

# Eurasia Border Review

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# Eurasia Border Review

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# “Langscapes” and Language Borders: Linguistic Boundary-Making in Northern South Asia

Maya Daurio and Mark Turin\*

## Abstract

Drawing on examples from the linguistically-diverse Himalayan region, in this contribution we explore three main questions. First, we ask how language boundaries both contribute to and defy the imagination of the nation-state. Second, we investigate how such boundaries are transcended and become redefined through increased mobility and technological innovation. And third, we examine what it means for languages to become detached from the landscapes in which they were traditionally situated and historically spoken. Unfixed and unfixable, languages resist the limitations and constraints of nation-states—both colonial and contemporary—that strive to delineate their boundaries along “clear” and often monolingual lines. In the Himalayan region in particular, plural linguistic identities challenge reductive national logics that seek to bind or appropriate languages for hegemonic and ideological goals. Not only are national borders decreasingly relevant for the maintenance and transmission of languages, but the global dispersal of people and the languages they speak, sign and write are combining with accessible digital media to transform internally-maintained language borders as well.

## Introduction

National borders and language boundaries are often represented as coextensive and are regularly perceived to be coterminous. While nation-states are necessarily demarcated to distinguish themselves from each other, languages are able to transcend national borders that often seek to divide and separate speech communities, and these linguistic geographies are carefully managed and rigorously maintained by language communities. Such political boundary crossing by language communities is nothing new, but the rapid growth of digital media has created additional pathways for language mobility and new opportunities for speech communities to carve out a sense of place.<sup>1</sup>

To explore the shifting historical, political, and social dynamics which affect how language communities and borders interact, we build on Arjun Appadurai’s use of the suffix *-scape* to indicate

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Jacquemet, “Language and Transnational Spaces,” in *Mapping Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation*, ed. Peter Auer and Jürgen Schmidt, Volume 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), 50–69.

the fluidity, irregularity, and contingent nature of “global cultural flows”<sup>2</sup> and apply this to our discussion of the dynamic and constructed relationship that exists between language and borders. Chiara Brambilla uses the concept of “borderscapes” to move from discussions of borders to bordering processes and their “shifting and undetermined nature in space and time.”<sup>3</sup> The idea of *borderscapes* invites a criticality in border studies “to grasp new forms of belonging and becoming that are worth being investigated in a time of globalisation and transnational flows.”<sup>4</sup> We find this proposition highly relevant for examining how such flows impact the changing landscapes of increasingly globalized language communities. Following in the footsteps of Appadurai and Brambilla, we propose a different *-scape* suffix to critically examine a relatively undertheorized aspect of border studies, that of linguistic boundary-making, particularly in the context of territorial languages linked to particular landscapes. The intriguing and enticing term “langscape,” while not explicitly defined anywhere in the available literature, seems to point to the coalescing of language and landscape in ways that are relevant and resonant for our discussion.

Linguist and public scholar Luisa Maffi founded Terralingua in 1996, a non-profit promoting understanding and support for biocultural diversity and explicitly linking *terra*, the earth, with *lingua*, language.<sup>5</sup> Since 1996, Terralingua has produced a biennial publication entitled *Langscape*, which started out as a quarterly newsletter but which has, over the last decade, transformed into a full-colour, community-centered, scholarly magazine that supports Terralingua’s mission to educate minds and hearts about the vital importance of biocultural diversity on earth. The concept of “langscape” speaks to the connection between language communities and the landscapes in which their languages are rooted, thereby facilitating an exploration of the transformation of language borders within the context of migration, technologisation, and globalisation.

Drawing on examples from the linguistically-diverse Himalayan region,<sup>6</sup> home to over 1,000 languages<sup>7</sup> from various language families,<sup>8</sup> we explore three main questions. First, we ask how language boundaries both contribute to and defy the imagination of the ethnolinguistic nation-state and we examine the role of censuses, surveys, and cartography in this context. Second, we investigate what

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<sup>2</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Chiara Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept,” *Geopolitics* 20:1 (2015): 14–34.

<sup>4</sup> Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept,” 30.

<sup>5</sup> “Terralingua - Unity in Biocultural Diversity” website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://terralingua.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Mark Turin, “Linguistic Diversity and the Preservation of Endangered Languages: A Case Study from Nepal,” in *Talking Points* (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), 2007), 1–39.

<sup>7</sup> As Tomasz Kamusella has argued, to write unproblematically about language and the distinction between languages and dialects is to ignore the historically fraught and political nature of defining and enumerating languages. We acknowledge the need to present the number of languages spoken in the Himalayas within this context. See Tomasz Kamusella, “The Global Regime of Language Recognition,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 218 (2012): 59–86; Tomasz Kamusella, “The History of the Normative Opposition of ‘Language versus Dialect’: From Its Graeco-Latin Origin to Central Europe’s Ethnolinguistic Nation-States,” *Colloquia Humanistica* 5 (2016): 164–188.

<sup>8</sup> David Eberhard, Gary Simons, and Charles Fennig, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2019). Accessed December 29, 2019: <http://www.ethnologue.com>

it means for languages to become detached from the landscapes in which they were traditionally situated and historically spoken, and sometimes de-ethnicized through the process. We discuss the territoriality of Himalayan languages and consider the linguistic identities of those who remain situated in their traditional landscapes as well as those who reside in urban environments. And third, we explore how language boundaries are transcended and become redefined through increased mobility and technological innovation. We underscore how access to different technological media provide greater opportunities for sustaining language communities across space and time while simultaneously, dominant language speakers continue to control the digital discourse promoting normative language ideologies.

### Language Borders and Linguistic Boundary-Making

Nation-states are “imagined” political entities<sup>9</sup> that are fundamentally—and one might argue, necessarily—constrained and defined by their geographical and cartographical borders.<sup>10</sup> The ideology of ethnolinguistic nationalism also assumes a geographical continuity, from the pre-modern to the modern, appropriating an imprecise past and superimposing it onto the conceptual imagination of the present.<sup>11</sup> As other contributors to the *Eurasia Border Review* (EBR) have demonstrated, nation-state borders simultaneously facilitate the flow of materials and peoples while working to restrict unsanctioned cross-border movement.<sup>12</sup> As a field, border studies has established that borders are themselves highly marked liminal spaces, and complex sites of porosity and of identity making.<sup>13</sup>

In this article, our goal is to focus greater analytical attention on language borders and linguistic boundary-making to the extent that these intersect with nationalist and colonialist endeavors. In so doing, we build on previous and notable efforts to make sense of the complexity of this subject matter. George Grierson, who conducted the Linguistic Survey of India over a period of three decades beginning in the late 1800s, wrote extensively about the challenges of delineating language

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Susan Gal, “Language and Political Spaces,” in *Mapping Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation*, ed. Peter Auer and Jürgen Schmidt, Volume 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), 33–50.

<sup>11</sup> Sheldon Pollock, “Introduction,” in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1–36.

<sup>12</sup> Victor Konrad, “Borders and Culture: Zones of Transition, Interaction and Identity in the Canada-United States Borderlands,” *Eurasia Border Review* 5:1 (2014): 41–58; Hari Bansh Jha, “Nepal’s Border Relations with India and China,” *Eurasia Border Review* 4:1 (2013): 63–75.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Schack, “Regional Identity in Border Regions: The Difference Borders Make,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 16:2 (2001): 99–114; Brigitta Busch and Helena Kelly-Holmes, “Language Boundaries as Social, Political, and Discursive Constructs,” in *Language, Discourse, and Borders in the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Brigitta Busch and Helena Kelly-Holmes (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2004), 1–12; Bonnie Urciuoli, “Language and Borders,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 525–546.

boundaries.<sup>14</sup> In 1917, and focusing on Europe, Leon Dominian sought to equate a linear, progressive notion of civilization with the sentiment of nationalism as outwardly expressed in language. Rather than challenge the linguistic identity-making of the nation-state, Dominian's work advanced its cause by attempting to illustrate how fundamentally language has influenced nationality.<sup>15</sup> Henry Robert Wilkinson published a rigorous analysis of two hundred ethnographic maps of Macedonia, most of them produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that reflected the ethnolinguistic nationalist inclinations of that period using language as the primary, and sometimes only, criterion for ethnic affinity.<sup>16</sup>

More recently, Susan Gal and Judith Irvine have argued that language ideologies produce boundaries which presume a linguistic and social correlative relationship.<sup>17</sup> In a recently published article, Mario Saraceni and Camille Jacob discuss the political nature of linguistic borders and propose the concept of "translanguaging" to understand language behavior as a social practice in which speakers' multilingualism expresses itself dynamically.<sup>18</sup> In situating our work within scholarship that examines how languages and borders are demarcated both by language communities and by the nation-states which contain them, we assert that linguistic identities become more pronounced at borders "if only because the communicative practices of the citizens on each side are more fluid and overlapping than the nation-states to which they belong would like to imagine."<sup>19</sup>

As much in popular conceptualization as in public policy, languages are often presumed to correlate with national political borders and have been (and continue to be) strategically deployed and expediently used to amplify nationalist sentiment, particularly in Eurasia. In the case of Croatia following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, "the demarcation of 'language boundaries' and the affirmation of 'language communities' were central concepts in political and media discourses on language" as the Yugoslav state disintegrated.<sup>20</sup> In some instances of nation-building, particular languages are appropriated to serve as symbols of national identity and even as proxies for the demarcation of nation-

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<sup>14</sup> Javed Majeed, "Mapping Languages," in *Nation and Region in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India* (London: Routledge India, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Leon Dominian, *The Frontiers of Language and Nationality in Europe, The Art World*, Volume 3 (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1918).

<sup>16</sup> Henry Robert Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, "The Boundaries of Languages and Disciplines: How Ideologies Construct Difference," *Social Research* 62:4 (1995): 967–1001; Judith T. Irvine, "Subjected Words: African Linguistics and the Colonial Encounter," *Language and Communication* 28:4 (2008): 323–343.

<sup>18</sup> Mario Saraceni and Camille Jacob, "Revisiting Borders: Named Languages and de-Colonization," *Language Sciences* 76 (2019): 1–10.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Turin, "On Linguistic Borders: Official Language Policy in Settler-Colonial Nations," *Border Bites* 8 (2018): 1–10.

<sup>20</sup> Brigitta Busch and Helena Kelly-Holmes, "Language Boundaries as Social, Political, and Discursive Constructs," in *Language, Discourse, and Borders in the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Brigitta Busch and Helena Kelly-Holmes (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2004), 1–12.

state borders, whether or not a difference in spoken language actually existed.<sup>21</sup> Along the Dutch-German border, for example, while the languages spoken on either side are mutually intelligible, they are politically distinguished from one another as Dutch or German, depending on which side of the border they are spoken.<sup>22</sup> In other instances, actual differences in spoken language are overwritten and rendered invisible to serve a nationalist goal, as in the case of numerous varieties of spoken Arabic documented within various nation-states committed to a vision of Arab nationalism, for example.<sup>23</sup> In such cases, languages can become nationalist metonyms, standing in for the nation-state itself.

In other contexts, nation-state borders work to erase linguistic identities. At the United States' southern border, a failure of imagination and understanding by the American state overwrites the ethnolinguistic identities of Indigenous Latin American migrants, reclassifying them as Spanish-speaking, regardless of their comfort and fluency in the language. Indicative of this deficiency in understanding is the lack of any process for a language assessment of immigrant speakers of Indigenous languages and the absence of any policy which affirms the right of these speakers to communicate in their primary language.<sup>24</sup> Only 7% of translated materials that exist as part of the United States Department of Homeland Security Limited English Proficiency (LEP) policy represent languages from Meso-America, while immigrants from Meso-America constitute 94% of the undocumented immigrant population. Only four Mayan languages are included in translation materials, while 25 other Mayan languages spoken in multiple countries are excluded, and not a single Indigenous language from Mexico is represented.<sup>25</sup> Once across the border, these historically marginalized, vulnerable individuals continue to be sidelined, becoming merged into an undifferentiated "Hispanics" mass, even though masking Indigenous language speakers as Spanish speakers is a clear violation of LEP policy.<sup>26</sup> The marginalisation at the border of those who lack proficiency in Spanish can aggravate an already challenging asylum-seeking process, ultimately resulting in children being unlawfully separated from their parents, the unwarranted deportation of adults, and in some cases even death.<sup>27</sup> Five of the six children who have died in the custody of the Department of Homeland Security since Donald Trump took office are Indigenous. In two of the cases, intake waivers signed by the fathers stating that their child did not require medical care were in English, and only verbal translation in Spanish was provided, a language in which the fathers lack proficiency.<sup>28</sup> In the United States and beyond, ethnic identity, basic human rights, and linguistic ancestry are eroded as migrants become coercively associated with

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<sup>21</sup> Máiréad Nic Craith, *Europe and the Politics of Language: Citizens, Migrants and Outsiders* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Turin, "On Linguistic Borders: Official Language Policy in Settler-Colonial Nations," 2.

<sup>23</sup> Tomasz Kamusella, "The Arabic Language: A Latin of Modernity?," *Journal of Nationalism, Memory, and Language Politics* 111:2 (2017): 117–145.

<sup>24</sup> Blake Gentry, "Exclusion of Indigenous Language Speaking Immigrants in the US Immigration System, a Technical Review" (Ama Institution, 2015), 1–64.

<sup>25</sup> Gentry, "Exclusion of Indigenous Language Speaking Immigrants," 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Nolan, "A Translation Crisis at the Border," *The New Yorker*, December 30, 2019. Accessed December 10, 2019: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/01/06/a-translation-crisis-at-the-border>

<sup>28</sup> Nolan, "A Translation Crisis at the Border."

a newly-imagined community, and individual histories are often lost or forced to be abandoned through migration.

The U.S.–Mexico political border creates a seemingly arbitrary divide between what lies on either side, exemplified by the case of Tijuana and San Diego, where two cities share the same weather, geography, history, and even the same language.<sup>29</sup> Legal border crossings are a daily reality for inhabitants of the cities on either side of this border—a regular movement that reflects the linguistic, cultural, and familial ties that endure between borderland communities—while at the same time there exists a “heightened linguistic anxiety and identity-making”<sup>30</sup> that is intentionally produced by the state.

In the context of the Himalayan region, although Nepali has a significant speech community outside of Nepal, and Nepal is a highly multilingual country, the Nepali language continues to be associated with Nepali national identity. Yet, being Nepali does not require that one only speaks Nepali: Nepal’s constitution provides for all Nepalis to receive at least primary education in their mother tongue.<sup>31</sup> While this is highly prized and symbolically important, an implementation gap exists between constitutional aspiration and educational reality, with access to mother tongue education remaining very limited in Nepal. Similarly, while the constitution of Nepal recognizes all languages spoken in the nation as national languages, it provides legal status to *Khas Nepali* as the language of official business,<sup>32</sup> reasserting a long-standing and entrenched linguistic hierarchy that situates Nepali above all other languages spoken and used in the nation.<sup>33</sup>

For the drafters of the constitution, and for Nepali-speaking Hindu elites, the role and function of Nepali as *the* (not *a*) linguistic embodiment of Nepali national identity remains unassailable. This contrasts with the multi- or pluri-lingual identities of most Nepalis, many of whom are advocating for and seeking official recognition of their ethnolinguistic community. At the same time that local ethnolinguistic identities are receiving greater recognition within the nation-state of Nepal, the Nepali language is becoming more visible beyond Nepal’s boundaries. Nepali is widely used and much valued in Darjeeling, Sikkim and other parts of the Indian northeast, and over time has become an important element in cultural and political movements for recognition and representation.<sup>34</sup>

There are also large numbers of Nepali speakers in Bhutan, but there they threaten the Bhutanese state’s aspirations of a national identity associated with Dzongkha. Following the introduction of a new citizenship law in 1985 requiring all citizens to adopt a national code of etiquette

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<sup>29</sup> Kristin C. Moran, “Border Tales: A Comparison of Spanish-language and English-language News,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 20:1 (2005): 115–127.

<sup>30</sup> Turin, “On Linguistic Borders: Official Language Policy in Settler-Colonial Nations,” 1.

<sup>31</sup> Nepal Law Commission, “Constitution of Nepal,” 2015. Accessed December 29, 2019: <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/981>

<sup>32</sup> Om Gurung, “Social Inclusion/Exclusion: Policy Discourse in Nepal,” in *Including the Excluded in South Asia*, ed. M. Sekher and R. Carciumaru (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 39–55.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on the ethnolinguistic nationalism of Russian neo-imperialism in a multilingual and multiethnic context, see Tomasz Kamusella, “Russian: A Monocentric or Pluricentric Language?,” *Colloquia Humanistica* 7 (2018): 153–196.

<sup>34</sup> Sara Shneiderman and Townsend Middleton, *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environments* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

and national dress, Nepali was banned as a subject in schools and up to 90,000 ethnic Nepalis were expelled.<sup>35</sup> The history of the Nepali language in Bhutan is complex, and disagreement over whether Nepali was simply a subject in Bhutanese schools or a medium of instruction persists. In spite of state-sponsored efforts to assert Dzonghka as the national language and the exclusion of some ethnic Nepalis from citizenship, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) continues to broadcast in Nepali, and the national newspaper, *Kuensel*, continues to print a Nepali-language edition.<sup>36</sup> The spread of Nepali across the eastern Himalayas underscores the reality that languages move when people move, and when nation-states expand and later contract—as Nepal has done—communities and the languages they speak are left behind in the wake, reconfiguring themselves over time in response to new national boundary-making around them.

### Census Taking and Language Mapping

The beginnings of linguistic cartography—the creation of maps displaying features and locations of languages—coincided with the emergence of the concept of the nation-state in the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Fundamental to both was the underlying notion that a nation corresponds to a single language,<sup>38</sup> with the concomitant belief that monolingualism was a desired, geographical norm and multilingualism the historical exception.<sup>39</sup> The International Statistical Congress, meeting in St. Petersburg in 1872, explicitly decided to use spoken language as the central component for classifying ethnographic groups,<sup>40</sup> and it was during this period of nation-state formation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that regional languages became increasingly marginalized.<sup>41</sup> Most nation-states envision social and cultural cohesion around a national language to be an effective way of facilitating affinity among their citizens, and subscribe to (in lesser or greater degree) an ideology of linguistic purity: the idea that a language must be preserved in its “correct” form and protected from contamination by other languages.<sup>42</sup> Yet as

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Rhoderick Chalmers, “Nepal and the Eastern Himalayas,” in *Language and National Identity in Asia*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84–99.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Turin, “Concluding Thoughts on Language Shift and Linguistic Diversity in the Himalaya: The Case of Nepal,” in *The Politics of Language Contact in the Himalaya*, ed. Selma K. Sonntag and Mark Turin (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 163–176.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Gibson, “Shading, Lines, Colors: Mapping Ethnographic Taxonomies of European Russia,” *Nationalities Papers* 46:4 (2018): 592–611.

<sup>38</sup> The German poet Ernst Moritz Arndt articulated a formula for ethnolinguistic nationalism in his song *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland*, wherein a greater German state could be achieved through the unification of all German-speaking areas. See Wikipedia Contributors, “Des Deutschen Vaterland - Wikipedia,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Accessed December 10, 2019: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Des\\_Deutschen\\_Vaterland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Des_Deutschen_Vaterland)

<sup>39</sup> Busch and Kelly-Holmes, “Language Boundaries as Social, Political, and Discursive Constructs.”

<sup>40</sup> United States Delegation to the International Statistical Congress, “Report of the Delegates to the International Statistical Congress Held At St. Petersburg In August, 1872” (Washington D. C., 1875). Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011407923/Home>

<sup>41</sup> Máiréad Nic Craith, *Europe and the Politics of Language*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Olivia Walsh, *Linguistic Purism: Language Attitudes in France and Quebec*, IMPACT: Studies in Language and Society 41 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016).

anthropologists know, and political scientists are learning,<sup>43</sup> lived, plurilingual linguistic identities are very often distinct from—and even built in opposition to—imagined or sanctioned ones.

Colonial powers undertook the enumeration and classification of languages—both written and spoken—to map the imperial geographies that they claimed, categorizing the social world in order to command it.<sup>44</sup> Such methodologies continue to be used by states to construct the ways in which groups are imagined to, or ideally should, align with one another. Turin describes how the differences between the Nepali spoken in Nepal and “the variant spoken in Bhutan were deemed to be significant enough that they served as the basis for a linguistic test to ascertain whether individuals claiming political asylum in Europe were indeed credible Lhotshampa from Bhutan (people of Nepalese ancestry who grew up in Bhutan) or citizens of Nepal dissembling as Bhutanese refugees in order to game the system and find safe passage to the European Union.”<sup>45</sup> By means of enumeration and classification, then, states work to mediate citizenship through an individual’s perceived ability to speak a certain language.

While surveys and censuses often function as tools of imperial control and administrative regulation, they can also be transgressive in the information that they reveal. Following the Burma Census Report of 1911, the Linguistic Survey of Burma (LSB) was initiated in 1917 but soon stymied on account of the way it threatened the ideological aspirations of colonial scholars to define the Burmese state within a “Burmano-Buddhist narrative.”<sup>46</sup> Leslie Fernandes Taylor, the superintendent of the LSB, tried to walk the line between his aspirations to provide a scientific and philological study of languages and the desire of the colonial state for the LSB to have practical applications for administrators on the ground. Taylor’s emerging linguistic narrative challenged that of the Burmese colonial government, ultimately marginalizing him, and the LSB was never completed.<sup>47</sup>

The successfully completed Linguistic Survey of India (LSI) offers an instance of how surveying and language mapping can in fact disrupt statist endeavors, despite appearances to the contrary. Benedict Anderson describes the colonial fascination with census-taking as motivated by a desire to “count the objects of its feverish imaginings,”<sup>48</sup> the objective being to build and organize a colonial state around the systematic classification of ethno-racial hierarchies.<sup>49</sup> The British colonial state imagined—or at least hoped—that India could be thought of as a cohesive whole, and the LSI, initiated in 1894, earned the backing of the administration precisely because it was believed that the results would dovetail agreeably with the census and reaffirm the imperial conception of India as a

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<sup>43</sup> Rémi Léger, “Why the Politics of Language Needs Examples from beyond the Global North,” Open Book Publishers Blog, September 27, 2019. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://blogs.openbookpublishers.com/why-the-politics-of-language-needs-examples-from-beyond-the-global-north/>

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Cohn, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command,” in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 16–56.

<sup>45</sup> Turin, “Concluding Thoughts on Language Shift and Linguistic Diversity in the Himalaya: The Case of Nepal,” 168.

<sup>46</sup> Javed Majeed, “The Colonial State and the Survey,” in *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India* (London: Routledge India, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Majeed, “The Colonial State and the Survey,” 70.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

consistent geographical entity.<sup>50</sup> The imperial Indian census was, after all, a means of fixing people in groups in time and space to impose a specific kind of social order,<sup>51</sup> one very much based on equating language with race.<sup>52</sup> Yet, as Majeed writes:

The LSI's geographical imagining of India conflicted with these colonial and nationalist mappings. It complicated the notion of India as a single, coherent, self-referential geography, and in doing so centralised India in a global linguistic geography. Its cartographical exercises were at odds with the colonial state's investment in a specific geographical image of India, and ultimately with the re-mapping of India after 1947 in terms of linguistic states.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, the Linguistic Survey of India laid bare some of the challenges inherent in attempting to fix and locate languages in place and space.<sup>54</sup> Cartography was a powerful expression of colonial power in imperial India, and the maps accompanying the LSI diluted the narrative authority of the British Empire by depicting the elasticity of language boundaries. Sheldon Pollock writes that “at its borders, every language may appear to merge into something else.”<sup>55</sup> George Grierson, who administered the LSI over a period of 33 years<sup>56</sup> and was careful to clarify the LSI's value for the administrative interests of the colonial state,<sup>57</sup> wrote candidly about the complexity of situating languages on a map,<sup>58</sup> using innovative techniques and rich, descriptive language to illustrate the indefiniteness of overlapping language spaces, including “shading” to indicate how “boundaries bleed,” “waves and tides” to describe the interaction between languages when they encountered one another, and “overflowing” to depict languages spilling over mountain ranges.<sup>59</sup> Language boundaries blur the edges and persist as inimitably undefinable.<sup>60</sup>

The categories enumerated in a census, and processes for collecting and collating data, are varied and elicit noticeably different responses. For example, while both Nepal and India conduct

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<sup>50</sup> Majeed, “The Colonial State and the Survey,” 50.

<sup>51</sup> Norman Gerald Barrier, *The Census in British India: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Patrick McCormick, “Hierarchy and Contact: Re-Evaluating the Burmese Dialects,” *The IAS Newsletter*, no. 75 (2016): 42–43.

<sup>53</sup> Majeed, “Mapping Languages,” 56.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>55</sup> Sheldon Pollock, “The Language of the Gods Enters the World,” in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 39–74.

<sup>56</sup> Javed Majeed, “Introduction: The Survey's Inception,” in *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India* (London: Routledge India, 2018).

<sup>57</sup> Majeed, “The Colonial State and the Survey,” 65.

<sup>58</sup> George A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India, Volume 1, Part 1* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publications Branch, 1927).

<sup>59</sup> Majeed, “Mapping Languages,” 60.

<sup>60</sup> Pollock, “Introduction,” 22.

decadal censuses, only Nepal seeks responses for both mother tongue and ethnicity.<sup>61</sup> India's decadal census does little to enumerate monolingualism, bilingualism, and multilingualism, nor does it attempt to determine how minority languages are being retained.<sup>62</sup> The 2005–2006 Linguistic Survey of Sikkim (LSS) was a joint effort by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, the Department of Human Resource Development (formerly Education) of the State Government of Sikkim, and one of the co-authors, Mark Turin. The survey sought to uncover the complexities around language use and illuminate understandings of identity and belonging.

One of the more unexpected findings of the LSS is that there were more young people who identified Bhutia, Lepcha, and Limbu—the autochthonous languages of Sikkim—as their mother tongue than there are those who self-identified as speaking them. Co-author Turin explains this anomaly as the expression of an emotional connection to an ancestral heritage, ethnic identity and sense of linguistic attachment.<sup>63</sup> The Sikkim survey is noteworthy for both the pattern of language shift that it uncovered, with more Nepali and fewer Indigenous mother tongues being spoken, and for identifying the way that an individual's language heritage can serve as a proxy for ethnicity, thus helping to cultivate a sense of belonging.<sup>64</sup> The LSI and the LSS illustrate that language mapping and linguistic surveys can produce results that challenge hegemonic narratives about how and where language communities situate themselves in and across nation-states.

### **Fluidity and Flux: Language Mobility in Nepal**

While we have demonstrated that linguistic boundaries are clearly not coterminous with national boundaries—both geographically and temporally—they are nevertheless actively maintained in their own right. Language borders do serve as demarcated sites of belonging<sup>65</sup> and contribute to the formation and maintenance of ethnolinguistic identities. While nation-state borders are conceived of and depicted as firm and unmoving, language borders are necessarily fluid. As such, language borders remain cartographically challenging to represent because linguistic boundaries are maintained at symbolic and emotional as well as at spatial and geographic levels.<sup>66</sup>

In the Eastern Himalaya, ethnic identity forms in partial response to a political climate which affords certain groups access to capital controlled by the government.<sup>67</sup> In India, the central and state

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<sup>61</sup> Mark Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas," in *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*, ed. Gerard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (SAGE Publications, 2014).

<sup>62</sup> Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence," 381.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>65</sup> Urciuoli, "Language and Borders," 539.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Language and Identity," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 369–394; Sarah Samuelson and Beth Freedman, "Language Policy, Multilingual Education, and Power in Rwanda," *Language Policy* 9 (2010): 191–215.

<sup>67</sup> Mona Chettri, *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).



**Figure 1: Map of the Himalayan Region**

Areas shaded in grey represent locations discussed in this paper. Map by Maya Daurio.

bureaucracies engage in neo-colonial categorizations to afford certain marginalized communities greater rights and benefits. Groups who are able to distinguish themselves ethnically, linguistically, and in their customs and performative culture may qualify for status as a Scheduled Tribe, increasing access to reserved posts in government agencies, seats in universities, low interest loans, and reduced thresholds required to pass educational board exams.<sup>68</sup> Efforts by Limbu, Lepcha, and Bhutia communities in Sikkim to lobby for inclusion as Scheduled Tribes are a manifestation of this process.

In neighbouring Nepal, *adivāsi janajāti* (indigenous nationality) organizations and activists propose a one-to-one relationship between language and ethnicity, through which they advocate for themselves as distinct groups in order to receive official recognition and other perceived and forthcoming entitlements.<sup>69</sup> Nepal has experienced significant political transformation and upheaval over the last three decades, including the introduction of a multi-party democratic system in 1990, a civil war that lasted from 1996 to 2006, the abolishment of the Hindu monarchy in 2006, and its first ever constituent assembly which was charged with drafting a constitution from 2008 to 2012,<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin, "Seeking the Tribe: Ethno-Politics in Darjeeling and Sikkim," *Himal Southasian*, March-April (2006): 1–4.

<sup>69</sup> Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence," 373.

<sup>70</sup> Gurung, "Social Inclusion/Exclusion: Policy Discourse in Nepal."

followed by another constitution in 2015.<sup>71</sup> Many of these political vicissitudes coalesce around the aspiration for a multicultural and multilingual Nepal with accompanying rights and representation for historically marginalized groups that make up a third of the country's population and much of its ethnolinguistic diversity.<sup>72</sup>

The federal definition of what constitutes an *adivāsi janajāti* in Nepal includes having one's own language and oral history, among other requirements,<sup>73</sup> and encourages groups to cultivate the idea of a singularity between ethnicity and language, whether or not the communities themselves are functionally multilingual. David Gellner understands multilingualism in Nepal as existing within a hierarchy in which the language people choose to use in a given situation is mediated by the power and status among the language groups in contact with one another.<sup>74</sup> Patrick McCormick describes a similar hierarchical, preferential system of language choice in Burma among multilingual communities.<sup>75</sup>

The multilingual traders of the Tichurong Valley in Dolpa, Nepal, offer one way of understanding how multilingual communities demarcate the language they use according to perceptions of power through the political, social, and economic domains that they navigate. Because they speak Kaike, Nepali, and Pöke, interactions that Tarali (inhabitants of the Tichurong Valley) have with other speech communities involve complex choices about which language to use, choices mitigated by relative positions of prestige and status.<sup>76</sup> Those Tarali who live in Tichurong do not have a sense of the impending loss of the Kaike language or diminishment of their culture because they are immersed in Tarali customs and surrounded by Kaike as a living and vibrant language. Kathmandu-residing Tarali, however, are taking steps to explicitly cultivate an identity around speaking Kaike, including actively creating a sense of affinity with the Magar community, one of Nepal's most numerous Indigenous groups, now that the Kaike language has been officially recognized as one of three distinct languages spoken by Magar community members.<sup>77</sup>

James Fisher understands the development of Magar identity among Tarali as an alliance of convenience.<sup>78</sup> In the current political climate, self-identifying as Magar provides Tarali access to the social, economic and political capital associated with membership in Nepal's largest Indigenous

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<sup>71</sup> Bal Krishna Sharma and Prem Phyak, "Neoliberalism, Linguistic Commodification, and Ethnolinguistic Identity in Multilingual Nepal," *Language in Society* 46 (2017): 231–256.

<sup>72</sup> Gurung, "Social Inclusion/Exclusion: Policy Discourse in Nepal."

<sup>73</sup> "The Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal," in *National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN): An Introduction* (Kathmandu: Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, 2003). Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://www.nefin.org.np/en/books/>

<sup>74</sup> David N. Gellner, "The Idea of Nepal, The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2016," in *Himal Books for Social Science Baha* (Kathmandu, 2016). Accessed December 29, 2019: <http://soscbaha.org/mcrl-2016/>

<sup>75</sup> McCormick, "Hierarchy and Contact: Re-Evaluating the Burmese Dialects," 43.

<sup>76</sup> Maya Daurio, "The Significance of Place in Ethnolinguistic Vitality," in *The Politics of Language Contact in the Himalaya*, ed. Selma K. Sonntag and Mark Turin (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 109–136.

<sup>77</sup> John Whelpton, *The History of Nepal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> James F. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

group,<sup>79</sup> including opportunities for greater political representation.<sup>80</sup> The (self-)enforcement of a correlative relationship between language and ethnicity in a largely multilingual country such as Nepal is indicative of the way in which linguistic geographies are cultivated to situate individuals and communities within particular social, economic, and political contexts,<sup>81</sup> and then delineated to facilitate affinities between groups of people to support them in accessing power and resources.

### Living “Langscapes”: Linking Language with the Land

Most if not all speakers of Indigenous languages are rooted in a particular place, codifying diachronic and site-specific knowledge about landscapes and livelihood systems in their grammar, lexicon and syntax.<sup>82</sup> In addition, Indigenous language communities demarcate boundaries by categorizing the territory in which they live and with which they are associated, assigning names to culturally, politically and historically significant sites in the landscape. The transfer of linguistic, cultural, and environmental knowledge from one generation to the next is processual, performative, and situated in this named and embodied landscape.<sup>83</sup> It is through the medium of language, then, that cultural knowledge and experience is organized, classified and transmitted across generations.<sup>84</sup> This continuous “place-making”<sup>85</sup> generates and sustains a sense of belonging and an emotional attachment to a land that is re-lived in the sharing of origin stories and delineated in sacred geographies.<sup>86</sup>

Among the Kaiké-speaking Tarali in Dolpa, Nepal, for example, villages are ringed by sacred trees inhabited by named deities, and the most powerful deity resides in a glacier overlooking the Tichurong Valley.<sup>87</sup> This is but one public example of the way that the Kaiké language serves to locate and situate the Tarali community in time and space. The Kaiké-speaking Tarali have long been multilingual traders, traditionally working in the salt trade between India and Tibet while continuing to reside in Dolpa.<sup>88</sup> Yet community members are now moving out of the Tichurong Valley in increasing numbers to access better educational and economic opportunities, resulting in a generation born and

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<sup>79</sup> B.K. Rana, “Recent Change in Language Communities of Nepal,” *OGMIOS Newsletter* 26 (2005). Accessed December 29, 2019: [https://www.ogmios.org/ogmios\\_files/265.htm](https://www.ogmios.org/ogmios_files/265.htm)

<sup>80</sup> Gurung, “Social Inclusion/Exclusion: Policy Discourse in Nepal.”

<sup>81</sup> Chettri, *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland*, 22.

<sup>82</sup> David Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World’s Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> K. David Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinctions of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Margaret Pearce and Renee Louis, “Mapping Indigenous Depths of Place,” *American Indian Culture and Research* 32:3 (2008): 107–126.

<sup>84</sup> Cristina Muru, “At Home Between Science and Humanities: Biocultural Diversity as Source and Object of Interdisciplinary Dialogue,” *Langscape* 4:2 (2015): 20–23.

<sup>85</sup> Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Evans et al., *Grounding Knowledge/Walking Land: Archaeological Research and Ethno-Historical Identity in Central Nepal* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Maya Daurio, “The Fairy Language: Language Maintenance and Social-Ecological Resilience Among the Tarali of Tichurong,” *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 31 (2012): 7-21.

<sup>88</sup> Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders*.

raised outside the landscape in which the Kaike language was historically situated and used.<sup>89</sup> What does it mean for a language to move beyond the landscape in which it was spoken and about which it contains a wealth of codified traditional cultural and ecological knowledge when speech communities relocate?

Many of the first generation of Kaike speakers who relocated to Kathmandu continue to maintain socio-economic ties to Tichurong and to the district of Dolpa. Those who are physically able to do so return to their home villages on a regular basis to participate in and attend important religious functions, to visit family and friends, or to conduct business. These Tarali continue to speak Kaike with each other in Kathmandu and almost all live within the vicinity of Boudhanath, an important Buddhist site in the northeast of Nepal's capital city. As urban Tarali participate in social organizations promoting Kaike culture that are centred around Indigenous and religious festivals,<sup>90</sup> their identities continue to be entwined with their language and customs and remain, notwithstanding the geographical distance, rooted in Tichurong. It is different for their children, however, most of whom were born and raised in Kathmandu, who answer their parents in the Nepali language, who are educated in English-medium schools, and rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to travel to Tichurong. Whether these youth predominantly identify as Tarali, as Magar, or as simply Nepali is complex and contingent. And it remains to be seen what role the Kaike language will have in their lives.

Around the world, part of the "success" of colonizing languages is that they become detached from the landscapes of their origin and enter new domains of use through militarization, imperial adventure, technologized networks of global trade, and ethnolinguistic nation-building. Many languages develop a strong link to a specific territory, unless they become adopted by a diasporic community, as in the case of Yiddish for Ashkenazic Jews and Romani in the case of the Roma. While the territorial origins of Sanskrit remain murky, for much of its history, its extra-territoriality is what allowed Sanskrit to transcend space. As Pollock notes, for Sanskrit, "the very capacity to escape the limitations of the local place and the temporal moment of the individual life memory was considered a defining virtue."<sup>91</sup> The written form of the Tibetan language is also arguably translocal, lacking a situatedness in place, and dispersed geographically across the Tibetan Plateau as well as throughout the Tibetan Buddhist diaspora.<sup>92</sup> In this vein, the rapid spread of the English language through military and colonial networks of trade and settlement was facilitated by the fact that English was no longer understood to be a territorial language singularly tied to England. Indeed, English has now been appropriated as a symbol of national identity by a vocal minority in the United States who strive to make it the official language as the country's constitution identifies no national language in its founding documents.<sup>93</sup> Such political advocacy instrumentalizes language as a way of drawing boundaries around who belongs and who does not.

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<sup>89</sup> Daurio, "The Significance of Place in Ethnolinguistic Vitality," 129.

<sup>90</sup> James F. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders Transformed: Return to Tarang* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2017).

<sup>91</sup> Pollock, "The Language of the Gods Enters the World," 49.

<sup>92</sup> Birgit Kellner, "Vernacular Literacy in Tibet: Present Debates and Historical Beginnings," in *Anfangsgeschichten/ Origin Stories*, ed. Norbert Kössinger et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 381–402.

<sup>93</sup> Turin, "On Linguistic Borders: Official Language Policy in Settler-Colonial Nations," 6.

In the linguistically diverse Himalayan region,<sup>94</sup> by contrast, language remains largely territorial. In Nepal alone, an estimated 123 languages are identified as spoken or signed mother tongues,<sup>95</sup> of which 109 are Indigenous.<sup>96</sup> Most of these languages are linked to particular langscapes—specific ancestral territories that reflect the traditional socioeconomic practices and cultural ways of their speakers. While many speakers of these languages continue to live and work in their traditional territories, as documented for the Kaike-speaking Tarali above, increased urbanization, educational opportunities, literacy, and health-related migration facilitated new forms of linguistic mobility and boundary-making that become enabled through widely-available digital technologies.

### Urban “Langscapes”: The Movement and Mobility of Languages

The city of Manchester in the United Kingdom is but one of an increasing number of linguistically diverse urban areas across the globe where the resettlement patterns of language communities are highly complex. More than 150 languages are spoken in Manchester, and nearly half of all students enrolled at institutions of higher learning come from homes where a language other than English is spoken.<sup>97</sup> The University of Manchester, in partnership with the city in which it is located, are working to promote awareness of linguistic diversity and highlight its benefits for the city, including attracting business investors, for whom competency in more than one language is important. The partnership also helps ensure access to services in multiple languages by working with local government and community organizations to celebrate the city’s diverse cultural heritage embodied by linguistic diversity.<sup>98</sup>

In an effort to improve language services for the wider community, the University of Manchester is spearheading a project entitled “Multilingual Manchester”. The project has launched an online interactive mapping application that “brings together statistical information on languages from a variety of sources covering different sectors of the city such as the languages of school pupils, library holdings in different languages and their uptake, interpreting requests, and census data.”<sup>99</sup> The application enables users to select and display language-related census data filtered by language used. The user may select a number of parameters for a query, such as the census category “percentage able to speak English well” and the language category “Amharic” to show the spatial distribution of the percentage of Amharic speakers across the city of Manchester who are also able to speak English

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<sup>94</sup> Turin, “Linguistic Diversity and the Preservation of Endangered Languages,” 1.

<sup>95</sup> Population Education & Health Research Center, “Nepal Population Report 2016” (Kathmandu, 2016). Accessed December 10, 2019: [https://www.mope.gov.np/downloadfile/Nepal%20Population%20Report%202016\\_1514709110.pdf](https://www.mope.gov.np/downloadfile/Nepal%20Population%20Report%202016_1514709110.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.

<sup>97</sup> University of Manchester, “About Multilingual Manchester,” website. Accessed October 25, 2019: <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/about/>

<sup>98</sup> “About Multilingual Manchester.”

<sup>99</sup> University of Manchester, “Mapping Multilingual Manchester,” in *Multilingual Manchester* (Wiltshire: Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2019). Accessed October 25, 2019: [http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AHRC-OWRI-leaflet\\_MLM-Section.pdf](http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AHRC-OWRI-leaflet_MLM-Section.pdf)

well.<sup>100</sup> Through these sophisticated visualizations, users are able to query and interrogate the urban “landscape” of Manchester to make visible the city’s plurilingual reality.

New York City’s many diverse ethnolinguistic communities offer a compelling example of both historic and contemporary linguistic mobility. Thanks to the immigrant communities who have moved to the metropolis from all corners of the world, a staggering 800 languages are spoken across New York City, making it the most linguistically diverse urban area in the world.<sup>101</sup> Many of the languages now spoken in New York City’s five boroughs are highly endangered, and linguists from the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA) based in Manhattan have established that the last remaining speakers of a number of languages are currently resident in New York City.<sup>102</sup> One example are the Gottscheers, a Germanic community from Slovenia, whose language is quite distinct from other Germanic-speaking populations.<sup>103</sup> Inspired by the goals of immigrant communities, ELA staff and their research partners are working to document as many languages in the city as they are able, some of which have never been recorded or documented before. To this end, staff at the Alliance have recorded hundreds of hours of audio and video of 50 different languages,<sup>104</sup> worked with speakers of over 100 endangered or minority languages, and have mapped 631 languages and dialects to 970 sites across the city.<sup>105</sup>

Through a new collaborative project funded by the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia, the Endangered Language Alliance and its partners are now developing a digital version of their language map to represent the mobility of language communities. Mapping languages, whether in print or digital form, continues to be a challenge since specific points that identify a community center or polygons drawn around a residential block are inadequate representations of the complex and layered plurilingual realities that exist in so many urban locations. This is particularly relevant for a site like New York, where multiple languages are spoken in the same apartment building or subway car, let alone on one city block in Jackson Heights, the most linguistically diverse neighborhood in the United States, and according to Daniel Kauffman, ELA co-founder, probably in the world.<sup>106</sup> Finding a way to visualize a stacked vertical alignment of geospatial linguistic data—such as multiple languages in one apartment building—is cartographically complex. As Gal notes, “the internationally conventional language map is built on the perspective of the contemporary

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<sup>100</sup> University of Manchester, “Data Tool Main Site,” Multilingual Manchester. Accessed October 25, 2019: <http://datatool.mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/#>

<sup>101</sup> Endangered Language Alliance, “Languages of New York City,” website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://elalliance.org/programs/maps/>

<sup>102</sup> Mark Turin, “New York, a Graveyard for Languages,” *BBC News*, December 6, 2012. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20716344>

<sup>103</sup> Mark Turin, “New York, a Graveyard for Languages.”

<sup>104</sup> Endangered Language Alliance, “Documentation,” website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://elalliance.org/programs/documentation/>

<sup>105</sup> Endangered Language Alliance, “Languages of New York City.”

<sup>106</sup> Bill Parry, “Queens Is a Lab for This College Professor Working to Document the World’s Disappearing Languages,” *Queens News and Community* (New York, September 2019). Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://qns.com/story/2019/09/09/queens-is-a-lab-for-this-college-professor-working-to-document-the-worlds-disappearing-languages/>

nation-state as a political form.”<sup>107</sup> The New York City language mapping project may help to disrupt this conventionality and find ways to represent overlapping spatial complexity that more accurately reflects the distribution of different speech communities across the city.

A number of New York City-based language communities are working hard to recreate a sense of place and belonging far from the ancestral territories in which they originated. In some cases, as with the Gottscheers, New York is the only place they have left to build and sustain their community. For other language communities, through digital communications such as texts, voice-over-internet audio calls, video calls, and social media, individuals connect with family and friends across space,<sup>108</sup> refashioning social identities and feelings of belonging through shared cultural events and digitally-mediated social interactions.

The U.S.-based Sherpa community, an internationally recognized ethnolinguistic community whose traditional homeland is the Solukhumbu district of eastern Nepal, are harnessing new digital media in creative and innovative ways. Over multiple generations, the Sherpa diaspora has expanded to include first neighboring districts in Nepal and northern India, then locations across South Asia and the Middle East, and finally new continents, including North America, Australia, and Europe. In New York City and surrounding areas alone, there are an estimated 5,000 Sherpa. The largest concentration of Sherpa living outside of Nepal’s capital city of Kathmandu is now in the borough of Queens in New York City.<sup>109</sup>

For transplanted Sherpa community members, the establishment of the New York *kyidug*—a social and cultural organization that supports members to celebrate being together at important life stages and ceremonies—has facilitated the maintenance of group identity, the preservation of cultural heritage, a supportive community of practice, and Sherpa language learning.<sup>110</sup> A participant in one of the *kyidug* programmes describes hearing elements of a Sherpa ritual being explained in the Sherpa language, noting that even in their ancestral homeland of Solukhumbu in eastern Nepal, prayers at home or in local monasteries were always recited in the more dominant liturgical Tibetan rather than in their own Sherpa language.<sup>111</sup>

By way of the persuasive example of Sherpa, it is worth noting that through processes of mobility and migration, ethnolinguistic identities can flourish in diaspora contexts in ways that were unimaginable at home, precisely because they are freed from oppressive state systems in homeland contexts that foreclose certain forms of linguistic agency and cultural visibility. In Nepal, we may understand the Sherpa language to be subjected to dual linguistic hegemonies; a coercive nation-state that prioritizes Nepali language ability combined with the dominant status of liturgical Tibetan in religious and ritual contexts. In Nepal, then, the Sherpa language could be described as being situated

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<sup>107</sup> Gal, “Language and Political Spaces,” 33.

<sup>108</sup> Mark Turin, “Globalization Helps Preserve Endangered Languages,” *YaleGlobal Online*, December 3, 2013. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/globalization-helps-preserve-endangered-languages>

<sup>109</sup> Pasang Yangjee Sherpa, “Sustaining Sherpa Language and Culture in New York,” *Book 2.0* 9:1 (2019): 19–29.

<sup>110</sup> Sherpa, “Sustaining Sherpa Language and Culture in New York,” 21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

beneath both Nepali and Tibetan in terms of perceived power and influence.<sup>112</sup> In the crowded neighborhoods of New York City, far from the open skies and towering mountains of Solukhumbu, Sherpa community members are able to reimagine and rebuild their relationship with the Sherpa language, generating new forms of linguistic attachment, belonging and practice in the process.

### **Pushing New Borders: Language and Technology**

As Sherpa community members who have relocated to New York illustrate, languages move with people. In the maps and accompanying descriptions in the original Linguistic Survey of India, Grierson evocatively describes the ways in which languages have always been prone to mobility, despite how nation-states attempt to position particular speech forms as lying within or beyond their borders. For Indigenous languages spoken in the Himalayan region, linguistic mobility should be increasingly understood as a form of diffusion by which members of ethnolinguistic communities settle in urban and peri-urban locations around the world, far from their ancestral homelands. While such mobility would traditionally have resulted in fewer interactions between community members,<sup>113</sup> access to digital technology is transforming that expectation and providing new platforms for linguistic connection. Not only are there more immediate, affordable and varied ways to communicate, but increasing numbers of people now have access to and make use of sophisticated technologies before they have access to basic services such as clean water, stable electricity, and sanitary facilities. As a case in point: cell phone towers arrived in the Tichurong Valley in Dolpa, Nepal, prior to every household having a latrine, and there is still no running water or electricity in the Tichurong Valley, aside from a few scattered solar-powered lights in individual households.

Boundaries—language borders included—are created, maintained, constrained, changed and challenged by communities on the basis of socio-economic factors such as the existence or speed of the internet, paywalls, state censorship,<sup>114</sup> and the cultural capital that individuals can leverage to secure access. Privilege and class help people to transcend language boundaries with greater ease, and we may pause to consider whether handheld technologies are helping to broaden access to information and communications or serving to reinscribe existing inequities, or perhaps a combination of both. Before smartphones were readily available but after basic cell phones had become relatively commonplace, in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand several days' walk from the nearest road, co-author Daurio met a

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<sup>112</sup> Bendi Tso and Mark Turin, "Speaking Chone, Speaking 'Shallow': Dual Linguistic Hegemonies in China's Tibetan Frontier," in *The Politics of Language Contact in the Himalaya*, ed. Selma K. Sonntag and Mark Turin (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 137–162.

<sup>113</sup> Barbara Johnstone, "Mapping Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation," in *Mapping Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation.*, ed. Peter Auer and Jürgen Schmidt, Volume 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), 1–18.

<sup>114</sup> See Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Great Firewall of China: Xi Jinping's Internet Shutdown," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2018. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/29/the-great-firewall-of-china-xi-jinpings-internet-shutdown>; "Russia Enacts 'sovereign Internet' Law, Free Speech Activists Cry Foul," *Reuters*, November 1, 2019. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-internet-bill/russia-enacts-sovereign-internet-law-free-speech-activists-cry-foul-idUSKBN1XB4TF>

gentleman whose son drove a taxi in a city on the plains. Father and son communicated with each other by cell phone, although at the time, in 2006, it required the father to summit a local peak in order to have stable cell reception, and the cost of the calls was high. Now, even for highly dispersed and historically marginalized communities, hardware and software technologies available on smartphones facilitate oral languages and cultural traditions to be recorded, shared and disseminated to friends and family across space and time.

Pasang Sherpa describes how new digital media and affordable technologies have enabled her increasingly diasporic Sherpa community to more readily interact and engage with each other across vastly different time zones. By way of example, dances, songs, and religious reading materials may be produced through a programme at the New York-based *kyidug*, recorded on mobile devices by participants and audience members who are present, and then speedily distributed over social media and video sharing platforms with community members back in Nepal and in other sites across the Sherpa diaspora. The level of cultural engagement and commitment among the New York Sherpa community has inspired Sherpa communities back in Nepal and India to begin language and religion classes of their own,<sup>115</sup> creating a feedback loop between the diaspora and the homeland that fosters language maintenance, cultural continuity and regular communications.

At the same time, with the emergence of writing cultures and increasingly technologically-mediated forms of communication, communities are seizing opportunities to engage with their language and cultural heritage online, through sharing audio and video recordings of language lessons and through asynchronous platforms such as internet radio and podcasting. In the 1890s, Baptist missionaries developed a Roman orthography for the Jingphaw language, spoken by Kachin people in northern Myanmar and neighboring areas in northeastern India and southwestern China. In a curious twist of history, the fact that the language had been committed to writing and that the orthography that was chosen was the Latin alphabet instead of a neighbouring Indic script, laid the foundation among Burmese Jingphaw speakers for the early emergence of a mobile language network that reached across the border from China.<sup>116</sup> Because their writing system required no special fonts beyond the Latin character set, Jingphaw-speaking Kachin were able to text with each other across nation-state borders on basic mobile phones, jumpstarting a digital movement that has facilitated communication across the Jingphaw-speaking diaspora. There are now digital news networks in Jingphaw, and cultural and political knowledge is produced and disseminated on social media and other platforms.<sup>117</sup> As a result of the existence of a commonly-used writing system and the affordances of decentralized digital technologies, the Jingphaw language and Jingphaw vernacular media are thriving, in spite of an ongoing war between the Kachin Independence Army and the Myanmar military since 2011.

Just as language mapping can helpfully disrupt hegemonic national linguistic identities, so too digital language learning is creating new opportunities for border-making and boundary resetting. While staff at the Endangered Language Alliance in New York City are supporting immigrant

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<sup>115</sup> Sherpa, “Sustaining Sherpa Language and Culture in New York,” 27.

<sup>116</sup> Keita Kurabe and Masao Imamura, “Orthography and Vernacular Media,” *The IIAS Newsletter* 75 (2016): 36–37.

<sup>117</sup> Kurabe and Imamura, “Orthography and Vernacular Media,” 37.

communities to record and document their own endangered languages, sometimes for the first time, a project in Canada is providing culturally relevant, online learning opportunities for a Northern Athabaskan language. Through a partnership with the Department of Anthropology and the First Nations and Endangered Languages Program at the University of British Columbia, the Kaska Language Website serves Kaska community members in the Yukon and Northern British Columbia by designing and recording Kaska language courses which are then uploaded to a public site, along with photos, audio and video recordings.<sup>118</sup> Both the Endangered Language Alliance and the Kaska Language Website are community-led documentation and revitalization projects that leverage multimedia platforms to engage participants wherever in the world they are. In such ways, communities are harnessing digital technologies to create extraterritorial opportunities for learning and engaging with historically territorial languages, creatively transcending time and space.

A recent example of increased global support and institutional visibility for facilitating access to language technologies is the UNESCO-hosted international conference Language Technologies for All (LT4All): Enabling Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism Worldwide held in December 2019 in Paris. Convened during the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages, the conference focused on multilingual technologies, including presentations on innovative applications to support citizen linguistics, speech-to-text technologies, and tools for digital language revitalization. An example would be the Mozilla Foundation which is partnering with the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to foster the ethical collection of open speech data in local languages in Rwanda through machine learning.<sup>119</sup> Meetings and symposia such as LT4All demonstrate how open-source technologies can help bridge political borders and build capacity within language communities to realize their own goals in ways that project into the future.

At the same time, the digital ecosystem often reflects and mirrors the same power asymmetries that exist in the material world. Kamusella points out that Wikipedia entries for Arabic vernacular are virtually non-existent—with the exception of the Egyptian Arabic Wikipedia—which reflects the normative assumption that there is only one Arabic language.<sup>120</sup>

It is clear, then, that new technologies and digital media can support language communities to transcend physical borders in novel ways and even subvert established linguistic hegemonies that are created and sustained within national and territorial boundaries. However, “technoscapes”,<sup>121</sup> to use Appadurai’s word, are not neutral spaces mediated by indifferent actors. Access to language technologies and the production and distribution of knowledge about digital language mobilization are disproportionately controlled by speakers of ideologically dominant and majority languages. Just as nation-state borders and ethnolinguistic territories are socially constructed and politically maintained,

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<sup>118</sup> University of British Columbia, “Kaska Language Website,” Kaska Language Website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://kaska.arts.ubc.ca/>

<sup>119</sup> Mozilla, “Mozilla and BMZ Announce Cooperation to Open Up Voice Technology for African Languages,” *The Mozilla Blog*, November 25, 2019. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://blog.mozilla.org/blog/2019/11/25/mozilla-and-bmz-announce-cooperation-to-open-up-voice-technology-for-african-languages/>

<sup>120</sup> Kamusella, “The Arabic Language: A Latin of Modernity?”

<sup>121</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 33.

so too are technoscapes shaped by normative linguistic geographies, even though opportunities exist for language communities to disrupt these norms.

### **Conclusion: Translocal “Langscapes”**

In this paper, we have situated language borders and linguistic boundary-making within the larger field of border studies and *borderscaping*,<sup>122</sup> critically examining how language borders are socially and politically constituted and how they change in response to the language ideologies of nation-states and language communities themselves. Expanding on the concept of *borderscapes*, we adopt the term “landscape” from the Terralingua publication to explore the connection between territorial speech communities and the landscapes in which their languages originate. What are the implications for communities—particularly Indigenous communities—when their languages become decoupled and untethered from their original territories? We know, for instance, that technologies in the form of online dictionaries<sup>123</sup> and language lessons and language apps<sup>124</sup> can help to generate access to language resources for community members wherever they are and thus help to facilitate new forms of linguistic mobility.

In addition, we have noted how some historically place-based language communities who are now dispersed across the world, such as the Sherpa, have succeeded in transcending national and territorial borders to recreate community and language-based traditions through social media and interactions on online platforms. Nevertheless, the role of newer digital technologies in creating mechanisms for language communities to reshape linguistic boundaries remains underexplored. It is critical to make sense of the socio-economic factors that determine levels of access to digital technologies and better understand regimes of state censorship that constrain access to such tools in research programs that explore changing language borders. In addition, studies that explore the deterritorialization of language communities and the socio-spatial affordances of language technologies would benefit from applying Appadurai’s concept translocality to examine the “power relations that affect the production of locality.”<sup>125</sup>

There is growing interest in our research community in the reshaping of ethnolinguistic nation-states, linguistic cartography, language ideologies, and language and technology. In the process of finalizing this contribution, for example, we learned of the publication of the *Handbook of the*

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<sup>122</sup> Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept.”

<sup>123</sup> Inge Genee and Marie-Odile Junker, “The Blackfoot Language Resources and Digital Dictionary Project: Creating Integrated Web Resources for Language Documentation and Revitalization,” *Language Documentation & Conservation* 12 (2018): 274–314. Accessed December 29, 2019: [https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/24770/1/genee\\_junker.pdf](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/24770/1/genee_junker.pdf), Heiltsuk Cultural Education Centre, “Heiltsuk Language & Culture Mobilization Partnership,” website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://heiltsuk.arts.ubc.ca/dictionary/>

<sup>124</sup> Chickasaw Nation, “Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program,” website. Accessed December 29, 2019: <https://www.chickasaw.net/Services/Chickasaw-Language-Revitalization-Program.aspx>

<sup>125</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 188.

*Changing World Language Map*,<sup>126</sup> an enormous reference volume of over 4,000 pages dedicated to a geographical approach to the study of language, broadly construed. We refer the interested reader to this megabook, although acknowledge that the prohibitive cost of the publication (Euro 1,247) will likely deter all but the independently wealthy or those who have digital or print access through institutions of higher learning. In our modest contribution, in this open-access journal, our primary regional focus has been the Himalaya, although we offer examples from across the globe to illustrate and underscore our theoretical positions.

Unfixed and unfixable, languages resist the limitations and constraints of nation-states—both colonial and contemporary—that strive to delineate their boundaries along unambiguous and often monolingual lines. In the Himalayan region in particular, plural linguistic identities challenge reductive national logics that seek to bind or appropriate languages for hegemonic and ideological goals. In our increasingly mobile and technologically-enabled world, it is ever harder to conceive of languages as linked primarily or solely to nation-states. Not only are national borders decreasingly relevant for the maintenance and transmission of languages, but the global dispersal of people and the languages they speak, sign and write are combining with ever more accessible digital media to transform internally-maintained language borders as well. Technology and mobility have exposed spatially and temporally innovative ways for linguistic belonging and cultural heritage to be imagined, shared, re-enacted and refashioned.

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<sup>126</sup> Stanley D. Brunn and Ronald Kehrein, ed., *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020).