



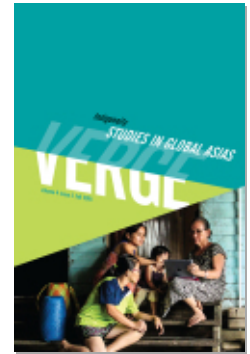
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## Orality and Mobility: Documenting Himalayan Voices in New York City

Nawang Gurung, Ross Perlin, Daniel Kaufman, Mark Turin, Sienna R. Craig

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**NAWANG GURUNG, ROSS PERLIN, DANIEL KAUFMAN,  
MARK TURIN, AND SIENNA R. CRAIG**

### Orality and Mobility: Documenting Himalayan Voices in New York City

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, the presence of people from the greater Himalayan region in New York City, particularly in the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, has expanded exponentially, from several hundred people in the 1980s to thousands of individuals from specific ethnic communities today (on Mustang, see Craig [2002] 2004, [2002] 2005, 2011; Craig and Gurung 2018; on Nepali women migrants, see Gurung 2015). As these new immigrants from Nepal, Bhutan, and North India, as well as diasporic Tibetans from India and culturally Tibetan regions in China, have settled into lives as New Yorkers, their senses of identity have begun to transform. Language plays a central role in these transformations. Himalayan voices can now be heard in the already hyperdiverse sociolinguistic landscape of a place like Jackson Heights.<sup>1</sup> Yet the processes of migration and assimilation have created new challenges for maintaining language diversity and cultivating a sense of social belonging through language. How are Himalayan New Yorkers finding a sense of community, navigating new transnational and intergenerational cultural dynamics, and responding to the relationship between “home” and being “over here” in New York? And what does language have to do with this?

These questions have guided a collaborative research project, *Voices of the Himalaya: Language, Culture, and Belonging in Immigrant New York*. Using the medium of video interviews, this project explores the lived experiences of migration and social change between the greater Himalayan region and New York City. The project has brought together a team of scholars and social activists, with expertise in linguistics, anthropology, and community-based participatory research (including the creation of digital archives), toward the production and curation of accessible narratives

told in an array of Tibetic Himalayan languages as well as several Tibeto-Burman languages close to the Tibetic area.<sup>2</sup> As a project, Voices of the Himalaya was designed to respond to the urgent challenges of language loss and rapid cultural change.

Beginning in 2016, the Voices of the Himalaya team has created and made publicly available twenty-five short videos with the dual goal of documenting Himalayan linguistic diversity in New York and encouraging language revitalization and cultural curiosity across generations, both within diasporic contexts and in “home” communities. These videos feature individuals of different generations and highlight a range of shared social issues: first impressions upon arrival in the United States; the challenges and possibilities of re-creating social networks in New York; balancing cultural continuity with American educational success; finding work and navigating the labor economy as nannies, construction workers, nail salon workers, and waiters or cooks; remembering and forgetting the cultural and natural landscapes of one’s childhood. The videos also touch on unique personal experiences, from a Sherpa man who holds the speed record for climbing Everest to a Tibetan man who played a role in making it possible to Google in Tibetan and the Bhutanese equivalent of an *American Idol* superstar.

Voices of the Himalaya is not a traditional language documentation project. Unlike other such efforts, the project does not focus on one marginalized speech form but is rather transregional in scope. In addition, our goal is not the comprehensive documentation—through grammar, texts, and lexicon—of an endangered or minority language. As a collaborative team, we neither wish to exert scholarly authority over language use, nor in any way do we glamorize or valorize “endangerment” (see Pine and Turin 2017). Instead, the project seeks to showcase compelling stories that capture aspects of the happiness and suffering of everyday life and which are attuned and sensitive to a politics of (self)-representation. Since the first video was released in June 2016, the videos have been watched more than seventy thousand times and have been shared widely on social media.

In what follows, we sketch out our collaborative process, including the methodology we have used to generate and produce these videos. We then discuss how this work at once coheres with and departs from traditional “language documentation” efforts and explore several of the most compelling aspects of community responses to this work, including details on the analytics related to viewing, sharing, and responding to these stories.

## ■ OUR COLLABORATIVE COOPERATIVE

At the center of our core team of five anthropologists and linguists is Nawang Tsering Gurung, a young social entrepreneur and community mobilizer from the village of Ghiling, in Upper Mustang, Nepal. The eldest of ten children, only four of whom lived beyond childhood, Gurung's commitment to his cultural and linguistic heritage is both scholarly and deeply personal. He arrived in the United States on a student visa at the end of 2007 and lived variously in Dallas, then Boston, before finally making New York his home. Gurung observed that while both Texas and Massachusetts have strong diaspora communities of Himalayan origin, most hailed from more privileged backgrounds and urban social classes. Remote and ethnically Tibetan districts such as Mustang were almost entirely absent from the demographics of Nepalis in these locations.

Having completed an associate's degree from Quincy College in Boston while simultaneously holding down two full-time jobs and working more than seventy hours a week, Gurung moved to New York in 2011. He was immediately struck by how the entire urban landscape of New York City—and in particular the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens—was saturated with more relatives and friends from his community than existed in the rest of the United States combined, and how these were more closely packed together than in his home district of Mustang. Relatives from villages a five-hour horse ride away in Mustang could now be reached through two stops on the subway. Rich social networks and complex economic relationships bound individuals from the higher reaches of Himalayan Nepal, India, and Bhutan together through religion, ritual, food, exchange, and language. Gurung heard not only Nepali on the street corners of Roosevelt Avenue and in the tea shops of Diversity Square but also the familiar rhythm of Mustangi Tibetan dialects along with Dzongkha, Thakali, Manange, and other Himalayan languages.

Gurung found employment at the New York Tibetan Service Center (NYTSC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the social and economic mobility of Tibetan and Himalayan immigrants of New York City. Gurung served as development director at the NYTSC, a role that brought him into close contact with donors, scholars, and the city authorities of New York. Having worked previously as a research assistant with a number of ethnographically minded scholars, both at home in the Himalaya and in diaspora communities in the Global North, Gurung hatched the germ of an idea: would it be possible to document the languages, cultures, social histories, folklore, and community life of Himalayan New Yorkers through video and thereby explore the lived experiences of migration and social change in his own community?

In New York, Gurung observed that most of his fellow countrymen and -women were working such long hours and holding down so many jobs that their young, school-age children were growing up in a diaspora context without a clear sense of their cultural heritage. At the same time, as grandparents began migrating to the United States to join their families, these elders had a combination of considerable leisure time and great cultural knowledge from their home communities but often passed long days in solitude. Gurung wondered whether a collaborative multimedia project—provisionally titled *Voices of the Himalaya*—might be a way to collect, protect, and connect these untold stories of opportunity and challenge, a chance to showcase both the extraordinary sociolinguistic diversity and the cultural connectedness and unity of Himalayan communities in the diaspora.

Building on a strong preexisting relationship with Sienna Craig, a medical anthropologist at Dartmouth with whom he had previously worked and published, Gurung started to assemble his team. He reached out to Mark Turin, an anthropologist and linguist at Yale University who was then directing the Yale Himalaya Initiative, who put him in touch with linguist Daniel Kaufman, executive director of the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), a nonprofit founded in 2010 with the goal of working with immigrant and refugee populations in New York and other cities, helping them document and maintain their languages. Kaufman in turn involved Ross Perlin, a writer and linguist specializing in endangered Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in southwest China who also serves as codirector at the ELA. Having composed the core team and procured seed funding from Dartmouth,<sup>3</sup> *Voices of the Himalaya* was ready to start work.

## ■ METHODOLOGY

Our aim was to produce compelling, tightly edited web videos, usually no more than fifteen minutes each, that would appeal to a wide popular audience and compete with other online media. An implicit goal of this work was to establish a new public-facing domain for Himalayan languages, which are usually restricted to private settings such as the home. We believed that creating professional, subtitled videos in less common languages, perhaps especially when produced in the world-city of New York, could have a galvanizing effect on the language attitudes of speakers and nonspeakers alike.

Between May 2016 and March 2017, we conducted interviews with twenty-two men and women, young and old, from diverse Himalayan backgrounds, as shown in the following table.

| <b>Video title</b>                               | <b>Language</b>     | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Hometown</b>               |
|--|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Ama-la's Story</i>                            | Ngari Tibetan       | Female        | Ngari, Tibet                  |
| <i>Young and Tibetan in Queens</i>               | Tibetan             | Female        | Queens, New York, USA         |
| <i>From Mustang to Manhattan</i>                 | Mustangi            | Female        | Marang, Upper Mustang, Nepal  |
| <i>Growing Up Between Words and Worlds</i>       | Tibetan (Ramaluk)   | Female        | Marang, Upper Mustang, Nepal  |
| <i>Mr. Speed, Fastest Up Everest</i>             | Sherpa              | Male          | Lhoding, Solukhumbu, Nepal    |
| <i>A Thangka Painter in New York</i>             | Tibetan/ Mustangi   | Male          | Chongur, Lower Mustang, Nepal |
| <i>Cooking for the Community</i>                 | Tibetan (Ramaluk)   | Male          | Tsum, Gorkha, Nepal           |
| <i>Trade and Travels from Manang to New York</i> | Manange             | Female        | Manang, Nepal                 |
| <i>Trade and Travels from Manang to New York</i> | Manange             | Male          | Manang, Nepal                 |
| <i>There Once Was a Storyteller . . .</i>        | Mustangi            | Male          | Tangye, Upper Mustang, Nepal  |
| <i>From the Farthest Valley</i>                  | Tokpe Gola          | Male          | Papung, Taplejung, Nepal      |
| <i>After Us, No One Will Speak</i>               | Seke                | Male          | Tsuk, Kyangma, Mustang, Nepal |
| <i>From Historic Capital to Diaspora Center</i>  | Lhasa Tibetan       | Female        | Lhasa, Tibet                  |
| <i>A Restaurant of His Own</i>                   | Tokpe Gola          | Male          | Papung, Taplejung, Nepal      |
| <i>A Kham Lady Renewing Tradition</i>            | Kham Tibetan (Dege) | Female        | Dege, Kham, Tibet             |

| <b>Video title</b>                                      | <b>Language</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Hometown</b>                    |
|---|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>A Superstar in Bhutan, a Newcomer to New York</i>    | Dzongkha        | Male          | Ula River, Wangdi Phodrang, Bhutan |
| <i>Keeping up the Language, from Varanasi to Google</i> | Tibetan         | Male          | Rongbu, Sog, Nagqu, Tibet          |
| <i>A Renaissance Man in Tibetan New York</i>            | Amdo Tibetan    | Male          | Arouxiang, Qilian, Qinghai, China  |
| <i>Nomad to New Yorker</i>                              | Amdo Tibetan    | Male          | Changmuzhen, Guide, Qinghai, China |
| <i>Bringing New York a Taste of the Himalayas</i>       | Thakali         | Female        | Jomsom, Lower Mustang, Nepal       |

After discussing the goals of the project using an English-language Institutional Review Board–approved information sheet as our guide, translated orally as needed into Tibetan and Nepali by Nawang Gurung, we elicited oral consent not only to the interviews but also to have edited videos made completely public and archived. Three female participants of the twenty-two people we interviewed later asked for their videos not to be made public for the time being, citing reasons of modesty and “face.” Of the twenty-two interviews, five took place at the Manhattan office of the Endangered Language Alliance, while the others were held at people’s homes and places of work (two restaurants and a store) in Queens and Brooklyn.

The participants came from a diverse set of linguistic and personal backgrounds, arguably representative of the new Himalayan community in New York. We also relied on a combination of convenience, chance, snowball, and targeted sampling techniques, facilitated and guided by Gurung’s extended network and deep knowledge of the community and its most compelling stories. Indeed, in a few cases, interviews resulted from serendipity: a chance encounter at the Jackson Heights Dunkin Donuts; a friend brought along by another participant, and so on. In addition, a limited amount of “B-roll” footage and photography, shot by project members in neighborhoods or at events or supplied by the participants themselves, supplemented the interview footage.

Interviews typically lasted between half an hour and an hour, tracing a narrative arc from a personal introduction (often beginning with a “tashi delek” or “namaste,” name, and place of origin) and life history to broader thoughts on language, culture, and community. No standard questionnaire was used, but Gurung (in all but a few cases the principal interviewer) used his knowledge of the participants and their communities, as well as general project themes, to guide the questioning. These questions were typically phrased in diasporic Standard Tibetan, in local Mustangi dialects, or occasionally in Nepali. Others present (Perlin in all but a few cases; Kaufman, Craig, and Turin in several; other videographers and advisors in some) added questions, usually in English. In keeping with project aims and our established conventions, all such questions and clarifications were edited out of the final videos. Footage breaks, text slides, and other devices may reveal the cuts to viewers with videography experience. Fuller, raw versions of the interviews are being archived.

As a project of and for the Himalayan New York community, *Voices of the Himalaya* took the self-representation and agency of participants seriously. Many participants chose to change out of New York street clothes just before beginning the interview and present themselves in their best traditional attire or cultural regalia. Likewise, participants were aware from the beginning that local languages were a focus of the project and were encouraged to speak their mother tongue despite fielding questions in Standard Tibetan or Nepali. While multiple speakers of the same variety interviewing each other might have been optimal in this respect (as was done in our *Manage* video), this was not usually possible for practical reasons and also not necessarily desirable in terms of larger project aims of widening access to historically marginalized voices. For most participants, it appeared to be quite natural for them to talk about themselves and their community in their mother tongue to an interlocutor (Gurung) who was assumed to understand most of what they said, although a few participants still opted for a more standardized language. For example, a chef from the Tsum region of northern Gorkha District, Nepal, chose to speak Standard Tibetan because of what he perceived to be the low status of his local dialect; a project manager at Google chose to do the same because he is professionally invested in Standard Tibetan rather than the eastern Tibetan (Kham) variety of his birthplace. Code-switching and mixed language use are present throughout the videos, representing a rich (if somewhat idealized) source of material for the study of multilingualism and language change in the Himalayan diaspora.

The relatively rapid “postproduction” process involved Gurung reviewing the entire recording and indicating cuts and reshufflings of material to



streamline the narrative, avoid repetition, and, in some cases, steer clear of controversial material deemed potentially embarrassing to the participant or the community. In some cases, team members communicated with a participant who made requests for edits or answered questions, particularly in the translation process, which proceeded once a shortened “clean edit” had been made. Other small touches to provide narrative coherence and guide viewers—slides dividing topics, titles, occasional explanatory text—were added by Gurung and Perlin at this stage.

Gurung made first-pass translations of the varieties of languages he could understand—Mustangi (Loke), Seke, and Standard or Central Tibetan varieties—and enlisted several translators for those he could not (Manange, Sherpa, Kham, Amdo, Dzongkha), working with them through Nepali and Tibetan. Perlin, a native English speaker, then worked with Gurung to proofread and correct those English translations. One video, in a mixture of Mustangi and Tibetan, has a full phonetic transcription as well.<sup>4</sup>

Careful thought was given to release and dissemination, with social media considered to be the principal platform. In addition to being archived with full metadata at the ELA, videos have been uploaded to YouTube, where they are tied to the broader Voices of the Himalaya corpus by theme music, a unified YouTube playlist, and links back to the ELA site. New uploads were embedded and principally distributed by ELA and by Gurung personally via Facebook, with sharing and tagging helping to ensure a wide, community-based viewership. The preceding section outlines our process. But how does this relate to the discipline of linguistics and the field of “language documentation,” particularly of rare or endangered languages?

### ■ VOICES OF THE HIMALAYA AS LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

In addition to being a de facto oral history project, Voices of the Himalaya was also conceived of as a language documentation project. The recent subfield of language documentation is mostly a reconfiguring of priorities and perspectives that have been present in some form for several centuries. Much of the traditional work of American linguists in the first half of the twentieth century involved describing the sound patterns, word structures, and syntactic configurations of Native American languages. The traditional outputs of such work were a descriptive grammar, a lexicon, and a text collection, occasionally referred to as the “Boasian trilogy” after the work of Franz Boas, one of the more prominent linguists and anthropologists of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What went on behind the scenes—the process and politics of fieldwork—

was often hidden to the public, including the primary data upon which those linguistic descriptions were based and the negotiations between the researchers and the communities whose languages and cultures they documented.

Several factors led to revisiting the values and priorities inherent in this work. A seminal publication by Michael Krauss (1992) highlighted the dire state of language endangerment today and, equally importantly, argued that linguists bear responsibility for remediating the situation. Rapid advances in digital technology also made it possible for linguists to create high-fidelity recordings that could be more easily preserved and shared across space and time. At the same time, there has been an increasing awareness of the ethical responsibilities of linguists toward the communities with which they work, especially Native and Indigenous communities, which has led to moving from a model of working *on* communities to working *with* and *for* communities.<sup>5</sup> Language documentation, as a subfield or simply a named movement, crystallized in the work of Himmelmann (2006, 1), with the oft-quoted goal of facilitating “a lasting, multipurpose record of a language.”<sup>6</sup> This informal movement advocated for a new respect toward primary data and sought to answer questions of preservation and access and explore how an entire language could be properly represented in terms of its many genres, varieties, and speakers.

While the Voices of the Himalaya project is also meant to serve as language documentation, it clearly prioritizes certain principles of the field at the expense of others. The team focused on producing a sample of various Tibetic dialects and other Himalayan languages, many of them endangered and some undescribed, as they are spoken in a relatively new center of the Himalayan diaspora: New York City. The documentation is furthermore explicitly multipurpose: interviews were recorded in such a way that they could be used for linguistic analysis, for an oral history of the burgeoning Himalayan community, and for different types of pedagogical and learning contexts. These videos were also recorded, edited, and disseminated with the Himalayan community foremost in mind, with scholarly and research considerations a clear second.

However, given this orientation, coupled with concerns about the consequences of sharing sensitive information and opinions, the videos required rather heavy editing, which has not been a feature of many language documentation projects, the main concern of which has been to collect and disseminate primary data. The consequence of this approach is that Voices of the Himalaya is a unique collection of videos that are more watchable and popular than they would have otherwise been, although some of the original structure of the discourse has been lost

through the editing process. The monologues were also structured into thematic chapters by the team in a post hoc fashion, not always reflecting the structure and sequence of the original conversation.

In terms of linguistic analysis, all the videos have been translated, and one has been transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet. While morphological and grammatical analysis is planned, it has not yet been undertaken. To what extent Voices of the Himalaya should be considered to be a language documentation project and to what extent it is more of an oral history project will largely depend on how users engage with the corpus and further extend its use. It is our hope that these annotated recordings can serve as a helpful baseline for the further study of these languages, but it must be kept in mind that the corpus, as of now, represents only how the interviewees speak in a controlled, one-on-one setting when asked to speak (on camera) in their native language and dialect.

### ■ COMMUNITY RESPONSES

As of mid-June 2017, the videos associated directly with the project had been viewed via YouTube more than seventy thousand times, with approximately 33 percent of views in the United States, 15 percent in Bhutan (principally the videos of our nationally celebrated Bhutanese participant), 14 percent in India, and then 6 percent each in Nepal, Switzerland, and Canada. In other words, the videos appeared to reach a representative cross section of the global Himalayan diaspora—even at the domestic level in the United States, where New York (half of all U.S. views), California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota were the states with the highest levels of engagement. Given that YouTube and Facebook are both blocked within China, we did not expect to reach viewers in that country, although there were a handful of such views. Thus far, efforts to upload videos to Youku and Tudou, with distribution via Weibo, were blocked.

Although such statistics must be treated with caution, according to YouTube analytics, most viewers are in the twenty-five to thirty-four age bracket (40 percent) and are male (69 percent), which may be a function of how videos were distributed, shared, and discovered. Approximately 60 percent of views occurred without subtitles, with that figure rising to 67 percent in New York. Although some may have had trouble finding the subtitles setting that sometimes needs to be toggled on or off within the YouTube interface, we take this figure to indicate that, for many viewers, subtitles were not necessary for comprehension—a compelling linguistic finding in its own right. The three most watched videos were *Young and Tibetan in Queens* (approximately fifteen thousand views), *A Superstar in Bhutan, a Newcomer to New York* (approximately twelve thousand views),

and *Ama-la's Story* (ninety-four hundred views), after which there was a significant drop-off for smaller languages and for older speakers less connected to social media or less well known in the community.

Social media and YouTube commenters are certainly not a balanced cross section of the community. We realize that comment sections can be particularly contentious, and social media research was not a central focus of our methodology for this study (Sloan and Quan-Hasse 2017). However, we felt paying attention to the comments provided one lens onto how the Himalayan community was accessing and responding to this work, and the comments logged could be fruitfully compared with feedback elicited in different manners from segments of the community that are not well represented online. Social media “engagement” with the videos, through likes and comments, followed a broadly similar pattern and mostly came from the United States, India, Nepal, and Canada. All in all, the videos had 439 likes and 58 dislikes, as well as 48 comments, many focused on language choice and use (and principally in English; Tibetan, especially in *Young and Tibetan in Queens*; in Chinese; and in Manange for the Manange video). ELA, as manager of the YouTube account, attempted a light-touch approach to moderating these reactions, only directly posting once in a speaker’s defense and in two cases removing inflammatory comments. In further work of this kind, we would hope to move from an ad hoc approach to a more considered policy on the ethics of community moderation around such a collection.

Comparing digital community reactions to *Young and Tibetan in Queens*, which features Tsejin Khando (a proud Tibetan American soon-to-be college student, born in New York, and a strong speaker of Tibetan), and *Growing Up between Words and Worlds* (approximately seventy-eight hundred views), with Chemi Chemi (a Mustangi college student in America who takes a more questioning stance toward certain aspects of community life), is instructive and illustrative. Most of commenters praised Tsejin as a model of cultural continuity, and three comments (in English) even directly address her as a friend or family member. Chemi’s video, conversely, elicited several critical reactions to her code-switching, including two that themselves code-switch (one seems to be a transliteration of “um” into Tibetan characters, and the other apparently criticizes her patriotism), although other comments commended Chemi for her educational accomplishments and the way she speaks.

Public commentary on the corpus provides a new source of data that seems worthy of further analysis. As this data set grows, we can imagine taking a quantitative approach to studying the cause and effect between an interview and its responses. At what point, for instance, does an inter-

viewee receive criticism for using too much English, Nepali, or Standard Tibetan? Does switching to these standard/national languages elicit the same types of reactions? In terms of ideas, what kinds of critical views elicit the most countercritiques, and which views find the most support? The social media and YouTube commenters are certainly not a balanced cross section of the community, but their comments can be fruitfully compared with feedback elicited in different manners from segments of the community that are not well represented online.

## ■ TRANSCRIPTION, TRANSLATION, AND LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

Language documentation of the type exemplified in *Voices of the Himalaya* affords valuable learning opportunities by way of the transcription and translation process. For obvious reasons, it is typically the most fluent members of a linguistic community whose speech is prioritized for documentation. However, these fluent speakers, for lack of time and training, are often unable to transcribe and translate their own recordings on a computer. Traditionally, a linguist does this technical work with the help of native speakers by his or her side. Urban settings allow for a different dynamic, which may increasingly become the norm whether language documentation is carried out in situ or in centers of diaspora like New York City.

Specifically, younger community members can be trained to do time-aligned transcription and translation, which can in turn give them an opportunity to improve their own language skills. In the current project, two Tibetan undergraduate linguistics students at Queens College, Tenzin Namdol and Tsering Dolkar, were able to engage with the language of their parents in a systematic and rigorous way that was otherwise unavailable to them. Tenzin, in particular, who was raised in Dharamsala, Kashmir, and New York, had expressed remorse at never having learned the language of her mother, Mustangi (Loke), despite being very fluent in Tibetan, Hindi, and English. Nonetheless, Tenzin was familiar enough with Mustangi that she could create the outlines of an English translation, which could then be filled in with help from her mother and the interviewees themselves.

Through this process, Tenzin's own comprehension of Mustangi was appreciably improved, and the prospects of language transmission from her mother to her was given a second lease on life, albeit in a more limited context. While the finished corpus has great potential as a pedagogical tool, the process of creating the corpus should also be seen as a valuable opportunity for younger community members to improve their grasp of

heritage languages. Most importantly, it offers diaspora youth a structured framework for engaging with their parents and elders on questions of language, culture, identity, and belonging.

### ■ CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Over the course of a twelve-month period, Voices of the Himalaya created a corpus of videos that are circulating within, and having a diverse impact on, Himalayan communities in both diasporic and Asian contexts. We have navigated our way through an evolving, collaborative methodology, documenting this research process with care and exploring complex questions of representation and voice. Based on community viewer feedback, we believe that such an endeavor has meaning and value to this community and that the project has scope for expansion.

One specific offshoot project that we are developing, based on this first year of research and video production, will focus on songs and singers in the Himalayan diaspora. During several of our interviews (and in a few of our completed videos), individuals offered examples of songs from their home communities. Song remains an incredibly rich source of cultural knowledge and linguistic diversity, including among those living in the New York Himalayan diaspora. Such a project would aim to document and showcase the diversity of Himalayan vocal traditions that are now uniquely concentrated—and in a critical moment of transformation and endangerment—in the diasporic center of New York City. This project recognizes that there is a shift under way to singing in the evolving Tibetan lingua franca, influenced either by popular music or by the conservatory approach of the Tibetan Institute of the Performing Arts. We aim instead to record the rural, vernacular genres as still practiced and sustained by small groups of enthusiasts in New York. Among the major themes and genres are male–female duets, drinking and wedding songs, songs particular to certain seasons, and songs about nature and specific sacred Himalayan geographies, honoring individuals such as *lamas* or commenting on religious themes.

In keeping with the goals of participatory action-oriented research, we also hope to use the next year to expand the corpus of Voices of the Himalaya videos and also to elicit more community-level feedback on the videos. We plan to do this in several ways: by conducting focus groups with elders and youth, in which we will play a few of the videos and elicit their responses, and by returning to some of the individuals represented in the initial videos and doing follow-up interviews or, if they are comfortable, capturing more of their unscripted daily-life interactions at home, with friends, and, as possible, at work. There is a tension concerning the

aesthetics of presentation and the paramount goals of community access and use—custom-built platforms like Shanti, Voices of Tibet, and the Tibet Oral History Project might serve the former purpose, while existing commercial channels like YouTube and WeChat hold out the best hope for the latter. Digital Himalaya, discussed earlier in this *Interface*, raises questions about how much weight, with finite resources, to give long-term preservation and scholarly archiving. A related question concerns metadata structure and consistency: release onto larger platforms allows broader dissemination but simultaneously risks loss of control and decontextualization. No single platform can fully address all needs.

From a scholarly perspective, we hope to expand the phonetic transliterations of our completed videos and to write several other articles about this project for both public consumption and more specialist academic audiences. In addition, we are planning to develop additional pedagogical materials that can be shared with New York City schools and to engage in direct outreach in the form of guest lectures and/or teacher in-service presentations as a way of encouraging cross-cultural understanding and deepening productive discussions about new New Yorkers and their contributions to their own communities and to wider society.

**Sienna R. Craig** is associate professor of anthropology at Dartmouth College. She received her PhD from Cornell University (2006). She is the author of *Healing Elements: Efficacy and the Social Ecologies of Tibetan Medicine* (2012) and of *Horses Like Lightning: A Story of Passage through the Himalaya* (2008) and a coeditor of *Medicine between Science and Religion: Explorations on Tibetan Grounds* (2010), among other publications. In addition to her academic work, Craig writes creative nonfiction and fiction, children's literature, and poetry. From 2012 to 2017, she coedited, with Mark Turin, *HIMALAYA, Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*. Craig is also a cofounder of DROKPA, a nonprofit organization that partners with Himalayan communities to support projects in education, community health, and social entrepreneurship.

**Nawang Tsering Gurung** is founder and director of Yulha Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring sustainable livelihoods and improving access to education and health care in the Himalayan communities of Nepal. He earned an associate's degree from Quincy College in 2011. He has served as a translator and assistant for National Geographic filmmaker Liesel Clark, on a documentary entitled *Cave People of the Himalayas*. Nawang has worked as a research assistant on several research projects in both New York and Nepal. Nawang is coauthor of several

presentations and publications based on this work, including “The *Khora* of Migration: Everyday Practices of (Well)-Being between Mustang, Nepal, and New York City.” He is also coauthor of the book *Dogyab: Rituel Tibetain de Conjuraton du Mal* (in French, 2017). Currently Nawang is coordinator of the Voices of the Himalayas project.

**Daniel Kaufman** is a founder and codirector of the Endangered Language Alliance and assistant professor of linguistics at Queens College, CUNY. He specializes in the Austronesian languages of Southeast Asia but has also focused for the last ten years on the documentation of endangered languages spoken by immigrant communities in New York City.

**Ross Perlin** is codirector of the Endangered Language Alliance, a non-profit based in New York City with a mission to document and support endangered languages and linguistic diversity. Ross received his PhD in linguistics from the University of Bern (2017) for his documentation and description of Trung, a Tibeto-Burman language of southwest China. He has also written on language, labor, and culture for the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, the *Guardian*, and the *Washington Post*, among other outlets. His first book, *Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy*, was published in 2011.

## ■ NOTES

Thanks to all of the Himalayan community members who shared their stories and lived with us and to Tierney Brown for her assistance with YouTube analytics and comments.

1. The Endangered Language Alliance estimates that Jackson Heights, together with adjacent areas whose borders are not always strictly defined, is the most linguistically diverse part of New York City, the most linguistically diverse metro region in the United States, according to the Census Bureau. For ELA’s map of the languages of Queens, first published in Solnit and Jelly-Shapiro (2016), see <http://elalliance.org/programs/documentation/language-maps/>.

2. Seke, Thakali, and Manange are among the Tibeto-Burman languages represented thus far in the project’s corpus.

3. Dartmouth College, Office of the Provost, Global Exploratory/Development Grant 2016-17.

4. We hope to do more such phonetic transcription, pending additional funding.

5. Rice (2006) and Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) are two examples of these discussions among linguists, while Moskowitz (2015), Rylko-Bauer,



Singer, and Willigen (2006), and Stilltoe (1998) address the issue as anthropologists, and Smith (2012) is the work of an indigenous scholar working at the intersection of the two fields.

6. Other important sources theorizing language documentation include Lehmann (2001), Woodbury (2003), the handbooks by Gippert, Himmelmann, and Mosel (2006) and Austin and Sallabank (2011), and the journals *Language Documentation and Description* and *Language Documentation and Conservation*.

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