 10 years of operation. *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*, 26(1), 4-10.
- Nepal Census. (2001). Nepal's Village Development Committees. *Digital Himalaya*. Retrieved from <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/nepalcensus/form.php?selection=1>

- Nepal Medical Project. (2014). About the Region. *Stanford's Nepal Medical Project*. Retrieved from <https://sites.stanford.edu/nepalmedical/about-region-0>
- Nepal Mountaineering Association. (2017). *NMA Training*. Retrieved January 28, 2017 from <http://www.nepalmountaineering.org/article-training>
- Nepal Trekking Pass. (2016). *Manang*. Retrieved November 29, 2016 from <http://www.nepal trekking pass.com/manag.php>
- Nepal, S.K. (2000). Tourism in protected areas: The Nepalese Himalayas. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27(3), 661-681.
- Nepal, S.K. (2002). Tourism as a key to sustainable mountain development: The Nepalese Himalayas in retrospect. *Unaslyva*, 208(53), 48-46.
- Nepal, S.K. (2003). *Tourism and the environment: Perspectives from the Nepal Himalaya*. Nepal: Himal Books.
- Nepal, S.K. (2005). Tourism and remote mountain settlements: Spatial and temporal development of tourist infrastructure in the Mt. Everest Region, Nepal. *Tourism Geographies*, 7(2), 205-227.
- Nepal, S.K. (2007). Tourism and rural settlements: Nepal's Annapurna region. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(4), 855-875.
- Nepal, S.K. (2010). Tourism and political change in Nepal. In R. Butler and W. Suntikul (Eds.), *Tourism and Political Change* (pp. 148-159). Woodeaton, Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Limited.
- Nepal, S.K. (2015). Irish pubs and dream cafes: Tourism, tradition, and modernity in Nepal's Khumbu (Everest) region. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 40(2), 248-261.
- Nepal, S.K. (2016). Tourism and change in Nepal's Mt. Everest region. In H. Richins and J.S. Hull (Eds.), *Mountain tourism: Experiences, communities, environments, and sustainable futures* (pp. 285-294). CAB International. Doi: [10.1079/9781780644608.0000](https://doi.org/10.1079/9781780644608.0000)
- Nepal, S.K., Kohler, T. and Banzhaf, B.R. (2002). Great Himalaya: Tourism and the dynamics of change in Nepal. *Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research*, Berne, Switzerland.
- New York Times. (1923, Mar. 18). Climbing Mount Everest is work for supermen. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/arts/mallory1923.pdf>
- Nisbet, R. (Ed.). (1972). *Social change*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Nobel Prize. (2017). *The Nobel prize in literature 1964: Jean-Paul Sartre*. Retrieved January 31, 2017 from http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1964/press.html
- Norgay, J.T., & Coburn, B. (2002). *Touching my father's soul: A Sherpa's journey to the top of Everest*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Noy, C. (2008). Pages as stages: A performance approach to visitor books. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2), 509-528.
- Nuwer, R. (2015, Oct. 9). Death in the clouds: The problem with Everest's 200+ bodies. *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20151008-the-graveyard-in-the-clouds-everests-200-dead-bodies>

- Odell, N. E. (1924). The last climb of Mallory and Irvine. *The Geographical Journal*, 64(6), 455-461.
- Oliver-Smith, A., & Hoffman, S.M. (1999), *The angry earth: Disaster in anthropological perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Olivier, S. (2006). Moral dilemmas of participation in dangerous leisure activities. *Leisure Studies*, 25(1), 95-109.
- Ollerenshaw, J. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2002). Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 329-347.
- Ortner, S.B. (1997). Thick resistance: Death and cultural construction of agency in Himalayan mountaineering. *Representations, Special Issue: The Fate of "Culture": Geertz and Beyond*, 59, 135-162.
- Ortner, S.B. (1999). *Life and death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan mountaineering*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pagdin, C. (1995). Assessing tourism impacts in the Third World: A Nepal case study. *Progress in Planning*, 44, 185-266.
- Palmer, C. (2004). Death, danger and the selling of risk in adventure sports. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Lifestyle sport: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 205–215). London: Routledge.
- Panzeri, D., Caroli, P., & Haack, B. (2013). Sagarmatha Park (Mt Everest) porter survey and analysis. *Tourism Management*, 36, 26-34.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Payne, E., & Shrestha, M. (2014, Apr. 20). Avalanche kills 12 in single deadliest accidents on Mount Everest. *CNN World*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/18/world/asia/nepal-everest-avalanche/>
- Peakbagger (2017). *What is a peakbagger?* Retrieved March 20, 2017 from <http://www.peakbagger.com/pbgeog/Essay.aspx>
- Peakbagger (2017b). *Pumori: China/Nepal*. Retrieved March 20, 2017 from <http://www.peakbagger.com/peak.aspx?pid=10637>
- Peedom, J. (Director). (2015). *Sherpa: Trouble on Everest* [Documentary]. Australia: Screen Australia.
- Peet, R. (2003). *Unholy trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Pervin, L.A. (1960). Existentialism, psychology, and psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 15(5), 305-309.
- Peterson, J.W. (Director). (1996). *The golden pig* [ethnographic documentary]. Australia: Oracle Pictures.
- Phoenix, A. (2013). Analysing narrative contexts. In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 72-87). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Pi-Sunyer, O. (1989). Changing perceptions of tourism and tourists in a Catalan resort town. In V. Smith (Ed.), *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism* (pp. 187-199). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.
- Pink, S. (2007). *Doing visual ethnography* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Pink, S. (2011). Multimodality, multisensoriality, and ethnographic knowing: Social semiotics and the phenomenology of perception. *Qualitative Research*, 11(3), 261-276.
- Pink, S. (2013). *Doing visual ethnography* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications
- Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, G. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative. In J. Clandinin (ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Pocock, N., McIntosh, A., & Zahra, A. (2012). Video diary methodology and tourist experience research. In T. Rakic & D. Chambers (Eds.), *An introduction to visual research methods in tourism* (pp. 108–126). London: Routledge.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany NY: SUNY Press.
- Pomfret, G. (2006). Mountaineering adventure tourists: A conceptual framework for research. *Tourism Management*, 27(1), 113-123.
- Pomfret, G. (2011). Package mountaineer tourists holidaying in the French Alps: An evaluation of key influences encouraging their participation. *Tourism Management*, 32(3), 501–510.
- Pomfret, G. (2012). Personal emotional journeys associated with adventure activities on packaged mountaineering holidays. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4, 145–154.
- Pond, K. (1993). *The professional guide: Dynamics of tour guiding*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Porter. (n.d). In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/porter>
- Prettyman, B. (2014, Apr. 29). Apa Sherpa: After the deadly avalanche, ‘leave Everest alone.’ *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from m.sltrib.com.
- Pritchard A., & Morgan, M. (2001). Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales? *Tourism Management* 22(2),167-179.
- Prosser, J. (1998). The status of image-based research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 97-112). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Prosser, J., & Schwartz, D. (1998). Photographs within the sociological research process. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 115-130). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Public Broadcasting Service. (2000). The way to the summit, Everest. *NOVA Public Broadcasting Station Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/everest/climb/waytosummitsou.html>

- Rabinow, P. (1984). Introduction. In P. Rainbow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Rahn, J. (2007). Digital content: Video as research. In J. G. Knowles, & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 299-312). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Raj Panday, D. (1999). *Nepal's failed development: Reflections on the mission and the maladies*. Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Centre.
- Rakic', T., & Chambers, D. (2010). Innovative techniques in tourism research: An exploration of visual methods and academic filmmaking. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12, 379–389.
- Rakic', T., & Chambers, D. (2012). *An introduction to visual research methods in tourism*. London: Routledge.
- Rankin, K. (2004). *The cultural politics of markets: Economic liberalization and social change in Nepal*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ravallion, M. (2010). World Bank's \$1.25/day poverty measure- countering the latest criticisms. *Research at the World Bank*. Retrieved from <http://econ.worldbank.org>
- Reed, D. & McConnachie, J. (2002). *The rough guide to Nepal*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Rhinehart, R. (2003). *To the extreme: Alternative sports inside and out*. New York: State University Press.
- Richardson, L. (1997). Narrative and sociology. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19, 116-135.
- Richter, L.K., & Richter, W.L. (1985). Policy choices in South Asian tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 12, 201-217.
- Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ritter, F., Fiebig, M., & Muhar, A. (2012). Impacts of global warming on mountaineering: A classification of phenomena affecting the alpine trail network. *Mountain Research and Development*, 32(1), 4-15.
- Rizvi, J. (1996). *Ladakh: Crossroads of high Asia*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, V. (2004). Taking risks: Identity, masculinities and rock climbing. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Lifestyle sport: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 113-130). London: Routledge.
- Rogers, P. (2012). *Resilience and the city: Change, (dis)order and disaster*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Rogers, P., & Aitchison, J. (1998). *Towards sustainable tourism in the Everest region of Nepal*. Kathmandu: IUCN Nepal.
- Rojek, C. (1993). *Ways of Escape*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Rostow, W.W. (1960). *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rowe, J. (2011). Legal issues of using images in research. In E. Margolis & L. Pauwels (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of visual methods*. London: SAGE.
- Sagarmāthā Pollution Control Committee. (2016). *Introduction*. Retrieved October 29, 2017 from <http://www.spcc.org.np/introduction.php?#intro>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Saikaly, E. (2014). Everest climbers memorial site. Retrieved from <http://eliasaikaly.com/2014/6706/>
- Santos, C. & Caton, K. (2008). Reimagining Chinatown: An analysis of tourism discourse. *Tourism Management*, 29, 1002-1012.
- Sartre, J. P. (1943). *Being and nothingness*. New York, NY: Gallimard.
- Sartre, J.P. (1938). *Nausea* (L. Alexander, Trans.). Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Sartre, J.P. (1946). *Existentialism is a humanism* (C. Macomber, Trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sartre, J.P. (1948). Reading: existentialism and humanism, In S.M. Engel & A. Soldan (Eds.), *The study of philosophy* (6th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Sartre, J.P. (1949). *Existentialism and humanism*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Scarles, C. (2010). Where words fail, visuals ignite: Opportunities for visual autoethnography in tourism research. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(4), 905–926.
- Schaffer, G. (2013, July 10). The disposable man: A western history of Sherpas on Everest. *Outside Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/climbing/mountaineering/Disposable-Man-History-of-the-Sherpa-on-Everest.html>
- Schoene, R. B. (2008). Illness at high altitude. *Chest: Us National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health*, 134(2), 402-416.
- Schroeder, K., & Sproule-Jones, M. (2012). Culture and policies for sustainable tourism: A South Asian comparison. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 14(4), 330-351.
- Seaton, A. (2002). Thanatourism's final frontiers? Visits to cemeteries, churchyards and funerary sites as sacred and secular pilgrimage. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 27(2), 78-82.
- Seaton, A. V. (1996). Guided by the dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2, 234-244.
- Sherlock, K. (2001). Revisiting the concept of hosts and guests. *Tourist studies*, 1(3), 271-295.
- Shilling, C. (1993). *The body and social theory*. London: Sage.
- Shrestha, H.P., & Shrestha, P. (2012). Tourism in Nepal: A historical perspective and present trend of development. *Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology*, 5, 54-75.
- Shrestha, N. (1998). Environmental degradation of Kathmandu: Losing Shangri-La? *Education about Asia*, 3, 11-18.
- Sijapati, A. (2016, Sep. 17). A juicy love affair. *The Kathmandu Post*. Retrieved from <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-09-17/juicy-love-affair.html>

- Singh, T. (1980). *Studies in Himalayan ecology and development strategies*. New Delhi: The English Book Store.
- Singh, T.V., & Kaur, J. (1986). The paradox of mountain tourism: case references from the Himalayas. *UNEP Industry and Environment*, 9(1), 21-26.
- Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation (2017). *Sir Edmund Hilary*. Retrieved from <http://thesiredmundhillaryfoundation.ca/about/sir-edmund-hillary>
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Smith, L. (2008). On tricky ground: Researching the native in the age of uncertainty. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (p. 113-144). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Smith, M., Davidson, J., Cameron, L., & Bondi, L. (Eds.). (2009). *Emotion, place, and culture*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Snowdon, P., Slee, B., & Farr, H. (2000). The economic impacts of different types of tourism in upland and mountain areas of Europa. In P. Godde, M. Price, & F. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Tourism and development in mountain regions* (pp. 137-145). New York, NY: CABI Publishing.
- Sofield, T. H. B. (2003). *Empowerment for sustainable tourism development*. Amsterdam: Pergamon.
- Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23(5), 605-649.
- Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry*, 20(1), 204-224.
- Stephen, L. (1871). *The playground of Europe*. London, UK: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Stevens, S. (2003). Tourism and deforestation in the Mt. Everest region of Nepal. *The Geographical Journal*, 169(3), 255-277.
- Stone, P. R. (2009). Making absent death present: Consuming dark tourism in contemporary society. In R. Sharpley and P.R. Stone (Eds.), *The darker side of travel: The theory and practice of dark tourism*. Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.
- Stone, P., & Sharpley, R. (2008). Consuming dark tourism: A thanatological perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(2), 574-595.
- Strange Remains. (2014, Mar. 2). The accidental graveyard in the 'death zone' of Mt. Everest [blog post]. *Strange Remains*. Retrieved from The
- Stuhlmiller, C. M. (1996). Narrative picturing: Ushering experiential recall. *Nursing Inquiry*, 3, 183-184.
- Svendsen, N. (Producer & Director). (2016). *The glass ceiling* [Documentary film]. United States: A Follow Your Dream Foundation Production.
- Swarbrooke, J., Beard, C., Leckie, S., & Pomfret, G. (2003). *Adventure tourism: The new frontier*. London: Butterworth-Heinemann.

- Taylor, D. (Ed.). (2011). *Michel Foucault: Key concepts*. Durham: Acumen Publishing.
- Telfer, D. J. (2002). The evolution of tourism and development theory. In R. Sharpley, & D. J. Telfer (Eds.), *Tourism and development: Concepts and issues* (pp. 35-80). Buffalo: Channel View Publications.
- The Asia Foundation. (2012). *A guide to government in Nepal: Structures, functions and practices*. Thamel, Kathmandu: Himal Books.
- Therien, J. P. (1999). Beyond the north-south divide: The two tales of world poverty. *Third World Quarterly*, 20(4), 723-742.
- Tourism Concern. (2015, May). Tourism Concern: Action for ethical tourism. *Tourism Concern Newsletter*. Retrieved from <http://us4.campaignarchive2.com/?u=e44b83e52db7ad342ba8d66ed&id=61716cffc4>
- Tourism Concern. (2017, March). Film and discussion: Trekking Wrongs: Porter rights. *Tourism Concern Newsletter*. Retrieved from <https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/member-event/>
- Tshering Sherpa, A. (2015). Earthquake update from SoluKhumbu (Mount Everest Region). *Climate Alliance of Himalayan Communities*. [Electronic Report] Retrieved from <http://www.alanarnette.com/blog/2015/05/13/update-on-latest-nepal-earthquakes/#jp-carousel-21131>
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Press.
- Turner, V. (1979). Frame, flow and reflection: Ritual and drama as public liminality. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6(4), 465-499.
- Turner, V. (1987). *The anthropology of performance*. New York: Performance Arts Journal Publications.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2015). Human development report. *United Nations Development Programme*. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/NPL.pdf
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2011). *UNWTO Tourism highlights: 2011 edition*. Retrieved from http://mkt.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtohighlights11enr_1.pdf
- Unsworth, W. (1981). *Everest: The mountaineering history*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Vail, P. (Director/Producer). (2014). *Gringo trails* [Documentary film]. United States: NYU.
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vardy, J., Vardy, J., & Judge, K. (2006). Acute mountain sickness and ascent rates in trekkers above 2500m in the Nepali Himalaya. *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine*, 77(7), 742-744.
- Varley, P. (2006). Confecting adventure and playing with meaning: The adventure commodification continuum. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 11(2), 173-194.
- Wadia, D. N. (1931). The syntaxis of the northwest Himalaya: Its rocks, tectonics and orogeny. *Records of the Geological Survey of India*, 65(2), 189-220.

- Walter, J.A. (1984). Death as recreation: Armchair mountaineering. *Leisure Studies*, 3, 67-76.
- Walter, T. (1991). Modern death: Taboo or not taboo? *Sociology* 25, 293-310.
- Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). *Toward psychologies of liberation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Weber, M. (1930). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner.
- Weber, M. (1978). *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York: The Free Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practices: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whelpton, J. (2005). *A history of Nepal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, P. & Soutar, G. N. (2009). Value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions in an adventure tourism context. *Annals of Tourism Research* 36(3), 413-438
- Williams, S., & Lew, A. A. (2015). *Tourism geography: Critical understandings of place, space, and experience*. London: Routledge.
- Williamson, J. (1990). What Washington means by policy reform. In J. Williamson (Ed.), *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* Washington: Institute for International Economics.
- Wilson, M. H., Newman, S., & Imray, C. H. (2009). The cerebral effects of ascent to high altitudes. *The Lancet Neurology*, 8(2), 175-191.
- World Bank (2014). Data: Nepal population. *The World Bank*. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/nepal>
- World Tourism Organization. (1997). *Tourism 2020 vision: A new forecast: Executive summary*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization
- Yalom, I. D. (1989). *Love's executioner and other tales of psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Yalom, I.D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Yalom, I.D. (1998). *The Yalom reader: Selections from the work of a master therapist and storyteller*. New York: Basic Books.
- Yalom, I.D. (2008). Staring at the sun: Overcoming the terror of death. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 36, 283-297.
- Yowangdu. (2012, Dec. 2). Tibetan Chang: How to make rice beer [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.yowangdu.com/tibetan-food/chang.html>
- Zebrowski, C. (2015). *The value of resilience: Securing life in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge.
- Zimmerer, K.S. (1996). *Changing fortunes: Biodiversity and peasant livelihood in the Peruvian Andes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Zuckerman, M. (1979). *Sensation seeking: beyond the optimal level of arousal*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Zurick, D. N. (1992). Adventure travel and sustainable tourism in the peripheral economy of Nepal. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 82(4), 608-628

Appendix A



Date _____

Recruitment Letter

Namaste!

My name is Maggie Miller. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am doing. The purpose of this project is to hear your stories of what it means to be a high-altitude climber on mountaineering expeditions and to understand your experiences and relationships on the mountainside. My study is titled, ***An exploration of emplaced and embodied stories of Sherpas' experiences of living and dying in mountaineering.*** This study forms my PhD research and I am affiliated with the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo and working under the supervision of Dr. Susan Arai.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what you will be asked to do. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participation involves one **face-to-face interview** with me for approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview is to take place in a location of your choice during an agreed upon time. In the interview, I will ask questions around your stories about being a high-altitude climber. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising me. With your permission, the interview will be audio and video recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, you will be given an opportunity to view the video footage, and I will provide you with a copy of the transcript so that you may add, clarify, or omit any points that you wish. In addition to the interview, I wish to accompany you to your village or on a trek to observe your daily activities and interactions, to further talk about mountain climbing. With your permission, at times I would like to video record some of these observations. If this makes you uncomfortable at any time, please notify me and I will omit this footage from my research notes and recordings. As an appreciation for sharing your stories and experiences in this study, we would like to offer you a small monetary gift of 1,000 NPR (~\$10.00 USD) for your participation.

Due to video recording, I cannot guarantee you complete confidentiality. If you wish to have your identity remain confidential, we can use audio recordings instead and your name will not appear in any thesis, video, or publication resulting from this study, unless otherwise specified. Instead, pseudonyms will be used in the place of your real name and the name of organizations or companies where you have been employed. Data

collected during this study will be retained and secured in a password-protected file for five years. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (226) 600-0367 or by email at m4miller@uwaterloo.ca. Questions or concerns may also be directed to my supervisor, Dr. Susan Arai at (+1) 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at sarai@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (file # 20474). However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

It my hope that this research study will promote cross-cultural learning and the sharing of knowledge by creating dialogue among multiple groups of people who share an interest in mountaineering and tourism in Nepal.

I very much look forward to your participation and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Respectfully,

Maggie Miller

B.Sc., M.A., PhD Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
t. 226-600-0367
e. m4miller@uwaterloo.ca

Susan Arai

PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
t. 1-519-888-4567 ext. 33758
e. sarai@uwaterloo.ca



Letter of Introduction

About the study

Namaste! My name is Maggie Miller. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am doing. My study is titled, ***An exploration of emplaced and embodied stories of Sherpas' experiences of living and dying in mountaineering.*** This study forms my PhD research and I am affiliated with the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo and working under the supervision of Dr. Susan Arai.

The following research questions will guide this study:

- How do Sherpas story death on the mountainside?
- What do these stories reveal about how death is navigated by Sherpas?
- What does the navigations of death by Sherpas reveal about freedom?

Why is the study being conducted?

The purpose of this project is to hear your stories of what it means to be a high-altitude climber on mountaineering expeditions and to understand your experiences and relationships on the mountainside. It is my hope that this research study will promote cross-cultural learning and the sharing of knowledge by creating dialogue among multiple groups of people who share an interest in mountaineering and tourism in Nepal.

What will I be asked to do?

- **Conversation-style interview.** During this study you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute in-depth conversation style interview. The interview will be conducted with the aid of a Nepali/Sherpa/English translator at a location and during a time that best suits you. Prior to the start of the interview we will review the informed consent process. With permission, the interviews will be audio and video recorded. As an appreciation for sharing your stories and experiences in this study, we would like to offer you a small monetary gift of 1,000 NPR (~\$10.00 USD) for your participation.
- **Community observations.** With your permission, I wish to accompany you to your village or on a trek to observe your daily activities and interactions, to further talk about mountain climbing. These observations will be written about in a personal journal, and with permission some content will be videoed or photo documented.

How are my rights protected?

Through your participation in the video methods of this study, participant confidentiality and anonymity cannot be upheld. However, if you wish your identity to remain confidential, audio recordings may be used for the interview instead of video, and you will be given a pseudonym in place of your real name, and if you are currently employed a pseudonym will be used in place of the name of your organization or company.

How will I find out about the results of this study?

A written summary of findings, and the final short-film will be made available to you by email or another means as specified on the consent form. Additional reports may appear in academic journals and conference presentations.

Has this research been approved by an ethics committee?

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (file # 20474).

Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:

- **Maggie Miller**, PhD Candidate, University of Waterloo (t. 1-226-600-0367 or by email at m4miller@uwaterloo.ca).
- **Susan Arai**, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo (t. 1-519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at sarai@uwaterloo.ca).
- Additionally you can send your questions or concerns to Maggie Miller or Sue Arai via mail at the following address:

Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3G1

Any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, may also be forwarded to the Director in the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo, Dr. Maureen Nummelin (t.1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or by email at maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

Namaste – Much appreciation and gratitude for your contributions to the study!

Sincerely,

Maggie Miller

PhD candidate
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1
t. 226-600-0367
e. m4miller@uwaterloo.ca

Susan Arai

Associate Professor
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1
t. 1-519-888-4567 ext. 33758
e. sarai@uwaterloo.ca

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Maggie Miller of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
- I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be video or audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.
- I understand audio and video-recordings of the interviews will take place to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that if I would like my information to be kept confidential, I may choose to have only audio-recordings made and that in reports and presentations pseudonyms will be used in place of my name and the name of my organization or company.
- I am also aware that audio or video excerpts from the interview may be included in research publications, graduate thesis, presentations, or multimedia representations with the understanding that the quotations will be confidential (using a pseudonym) if specified.
- I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising Maggie. Should I withdraw, I may decide at that time whether the information I have provided can continue to be used for the research or if the information is to be destroyed.
- I understand this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (file#: 20474).
- I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

I understand all of the information provided to me about this research study, and I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study:

Yes No

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview and the reproduction of my responses for all research and outreach activities:

Yes No

I consent to the video-recording of my interview and the reproduction of my responses for all research and outreach activities:

Yes No

In the publication of study results and sharing this information with others:

- I want to be in the video AND credited by name for the contributions that I have made (information will be attributed to me).

I DO NOT want to be in the video, but I DO want to be credited by name for the contributions that I have made (information will be attributed to me).

I DO NOT want to be in the video and I DO NOT want to be credited by name, but general acknowledgment can be provided (e.g., Sherpa guide; Sherpa porter).

Verbal consent was received by _____, check here
(Participant Name)

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____

When the study is completed, would you like me to send you a summary of the study?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what would you like to receive from me?

- a written document
- the DVD
- written document and DVD

How would you like to receive the information?

by email (a written document will be emailed to you, and/or web link will be emailed to you so you can watch the film online) sent to the following email address: _____

by mail - a written document and/or DVD will be sent to you by mail to the following address: _____

Student Investigator's Consent:

I have fully explained the procedures of the study to the above participant and will respect the terms of this consent form.

Student Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Observation Guide

- How are Sherpas experiencing/storying life on the mountainside?
 - What is being said?
 - Who is involved in these encounters?
 - What roles do they play?
 - What is being seen, heard, and felt?
- How are Sherpas experiencing death on the mountainside? What stories of death do Sherpas encounter?
 - What practices are being described?
 - What is being overtly said about death/dying?
 - What is being subverted?
 - What tensions arise between death and development?
- How do Sherpas negotiate ideas of death and dying?
 - Who is involved in these encounters?
 - What roles do they play?
- What is revealed by encounters with death/dying on the mountain?
 - What power relations unfold in these experiences? How are they seen, heard, and felt?
 - What existential concerns arise in these experiences? How are they seen, heard, and felt?
- What stories of death do I encounter?
 - What do I see, hear, feel in these encounters?
 - Who is involved in these encounters?
 - What roles do they play?
 - What do these stories reveal?

Appendix D

Conversation-Style Interview Question Guide

Preamble: Hello, my name is Maggie Miller, I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as a high-altitude climber. I am interested in hearing your story, and how you understand and interpret living and working on the mountainside.

If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not have to answer them, and you may request to stop the interview at anytime. I will be video and audio recording our interview today. Is this okay with you?

This interview is meant to be conversational in style. I have a several questions that I would like to ask, however, I am more interested in exploring new ideas and topics as they arise. With this interview I would like to begin by asking you to **tell me a story of the last time you worked on a mountain expedition as a high-altitude climber. What was your role?**

- 1) What is it like to be a high-altitude climber?
- 2) Can you describe a typical day on the mountainside? What do you see, feel, and hear as you are there?
- 3) How do you experience life in the mountains? Tell me a story about your time working and living in the mountains.
- 4) Why have you decided to stop working as a guide/porter on Mt. Everest expeditions? What changed for you?
- 5) Each year there are several deaths on the mountainside. Can you tell me about your thoughts about these experiences? How has the community responded?

Context Glossary

This Context Glossary has been divided into five main sections: Locations & Places, Mountains, Industry Terms, People & Organisations, and Sherpa & Nepali Terms. The first two sections have been set up as an interactive glossary powered by Google's *My Maps* function. To explore the various geographical contexts use the "Interactive Google Map" link below or by clicking the individual place name hyperlinks that are imbedded into the document. The "Interactive Google Map" has been set up and created specifically for this thesis. On the left hand side of the webpage, you will find a legend containing three separate pins ranging in colour. The coloured pins are associated with geographical attributes (i.e. Villages, Mountains, or Mt. Everest landmarks), which are located throughout the main body of the map. To explore and discover the contexts you wish to understand further, click the pins within the legend or any pin stuck on the main body of the map (My Maps, 2017). For those reading this glossary in hard copy, not to worry, each place or term has been described or defined herein, and several maps and images have been incorporated into the body of the text.

[Interactive Google Map](#)

Places & Locations

Chyangba – is rural village settlement functioning under the Taping Village Development Committee (VDC), and located in the Lower Solu region. It sits at 3500 meters above sea level and 400 kilometres east of the capital city, Kathmandu. There is an estimation of about 150 houses inhabited by varying ethnic groups (e.g., Sherpas, Rai, Magar, etc.) (Nepal Medical Project, 2014).

Dandakharka – is a VDC located in the Dolakha District, which is northwest of the Solukhumbu District of Nepal. According to the 2001 Nepali census, Dandakharka had a population of 3,827 people living in 760 households (The Asian Foundation, 2012; Nepal Census, 2001). This VDC is also home to Ngima Sherpa, one of the guides and interpreters for this project.

Darjeeling – The District of Darjeeling (or Darjiling) lies in the northern most part of the State of West Bengal, India. The municipality of Darjeeling, located at an elevation of 2042 meters, is the headquarters of the Darjeeling district, and once served as a British military depot. The northern part of the district lies along the Himalayas, housing the world's third largest mountain, Kangchenjunga (Census India, 2011). Before the opening of the Nepali borders Sherpas were known to migrate to Darjeeling to assist with ascents up Kangchenjunga and other mountains in the Indian Himalaya (Bott, 2009; Ortner, 1999).

Deboche – is located between Tengboche and Panboche at 3820 meters above sea level. Settled in the Upper Khumbu region, this small village settlement is one potential stop on the popular EBC trekking route (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Dolakha District – Dolakha is one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal. This region covers an area of 2,191 km² and is located near the western edge of the Rolwaling Himal, about half way between the Solukhumbu District (Mt. Everest Region) and Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. According to the 2011 National Population and Housing Census [NPHC], it has a population of 186,557 (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2012). Additionally, Mingma's VDC Gaurishankar and Phuri's VDC Dandakharka fall within the boundaries of this district.

Gorakshep (or Gorak Shep) – is a small settlement situated on a frozen lakebed covered with sand at an elevation of 5164 meters near Mount Everest. It is the final village along the popular EBC trekking route. The village is not inhabited year-round as it was solely created for the acclimatising trekkers and mountaineers (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Kathmandu – is the capital city of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Situated 1400 meters above sea level, this metropolitan center covers an area of 50.67km². Kathmandu is understood as the most densely populated district of Nepal with a total population of 1,744,240 people accounted for in the 2011 census (NPHC, 2012).

Kharikhola – is situated 2220 meters above sea level. This small village settlement, located at the southern end of the Solukhumbu District, is approximately a two-day trek northeast of the bustling village of Salleri and about a two-three day trek south of the village of Lukla. Despite lengthy travel times to and from Lukla, Kharikhola is said to only be about nine kilometers away (Mapcarta, 2017; Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Khumjung – A VDC situated at 3790 meters above sea level, within the borders of Sagarmāthā National Park (SNP). Located in the Solukhumbu District, Khumjung is understood to be the largest village within this region, which sprawls below the peak of Khumbila (3780m). In the middle of Khumjung is the original Hillary school, which was established as a secondary school by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1961 (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation, 2012). According to the 2001 Nepali census, Khumjung has a population of 1,809 people living in 433 households (Nepal Census, 2001).

Khunde – Adjacent to Khumjung is the village of Khunde, sitting at 3840 meters in elevation. Also located within the SNP, Khunde is home to the first hospital and medical clinic in the Khumbu region, which was founded by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1966 (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation, 2017).

Lobuche – is a small village settlement within the Upper Khumbu region. At the elevation of 4940 meters, it is one of the last overnight stops on the way to Mt. Everest. Lobuche has minimal development with only a handful of public services like lodging accommodations (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Lower Solu (or Solu) – is one of three sub-regions of the Solukhumbu District, the other two being Khumbu and Pharak. Generally, the Solu region includes the VDCs and settlements that are located south of the village Lukla. These villages vary in elevations, situated between 2400 and 3100 meters above sea-level (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004).

Lukla – is a settlement located within the Khumbu region of the Solukhumbu District. Sitting at 2860 meters it is home to the Tenzing-Hillary Airport, a popular access point into the Himalayas and the Sagarmāthā National Park (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Rogers & Aitchison, 1998).

Manang – The town of Manang is located in the Manang District, one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal. It is situated at 3519 metres above sea level on the broad valley of the Marshyangdi River, north of the Annapurna mountain range (Nepal Tekking Pass, 2016). Manang is the setting of one of the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) basic mountaineering training courses (NMA, 2017).

Namche Bazaar – is a village and VDC in the Solukhumbu District situated at an elevation of 3440 meters. At the time of the 2001 Nepal Census, Namche had a population of 1647 people residing in 397 households (Nepal Census, 2001). Namche is a historic trading hub, and located centrally in the Upper Khumbu. Known for its museum, visitor center, military outpost, and large weekend bazaar, this is a consistent stop on the EBC tourist and trekker itineraries (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Discover Nepal, 2017).

Nepal



Figure 2: Map of Nepal showing capitol city of Kathmandu and select towns and villages. Landlocked borders between India and China (Image found in the Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017)

Land locked between the Chinese region of Xizang (Tibet) and India along the Himalayan range, Nepal a population of over 28 million (World Bank, 2014). Historically, this nation is understood as having a low-income economy. Situated in the heart of the Himalayas, eight of the fourteen

world-famous mountain peaks over 8000 meters tall are located in Nepal, including the world's tallest mountain, Mt. Everest (Bhattarai et al., 2005; Nepal, 2003).

Pangboche – is one of the highest permanent village settlements. It is located in the Khumjung VDC of the Solukhumbu District, and home to one of the oldest monasteries in Nepal. Situated at an elevation of 3985 meters, this village serves as a basecamp for those who wish to attempt the peak of Ama Dablam (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Discover Nepal, 2017).

Phaplu Airport - Near the small village of Phaplu within the Solukhumbu District of Nepal sits the Phaplu Airport at 2413 meters above sea level. This airport provides domestic travel to and from the Kathmandu airport, offering more direct access to the villages in the lower Solu region. Many trekkers who wish to avoid the crowds at the Lukla airport and have extra time on their hands may start their EBC treks from here (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Phortse – is a farming village and also known for its animal husbandry. Situated at 3840 meters above sea level in the Upper Khumbu region, Phortse is nearly a three-day hike from the village of Lukla (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009). The pride of Phortse lies in its long lineage of strong Sherpa climbers and Mt. Everest summiters. To date, sixty-six Sherpas from Phortse have successfully summited Everest. Phortse is also the home of the only climbing school in the entire Solukhumbu region. Known as The Khumbu Climbing School, it is an initiative started by the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation and is co-operated and organized through Lhakpa Dorji's lodge (Pemba Sherpa, Personal communication, January 15, 2016). Phortse is also home to Pemba Sherpa, a guide and interpreter for this project.

Sagarmāthā National Park – is a protected area in the Himalayas of eastern Nepal. It encompasses an area of 1,118 km² in Solukhumbu District of Nepal. It was established in 1976 and declared as a World Heritage Site in 1980. Sagarmāthā National Park is home to Mt. Everest, and shares an international border with the Qomolangma National Nature Preserve of Tibet. Environmental impacts in the park include increasing pollution and deforestation, which are attributed to a high number of tourists, a lack of management strategies, local institutions, and government policies (Heinen & Kattel, 1992; Heinen & Mehta, 2000; Nepal, 2000, 2003).

Salleri – Salleri is the district capital and headquarter of the Solukhumbu District in the Sagarmāthā Zone. It is situated in the Lower Solu region at an approximate elevation of 2990 meters above sea level. In 2014, Salleri merged with neighbouring VDCs, Beni, Garma, and Loding Tamakhani to form the municipality of Dudhkunda. This village is commonly recognised for its increasing infrastructure and road development; there are many bus and jeep routes to and from Kathmandu. In the 2001 Nepali census, Salleri had a population of 105,886 people distributed among 1106 individual households (Nepal Census, 2001).

Sankhuwasabha District – Located in the Koshi Zone, Sankhuwasabha is one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal. It covers an area of 3480km² and is the home to many indigenous and ethnic populations (e.g., Rai, Yakkha, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa, etc.). Within its district borders lies the very deep Arun Valley and the world's fifth tallest mountain, Makalu. According to the 2011

Nepali National Population and Housing Census, Sankhuwasabha had a population of 158,742 (NPC, 2012). This district is also home to Ang Phurba's small village settlement of Kamabalu.

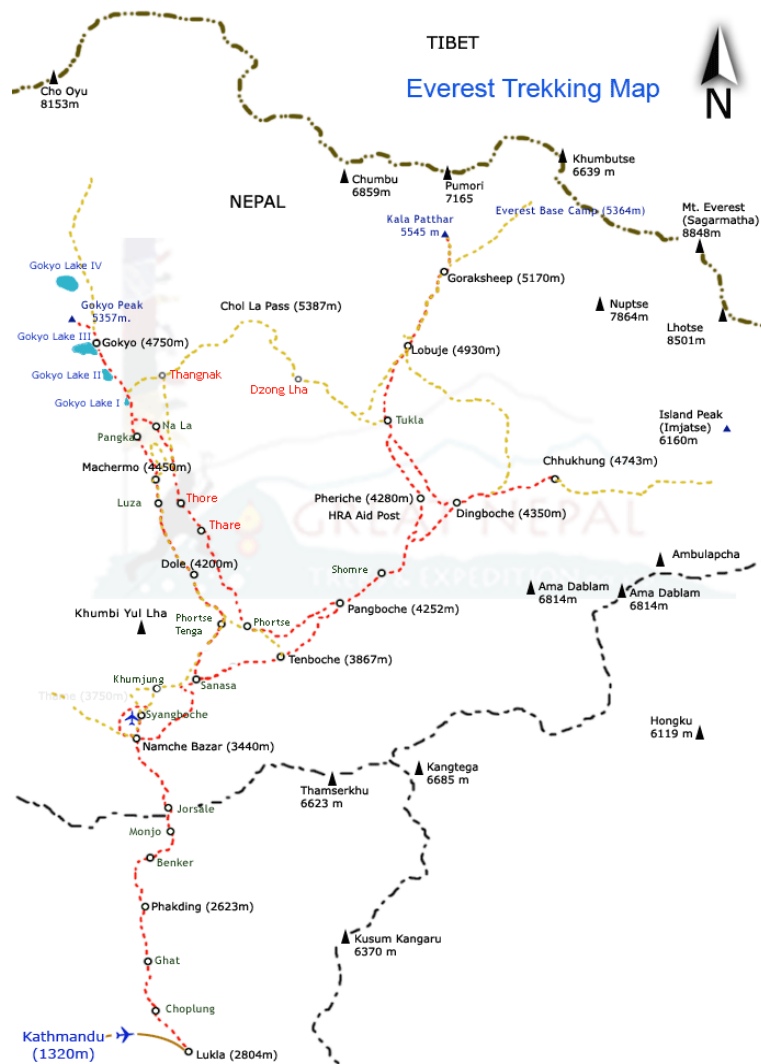
Solukhumbu – As one of the seventy-five districts, the Solukhumbu District is a part of the Sagarmāthā Zone located in northeastern Nepal. As the name suggests this district consists of the Solu and Khumbu sub-regions, along with a third region, Pharak. Salleri is the Solukhumbu District headquarters. The entire district covers an area of 3,312 km², with Mt. Everest located in its most northern part (NPC, 2012).

Takasindu – is a VDC in the Solukhumbu District. Located in the Lower Solu region near Salleri, this VDC sits at an approximate elevation of 2842 meters. It is home to the small Tharling Sheddruk Monastery and world famous Babu Chiri Sherpa, who died during his eleventh summit attempt in 2001. According to the 2001 Nepali census, Khumjung has a population of 2,053, dispersed among 381 households (Nepal Census, 2001; Reed & McConnachie, 2002).

Thame – Thame is a small village settlement in the Solukhumbu District of Nepal. Situated at 3354 meters above sea level within the Namche VDC of the Upper Khumbu region, Thame often serves as a day-trek spot for acclimatising trekkers and tourists. It was the childhood home to famed Sherpa climbers, Tenzing Norgay and Apa, and is recognised as one of the final stops on the old Tibetan trade route from Tingri via Nangpa La (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009; Discover Nepal, 2017).

Thamel – is a commercial borough located in the northern region of Kathmandu, Nepal's capital. It is often recognised by many as the center of the city's tourism industry, distinguished by narrow, crowded alleys with few street signs and countless shops, cafes, vendors, and tour offices (Lonely Planet, 2017).

Upper Khumbu (or Khumbu) – Also known as the Everest Region, the Khumbu is one of three sub-regions in the Solukhumbu District of Nepal, the others being Solu and Pharak. The Khumbu region encompasses Sagarmāthā National Park and Sagarmāthā National Park Buffer Zone between the villages of Lukla and Monju. The Nepali side of Mt. Everest is accessible from this region, which contributes to the large number of trekkers, mountaineers, and tourists who travel to this region annually, specifically on the popular EBC trekking route which starts at Lukla and runs northeast to villages like Namache, Tengboche, Phangboche, and Leboche. The elevation of this area varies drastically from 3330 meters to 8850 meters (the summit of Mt. Everest) (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).



: Map of the Khumbu showing trekking trails to EBC, main villages, and nearby mountains (Great Nepal Travels, 2017)

Mountains & Mt. Everest

Ama Dablam – Ama Dablam standing at an elevation of 6170 meters is known around the world, not for its altitude, but for its beauty. Reflecting its exquisiteness is the significance of its name: “Ama” means mother or grandmother and “Dablam” means charm box or pendant in Tibetan, together understood as “mother’s necklace.” This mountain was first successfully summited by a team of four mountaineers (from UK, NZ, NZ, USA) on March 31, 1961 via the popular route along the southwest ridge (Kennedy, 2005).

Annapurna (or Annapurna I) – is the tenth tallest mountain of the fourteen eight-thousanders. Annapurna I stands at 8091 meters above sea level, and though it ranks as one of the most dangerous mountains to climb it was the first 8000-meter peaks to be successfully climbed. French mountaineers Maurice Herzog and Louis Lachenal in 1950 stood on its summit on June 3, 1950 (NASA, 2017b).

Cho Oyu – The world’s sixth tallest mountain, Cho Oyu stands at 8201 meters above sea level and approximately 20 kilometers west of Mt. Everest. It is located on the boarder of Tibet and Nepal, and its name mean “Goddess of Turquoise” in Tibetan. Cho Oyo is considered by many to be one of the least challenging 8000-meter mountains to climb, with less than a one percent fatality rate. Since March 2012, there has been over 3,138 successful accents (NASA, 2017b).

Cho-la Pass – Located in the Upper Khumbu region of the Solukhumbu District, trekkers often cross the Cho La Pass *en route* to the EBC from the village settlement of Gokyo. It is known to be a summit pass situated at 5420 meters above sea level, and connects the western village of Thangnak to the village of Dzongla. Accessing the pass from the west requires individuals to cross the Ngozumpa Glacier on the way (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Dhaulagiri (or Dhaulagiri I) – Standing above 8167 meters, Dhaulagiri I is considered the world’s seventh tallest mountain. It was first summited seven years after Mt. Everest in 1960 by a Swiss-Australian-Nepali expedition. Its name means “White Mountain” in Tibetan, and it is known for its remarkable geological attributes: limestone and dolomite rock layers that formed at the bottom of the ocean. Dhaulagiri is located near Annapurna, and these two mountains are separated by a deep gorge and the Gandaki River (NASA, 2017b).

Himalayas – The Himalayas, or Himalaya, are the world’s highest mountain range in Asia. The range extends west-northwest to east-southeast in an arc over 2400 kilometres long (Hobbs, 2007; Wadia, 1931). Spanning five countries (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and China), the range is understood to be quite heterogeneous: marked by ecological and environmental diversity; record landmarks (e.g., it has ten of the world’s fourteen 8000 metre peaks, and over 100 summits over 7200 metres); and varying ethnic groups and populations (e.g., Indic people, Tibetans, Afghan-Iranians, etc.) (Andrejczuk, 2016 as cited in Apollo, 2017). These mountains are home to over 52.7 million people, while about 4.7 million people visit the High Himalaya each year (Apollo, 2017).

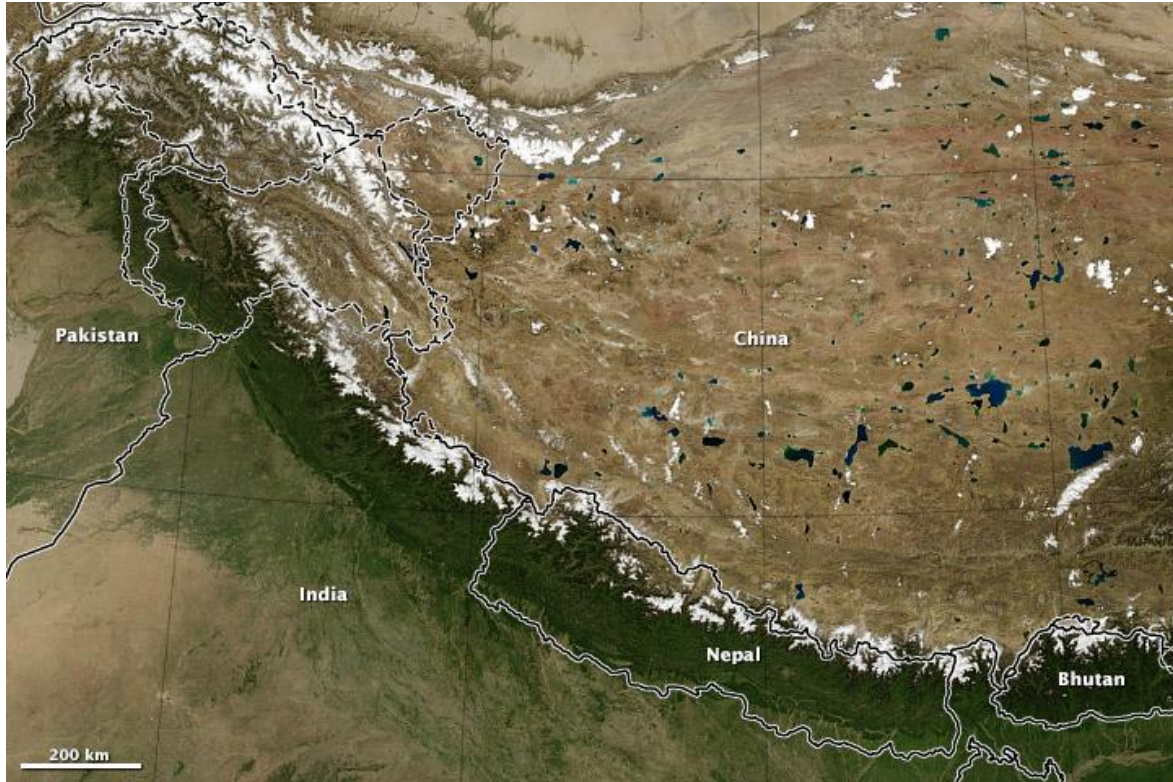


Figure 4: Satellite image of the Himalayan Range (NASA, 2017a)

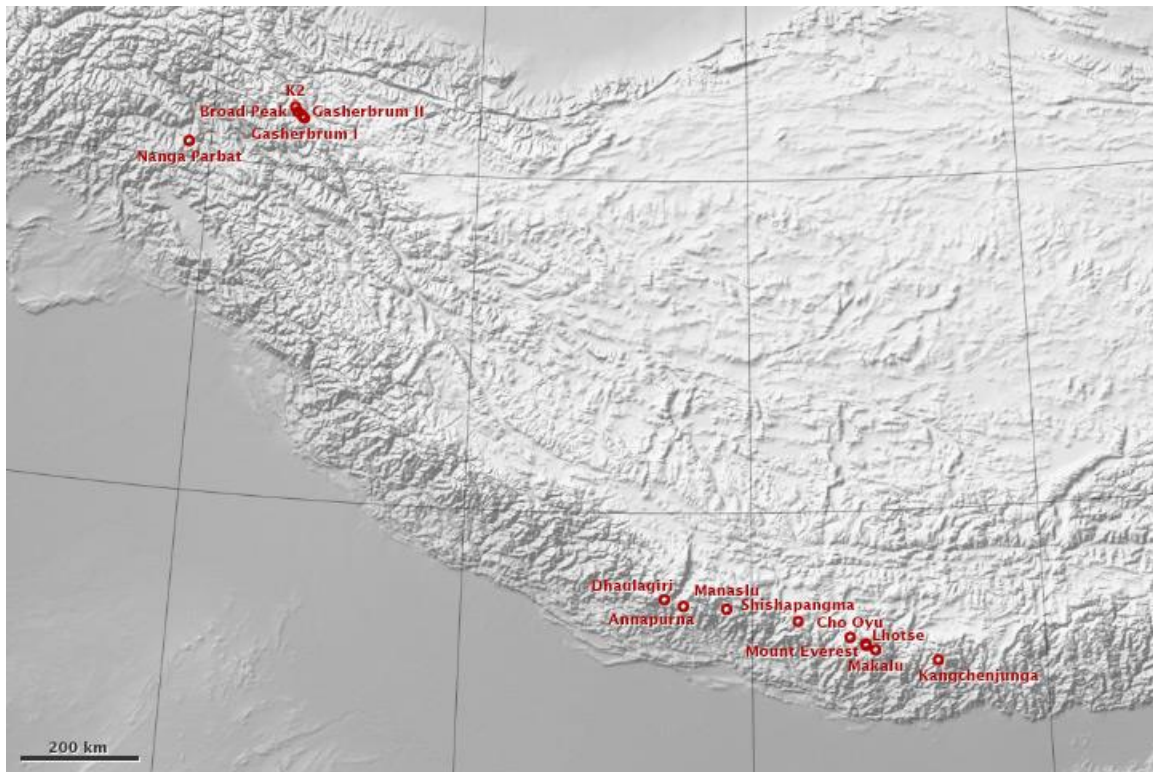


Figure 5: Topographic map of the Himalayas, with the world's fourteen 8000-meter mountain peaks labeled in red (NASA, 2017a)

Island Peak (or Imja Peak) – Commonly referred to as Island Peak, but traditionally and formally known as Imja Tse. Island Peak stands at 6189 meters above sea level and is located in the Imja Valley in Sagarmāthā National Park. This peak is often understood as an advance-beginner peak or training climb for acclimatising mountaineers. It was first successfully summited in 1956 by a Swiss team preparing to climb Mt. Everest and Lhotse. The name “Island Peak” comes from the illusion that the mountain is an island in a sea of ice when viewed from Dingboche (Alpine Ascents, 2017; Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Jongsong (or Jonsong La) – Jongsong La’s summit is situated on a tri-junction between India, Nepal, and China. It is part of the Janak section of the Kangchenjunga Himal (Carter, 1985). Though it measures at 7420 meters above sea level, it hangs in the shadows of the world’s third largest mountain, Kangchenjunga. The first successful summit ascent was made in 1930 by a German expedition team (Peakbagger, 2017).

K2 – Located on the border of Pakistan and China, K2 or Chhogori, is the world’s second highest mountain, standing 8611 meters above sea level. K2’s modern nickname is “savage mountain” because of the extreme dangers and risks that climbers must take to successfully stand on its summit: eighty-one percent people have died trying (29% fatality rate). As of March 2012, there have been 306 successful ascents (NASA, 2017b; Jurgakski, 2017).

Kangchenjunga – Rising to 8576 meters high, Kangchenjunga is the world’s third tallest mountain. Located between the border of Nepal and India it is approximately 120 kilometers southeast of Mt. Everest. Resembling a tent with four ridges, there is no easy way up the steep slopes of Kangchenjunga. British climbers Joe Brown and George Band made the first successful ascent in 1955, and as of 2009 there have been 243 successful summits (NASA, 2017b; Jurgakski, 2017).

Lhotse – Sometimes called Everest’s south peak, Lhotse is connected to the giant by the South Col, a vertical ridge or sharp pass. Lhotse is the fourth tallest mountain in the world, rising to 8516 meters, but the most challenging route is via the south face. As of 2009, there has only been twenty-one fatalities on this mountain (Jurgakski, 2017).

Makalu – Rising to 8463 meters above sea level, Makalu is the world’s fifth tallest peak. Nearly twenty kilometers southeast of Everest, this mountain has a classic pyramid shape. The first successful summit on the mountain was made by an American team led by William Siri in 1954. In Tibetan Makalu means “Great Black,” which references its often-exposed granite faces (Duane, 2005; NASA, 2017b).

Manaslu – One of the world’s fourteen tallest mountains, Manaslu is located in the Nepali Himalayas and ranked eighth in height at 8156 meters above sea level. The peak sits about thirty-five kilometers east of Annapurna in Nepal. The summit itself is steep and sharp, only accommodating a few at a time. It is said to be one of the more difficult and dangerous 8000-meter peaks, with a fatality rate of about 10 percent (Arnette, 2012; NASA, 2017b).

Mera Peak – is regarded as the highest, and one of the most sought out, “trekking peaks” in Nepal. Standing at 6476 meters above sea level, Mera peak is a mountain located in the Solukhumbu District in the Mahlangur section of the Barun sub-section of the Himalaya. The views from its summit are some of the most picturesque in the region, with five of the world’s 8000-meter peaks in sight (Mayhew & Bindloss, 2009).

Pumori – Pumori is a mountain on the Nepal-Tibet border that stands at an elevation of 7161 meters tall. It is one of the most popular 7000 meter peaks in Nepal, located in the Upper Khumbu region. In Tibetan, Pumori means “the Mountain Daughter,” and George Mallory often referred to this peak as Clare Peak after his own daughter (Peakbagger, 2017b).

Shishapangma – at the elevation of 8017 meters above sea level, this is the shortest and youngest mountain of the fourteen peaks that stand taller than 8000 meters. Shishapangma is the only 8000-meter mountain entirely located in Tibet. Although it is not known for its technical climbs, Shishapangma was the last of the fourteen tallest peaks to be summited, namely due to foreign travel restrictions to Tibet. A Chinese team finally reached the top in 1964 (Jurgakski, 2017; NASA, 2017b).

Thamserku – rises to 6623 meters tall. It is located in the Mahlangur Himal in the east of Nepal. Although it is much shorter than many of Nepal’s famed mountain peaks, Thamserku is rated as a challenging and technical climb. On a clear day, the southwest face can be seen by EBC trekkers during their ascents to Namche Bazaar (Griffin, 2015b).

Mt. Everest



Figure 6: Photo of Mt. Everest taken during sunset (Image captured by Pemba Sherpa, 2016)

Positioned on the Nepal-China (Tibet) border, Mt. Everest stands tall at 8,850 meters above sea level, making it the world's highest mountain. Glaciers have chiselled its summit into a triangular pyramid defined by three faces and three ridges, which extend to the northeast, southeast, and northwest (Jurgakski, 2017; NASA, 2017b). The southeast ridge is the most popular and widely used climbing route; this is the route that was taken by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary during their successful ascent in 1953. This famous climb has undoubtedly contributed to the remarkable growth of Nepal's tourism and mountaineering industries as commercial expedition companies continue to lead paying clients up the southeast ridge annually (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998; Schaffer, 2013).

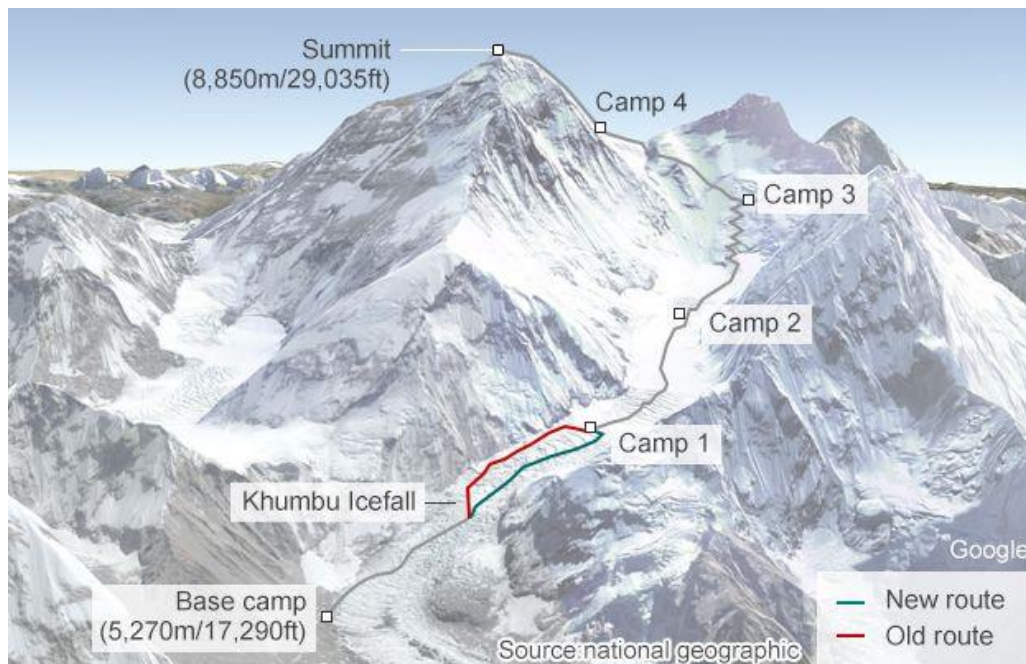


Figure 7: This map depicts the commercial climbing route to the summit of Mt. Everest and the proposed new route (for the 2015 climbing season) through the Khumbu Icefall (after the 2014 avalanche) (CBC, 2015).

Everest Basecamp [EBC] – is located at approximately 5335 meters above sea level. Basecamp becomes a temporary home for climbers as they begin their long process of acclimatisation and training to attempt Mt. Everest's summit (Altitude Junkies, 2016).

Camp I – is set up at approximately 6000 meters above sea level. This camp is the first camp directly after the Khumbu Icefall. Depending on the type of expedition, Camp I will either be stocked by the climbers as they ascend and descend through the Icefall, or in advance by Sherpas and high-altitude mountain workers (Altitude Junkies, 2016; Everest News, 2003).

Camp II – is set up at approximately 6400 meters above sea level. From Camp I, climbers make their way up to the Western Cwm to the base of the Lhotse face, which is the mountain that borders Everest. Here, they will set up Camp II. As climbers continue up, they will travel towards the Lhotse face, forced to cross the Western Cwm (Altitude Junkies, 2016).

Camp III – is set up at approximately 7200 meters above sea level. To reach this camp, climbers

must navigate the Lhotse face, climbing a sheer wall of ice that demands skill and strength. Due to the steepness of this camp, many Sherpas will skip Camp III, heading straight to Camp IV, refusing to stay the night on the Lhotse Face (Altitude Junkies, 2016; Everest News, 2003).

Camp IV – is set up at approximately 7950 meters above sea level. Also known as the South Col, this campsite is a rock-strewn saddle between Mt. Everest and Lhotse. From Camp IV, climbers begin their summit push around midnight with hopes of reaching the summit, approximately another 1000 meters within 10 to 12 hours (Altitude Junkies, 2016; Everest News, 2003).

Camp V (Tibet) – This camp no longer exists, but was once the highest point an individual could camp on Everest, when climbing to the summit via the Northeast Ridge from the Tibet side (P. Sherpa, personal communication, April 18, 2015). In more recent years this route consists of a basecamp, an interim camp, an advanced base camp, and three high camps (Arnette, 2011).

Khumbu Icefall (or Icefall) – Located at the head of the Khumbu glacier at an altitude of 5486 meters, is one of the most dangerous sections of the well-traveled commercial routes on the south side of Mt. Everest (Kaplan, 2015). The Khumbu glacier that forms the icefall moves at speeds that trigger unpredictable breaks in the ice, creating crevasses and causing huge blocks of ice to break off and tumble down the glacier, often triggering avalanches. Icefall doctors help commercial climbers navigate the hazardous terrain of the Khumbu Icefall by fixing ropes and securing aluminum ladders over deep crevasses in the ice (Heller, 2016).

South Col – The South Col is the site for Camp IV on the southeast ridge climbing route (the commercial route). This is a sharp-edged, rock-strewn pass between Mt. Everest and Lhotse. Due to high winds, the South Col is usually free of significant snow accumulation (Public Broadcasting Service, 2000).

South Summit – Marked by a small table-sized dome of ice, the South Summit is located at 8750 meters above sea level. From here, climbers must traverse a thin steep southeast ridge. This is the most exposed section of this southeastern climbing route (PBS, 2000).

Hillary Step – The Hillary Step is a vertical rock face feature located between the South Summit and the Mt. Everest Summit at approximately 8790 meters. Ascents and descents past the Hillary Step are usually made with fixed ropes; which frequently causes bottlenecks as climbers wait their turn on the ropes (PBS, 2000).

Western Cwm – is the broad blow-shaped glacial valley basin that many mountaineers traverse when using the southeast route to summit Mt. Everest. Terminating at the foot of the Lhotse face of Everest, the elevation of the Western Cwm is 6000 meters – 6800 meters high (PBS, 2000).

Mountaineering & Relevant Industry Terms

2014 Mt. Everest Accident – On April 18th, 2014, 17 Sherpa and Nepali climbers were killed in an avalanche while preparing the commercial climbing route for the coming season. The

aftermath of this particular avalanche led to several contentious meetings among mountaineering stakeholder groups, Sherpa-led strikes, and ultimately a mountain closure. According to media reports, clients of commercial expeditions were required to forfeit money and time invested, while Sherpa and Nepali climbers walked away with only a few weeks' wages (Brown, 2014; CBC, 2014).

'96 Everest tragedy – Between May 10th and 11th in 1996, eight people were caught in an unpredictable snowstorm high on Mt. Everest, all perishing in their attempts to descend the mountain. At the time it was understood as the deadliest day on Everest with the largest number of fatalities in a single-day tragedy. The story has been told and retold by many including Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, Boureev's *The Climb*, and most recently Hollywood's motion picture *Everest*. World Class climbers and expedition guides, Scott Fischer (USA) climbing with Mountain Madness and Rob Hall (NZ) climbing with Adventure Consultants were among two of the eight people to die (Hell, 2012; Krakauer, 1996). Kami Sherpa, a Climbing Sherpa interviewed in this project, worked along side Rob Hall this particular year.

Altitude sickness (AMS) – Mountain sickness can progress to high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) or high altitude cerebral edema (HACE), which are both potentially fatal. Some of the physiological and psychological effects of prolonged high-altitude exposure include the loss of memory, disorientation, and hallucinations (Schoene, 2008). Medical research shows that the incidence of acute mountain sickness AMS or high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) is a likely occurrence (34%) when climbing over 5000 meters above sea level. This accounted for 85% of all the medical diagnoses made by the Everest Basecamp Medical Clinic between 2003 and 2012 (Némethy et al., 2015; Vardy et al., 2006).

Aluminum Ladder (or Ladders) – The aluminum ladders are a famous feature of the common commercial climbing route up Mt. Everest. Strategically placed by Icefall Doctors, these ladders are used to assist climbers with crossing treacherous crevasses and ascending more quickly up the ever-shifting ice blocks (namely in the Khumbu Icefall). In 2016, twenty-three aluminum ladders were set in place, along with many fixed ropes, to aid climbers up the glacier (cf. Arnette, 2013c; Heller, 2016).

Climbing Sherpa or Sherpa: These terms have been adopted and are often involuntarily used to signify high-altitude roles and statues as a specialised high-altitude porter or mountaineering guide. Individuals who assume these roles are generally charged with securing climbing routes, setting up camps, and carrying clients' supplies and equipment (Ortner, 1999).

Crampon – is a device that is added to boots or outdoor footwear to improve traction and mobility on ice and snow. There are several types to choose from, varying in rigidity and stiffness (cf. Johnson, 2006; see also Eng, 2010).

Crevasse – Glacial features that occur when ice encounters a force greater than it can bear. When ice near the surface of a glacier stretches or bends too quickly, it can break apart creating crevasses, or large gaps within the ice (Eng, 2010).

Jumar (or ascender) – A mechanical device that aids in ascending on a rope. They often function similar to friction knots, but allow for a faster ascension (Eng, 2010).

Icefall Doctors – An elite team of local guides and climbers, typically of Sherpa and Nepali descent, who are charged with securing and maintaining the popular South Col (southeast ridge) route up to the Mt. Everest summit. These doctors are primarily responsible for navigating the hazardous terrain of the Khumbu Icefall, fixing ropes, and securing aluminum ladders over deep crevasses in the ice (Heller, 2016).

Kitchen Boy – These individuals assist the expedition cook in the kitchen tent, which is usually set up at basecamp. Sometimes this role is referred to as a cook's assistant or kitchen helper (Bott, 2009; Guggleberger, 2015).

Porter – or carrier – is a person who transports goods and cargo from one place to another. Historically, the use of humans as transport was done prior to the domestication of animals. In mountain regions, like the Solukhumbu, individuals still work as porters carrying goods to villages as well as transporting trekkers' duffels and items needed to replenish the local restaurants and guesthouses. These jobs are usually poorly valued, and do not involve many technical skills (Bott, 2009; Porter, n.d.).

Oxygen Bottle – In 1922, George Finch designed one of the first oxygen devices (weighing 15kg) to accompany mountaineers on their ascents up high-altitude mountains. Today, nearly 97% of climbers choose to use supplemental oxygen, which is carried in canisters on their backs. To ascend and summit Mt. Everest without oxygen is a rare feat, accomplished by less than one hundred climbers total. Varying slightly in weight, there are several companies who now produce oxygen canisters for commercial mountaineering pursuits (e.g., Summit Oxygen, TopOut, Poisk, etc.) (Arnette, 2013a).

Seracs – are unstable hanging glacial ice structures. When glaciers move fast icefall can fracture exposing more crevasses, and when numerous crevasses link together may isolate columns of ice. These columns of unstable ice are called seracs (Eng, 2010).

Sirdar – A word that originates in Persia, Sirdar was adopted in South Asia to signify a notable and important position ranking, such as a leader. A Sirdar, in a high-altitude expedition, is the leader and manager of the team of hired Climbing Sherpas, porters, kitchen assistants, or high-altitude assistants. Generally these individuals are other Sherpa and Nepali climbers (Adams, 1992; Guggleberger, 2015).

Snow blindness – ultraviolet (UV) keratitis – is a condition caused by insufficient eye protection when exposed to intense UV rays. This is common at high altitudes when a natural source of sunlight is reflected off of snow or ice, refracting nearly eighty percent of the UV radiation (Boyd, 2015).

Tenzing-Hillary Airport (or Lukla Airstrip) – This airstrip was built in 1964 by Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust near the settlement of Lukla in the Solukhumbu District. This airstrip

became a key access point into the northeastern highlands of Nepal, marking the beginning or ending of a trek for the majority of tourists and mountaineers. Prior to the availability of these nail biting flights into the highlands, many would enter the region from a trail that started from a road-head located in the village of Jiri, a gruelling seven day hike that passes through villages in the lower parts of Solukhumbu (Rogers & Aitchison, 1998).

People & Relevant Organisations

Ang Rita Sherpa – Born in 1949, Ang Rita is a world famous Nepali-Sherpa mountain climber who has summited Mt. Everest ten times without the use of supplemental oxygen. These summits all occurred within thirteen years, taking place between May 7, 1983 and May 23, 1996. Orphaned in his teen years, Ang Rita was compelled to work in the mountaineering industry to support his family. He now owns a trekking company in Kathmandu (Everest History, 2004b).

Apa Sherpa – Apa is a Nepali-Sherpa climber from Thame. He was born in 1960 under the name Lhakpa Tenzing Sherpa, but is now more commonly known as Apa. Nicknamed as “Super Sherpa” he currently shares the world record, with Phurba Tashi, for the greatest number of successful summits on Mt. Everest: a total of twenty-one times. Apa and his family now reside in Draper, Utah in the United States of America (Apa Sherpa Foundation, 2016).

Babu Chiri Sherpa – is a world-famous mountaineer. Of Sherpa and Nepali descent, Babu grew up in the small rural village settlement, Takasindu, located in the Lower Solu region of the Solukhumbu District. He died during his eleventh summit attempt in 2001. Babu Chiri Sherpa is known for two world records: the fastest Mt. Everest summit from basecamp along the Southeast ridge (16 hours and 56 minutes), and spending twenty-one hours on the summit without supplemental oxygen (Everest History, 2004a; Guinness, 2017; Mu & Nepal, 2015).

Cheering Sherpa – is Rinchen Sherpa’s youngest son. At the time of Rinchen’s interview, Cheering was three-years old.

Dechen Sherpa – is Ngima’s niece, daughter of his sister, Sumi. Dechen was three months old when I stayed with Ngima and his family in Dandakharka.

Dinesh Paudel – is the director of Mega Adventures International, and was instrumental to the organisation of fieldwork in both Kathmandu and the Solukhumbu. He also referred me to Ngima Sherpa, who assisted this project as a guide and interpreter.

Dolma Sherpa – is Ngima’s Mother, and still lives in Dandakharka with her daughter Sumi, and granddaughter Dechen.

Fu Doma Sherpa – is Pemba’s sister and Lhakpa Dorji’s daughter. She resides in the village of Phortse with Pemba, Lhakpa Dorji, and her mother, Ngawang. She works as a librarian at a local primary school. Additionally, she assists with the management of Namaste Lodge, a guesthouse owned by Lhakpa Dorji and Ngawang.

Kanchi Sherpa – Kanchi is the eighteen year-old niece of Tendi Sherpa, the co-owner of Mega Adventures International. She still resides in Chyangba in the Lower Solu region, and helped to organise the interview of Dorchi Sherpa.

Khumbu Climbing Center (KCC) – Located in Phortse, the KCC was founded in 2003 by the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, with a mission to increase the safety margin for Nepali climbers and high-altitude mountain workers. The KCC is understood as a vocational program for indigenous and local climbers who travel to Phortse for two weeks in the winter to develop technical climbing skills, mountain safety, rescue and first aid, as well as English language skills. Over the past fifteen years, the school has grown with its first official brick and mortar headquarters currently under construction. Additionally, the majority of the KCC's instructors and teachers are now local Nepali (Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, 2017).

Lakpa Rita Sherpa – is a renowned Nepali-Sherpa mountaineer and guide. Lakpa was born and raised in the village of Tamo, near the village of Thame, in the Solukhumbu District of Nepal. He now resides in Seattle, Washington and is known for his fifteen successful summits on Mt. Everest. He has led over twenty-three expeditions on Everest; he has a record of 253 climbers successfully standing on the summit under his leadership. In February 2009, Lakpa was the first Sherpa and Nepali to summit the highest peak on each of the world's seven continents (a record known as the Seven Summits) (Alpine Ascents, 2017b).

Mega Adventures International (MAI) – Located in the heart of Thamel, Kathmandu MAI is an adventure and eco-tourism company that prides itself in organising responsible tours through Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and India. The company is owned and managed by a team of tourism professionals, including Dinesh Paudel and Tendi Sherpa. MAI was instrumental to organising the beginning stages of this project's fieldwork, finding a guide and interpreter, and scheduling the interviews hosted in Kathmandu (Mega Adventures International, 2017).

Nepali Mountaineering Association (NMA) – The NMA was established in 1973 as an alpine association of Nepal. As a non-governmental not-for-profit organisation, its vision is to promote mountain tourism, mountaineering and other climbing sports, while protecting and preserving the mountain environments and the local and cultural heritage. It is the only national alpine club that has the authority to issue climbing permits to over thirty-three Nepali mountain peaks (NMA, 2017).

Ngawang Karma Sherpa – is Pemba's mother. She resides in the village of Phortse with Pemba, her husband Lhakpa Dorji, and her daughter Phu Doma. Ngawang Karma owns and manages Namaste Lodge, a guesthouse that caters towards trekkers and mountaineers in the Khumbu region.

Ngima Sherpa – Ngima is a recent graduate of Kathmandu University in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. He was twenty-four years old when he accompanied me as a guide and interpreter throughout the lower mountain regions of the Solukhumbu District of Nepal. Much of his immediate family still resides in the small village of Dandakaharka including

his mother Dolma, sister Sumi, and niece Dechen. He has worked previously with Mega Adventures International as a trekking guide, and can speak English fluently. He now resides in Poland, where he attends a Master's program.

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa – Late Pasang Lhamu Sherpa was the first Nepali woman to successfully summit Mt. Everest at the age of thirty-two on April 22, 1993; she unfortunately died on her descent. Born to a family heavily involved in the mountaineering industry, Pasang was involved in climbing since her early teen years. Her successful summit was the fourth attempt on Mt. Everest (The Glass Ceiling, 2016).

Pemba Sherpa – Pemba is from the village Phortse, where he resides with his family at the Namaste Lodge. He acted as one of the project guides and interpreters, primarily in the Upper Khumbu region. He was twenty-three years old when this project took place. At the time, his mother had forbidden him to climb Mt. Everest in the coming 2015 spring season due to fatal predictions in the Tibetan calendar (cf. National Geographic, 2015). Pemba's experience in the mountaineering industry, his understandings of the high-mountain geography, his ability to speak Sherpa fluently, and his extensive networks all contributed to him being a great asset throughout this project.

Sir Edmund Hillary – Born in 1919 in New Zealand, Hillary became interested in mountaineering while he was in high school. He was a well-known mountaineer and explorer, who had summited many of the world's high peaks, but he is still most significantly recognised for the first successful ascent of Mt. Everest. Hillary and Nepali-Sherpa mountaineer, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, summited Everest on May 29, 1953 as part of the ninth British expedition to Everest. Following this success, he devoted much of his life to aiding the Sherpa people through building schools and hospitals (Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation, 2017).

SPCC – The Sagarmāthā Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) was originally established in the 1980s as a not-for-profit organisation with a mandate to clean up the Solukhumbu region of trash and waste. However, only receiving a small proportion of federal funding, the increasing costs of waste management in the '90s necessitated the SPCC to think of new ways to raise money. Eventually new positions emerged on the mountain: Icefall Doctors. A group of Nepali and Sherpa men hired by the SPCC became responsible for setting ropes and managing the route through Mt. Everest's Khumbu Icefall. For this service, the SPCC required payment from each large commercial expedition team (Outside, 2015).

Sumi Sherpa – is Ngima's sister, and mother of Dechen Sherpa. Her, and her daughter, still live in the small village of Dandakharka, with her mother, Dolma.

Tendi Sherpa – is one of the co-founders and owners of Mega Adventures International. He was instrumental to the organisation of fieldwork in the village Chyangba.

Tenzing Norgay Sherpa – Tenzing Norgay was a Sherpa-Nepali mountaineer born on May 29, 1914 under the name Namgyal Wangdi, but changed it under the advice of a Tibetan Lama. He was raised in Tengboche in the Khumbu region of Nepal, and at the age of twenty-one he was

employed on his first mountaineering expedition to Mt. Everest. He is most famous for the first successful summit of Everest on May 29, 1953 with New Zealander, Sir Edmund Hillary. After retiring from mountaineering, Tenzing Norgay became the first director of field training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling, India in 1954. Here, he passed away in 1986 at the age of 71 years old (Norgay & Coburn, 2002; Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation, 2017).

Village Development Committee (VDC) – Nepal’s seventy-five districts have been subdivided into localities known as Village Development Committees (VDC). There are several VDCs in a single Nepali district, each act as part of Nepal’s Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development; they generally function at a lower administrative level, similar to municipalities. Generally, there are nine wards in each VDC, which are demarcated on the basis of population (Asia Foundation, 2012).

Sherpa & Nepali Terms

Baisakh – A month on the Nepali calendar, equivalent to the month of May in the modern Gregorian calendar.

Chhaang – or Chhaang, is Tibetan spirit made from millet, rice, or barley. Popular in the eastern Himalayas, this alcoholic beverage was usually consumed while harvesting, but now it often accompanies many events and celebrations (Yowangdu, 2012).

Dal bhat – is a traditional dish in Nepal consisting of steamed rice, pickled vegetables, and a bowl of lentil soup, known as dal. In addition to its popularity in Nepal, it is also a staple food in other countries like Bangladesh and India. “Dal bhat power 24 hour” is a common joke between climbers and high-altitude workers in the Solukhumbu who indicate that a meal of dal bhat each day provides them with everlasting energy.

Dhanyabad – is a Nepali word that translates to “thank you” in English.

Dia – is a Nepali word that translates to “older brother” in English, but is often used along with greetings or as a way to address a male (e.g., Namaste, dia!)

Didi – is a Nepali word that translates to “older sister” in English, but is often used along with greetings or as a way to address a female (e.g., Namaste, didi!)

Dzopkyok – is word in Sherpa that signifies a crossbred or hybrid animal made up of Yak and Cow. Dzopkyok are often mistaken for yak or nak (female yak), by individuals who may not familiar with the breed. They are often used to transport expedition and commercial mountaineering clients’ equipment up to the Mt. Everest basecamp.

Ek dam ramro – is a Nepali phrase that translates to “very good” in English.

Jomolungma (Chomolungma) – is the Tibetan name for Mt. Everest. The Tibetan word “Jomo” stands for a holy and respected female, while “Lungma” is a word that means female or mother elephant, thus the direct the word Jomolungma is often interpreted as “Sacred Mother.” The mountain itself is said to be the home of the Tibetan Goddess Jomo Tseringma (Kyareng, 2011).

Mani Rock – are stone plates inscribed with the six-syllabled mantra of Avalokiteshvara: Om mani padme hum. These mantras and rocks are used as a form of prayer in Tibetan Buddhism, and can be seen peppered along the hillside of the Solukhumbu. They are intentionally placed together in piles, along rivers, or sometimes form long walls as an offering to spiritual deities (Rizvi, 1996).

Momos – a local Nepali cuisine influenced by Tibetan and Chinese dishes. Momos are bite-size vegetable and/or meat stuffed dumplings, and are one of the most popular dishes in Nepal (cf. Sijapati, 2016).

Namaste (Namascar) – A respectful form of greeting in Hindu custom, which is often used in India and Nepal. This salutation is often expressed before or after exchanges, and is usually spoken with hands pressed together at the heart and a slight bowing gesture (Cush, Robinson, & York, 2008).

Prayer Wheel – A cylinder made from metal or wood, inscribed with the six-syllabled Sanskrit mantra of Avalokiteshvara: Om mani padme hum. It is spun clockwise, which is said to have the same effect as reciting a mantra aloud (Rizvi, 1996).

Puja (or Pūjā) – the word puja comes from Sanskrit, meaning reverence, honour and worship. Pujas are spiritual rituals or celebrations hosted for various occasions, such as the passing of a loved one, a farewell for a safe journey, or as a ritual for luck, good health, and wellbeing. These rituals are practiced in a variety of religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Pujas vary according to religious affiliation and occasion (Cush et al., 2008)

Sagarmāthā – is the Nepali name for Mt. Everest. This Nepali word is said to translate to “forehead of the sky.” Sagarmāthā is considered to be a sacred to Nepali natives, as it is the home to deities and goddesses (Ortner, 1999).

Sherpa – Sherpa has multiple meanings within a mountain context. Originally, and more times than not, this word signifies a member belonging to a specific ethnic group in the Himalayas of Nepal (Ortner, 1999). However the category of “Sherpa” has undergone changes as these Sherpa natives have been recognised to be well suited for supporting commercialised climbing expeditions. Thus, “Sherpa” as an identifier was adopted to indicate individuals who assume a role and status as a specialised high-altitude porter with at least some (and sometimes a lot of) climbing expertise (Ortner, 1999). I use Sherpa to signify ethnicity of the mountain populations.

Sherpa Tea – a traditional beverage in the southern part of the Solukhumbu region made of flour, salt, and black tea.

Tashi Delek – This Sherpa greeting is a phrase that originates from the Tibetan language, and cannot be directly translated to English. “Blessings” and “good luck” are some of the common interpretations, yet it is often used at the beginning of every Sherpa exchange (Jackson, 2004).

Thuche – is a Sherpa word that translates to “thank you” in English.