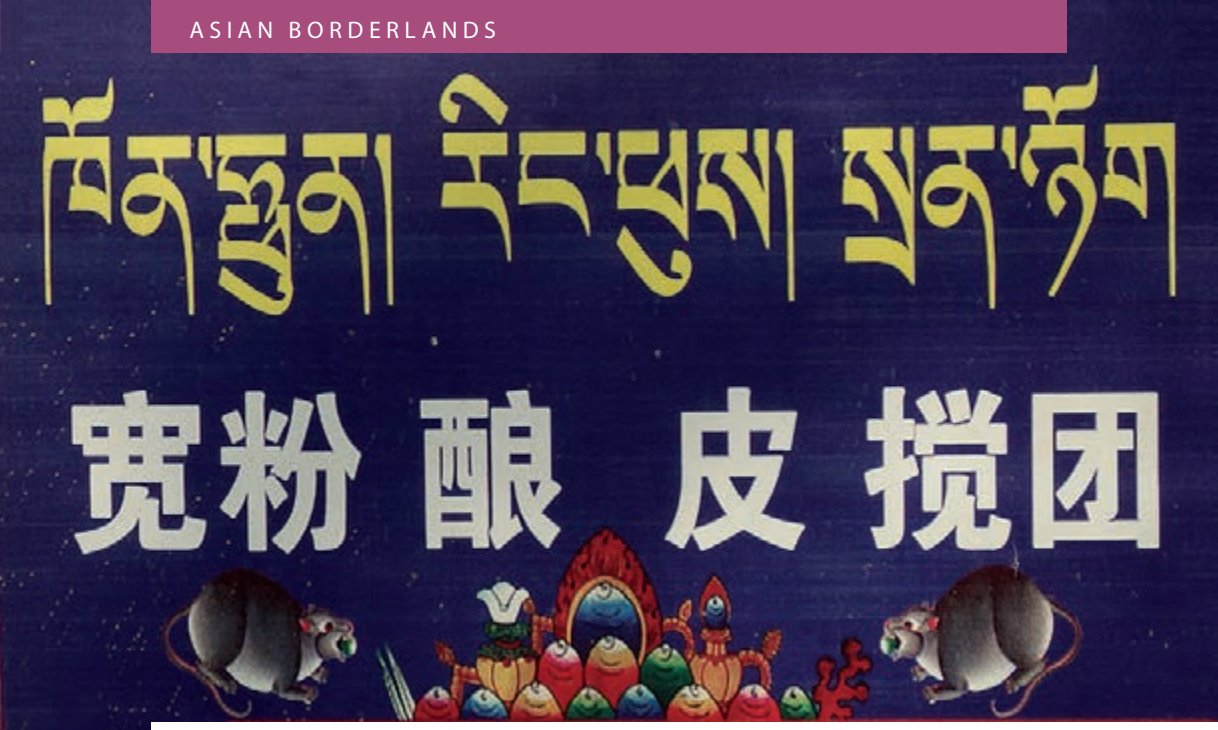
ASIAN BORDERLANDS



Edited by Gerald Roche and Gwendolyn Hyslop

Bordering Tibetan Languages

Making and Marking Languages in Transnational High Asia

Amsterdam University Press

Bordering Tibetan Languages

Amsterdam
University
Press

Asian Borderlands

Asian Borderlands presents the latest research on borderlands in Asia as well as on the borderlands of Asia – the regions linking Asia with Africa, Europe and Oceania. Its approach is broad: it covers the entire range of the social sciences and humanities. The series explores the social, cultural, geographic, economic and historical dimensions of border-making by states, local communities and flows of goods, people and ideas. It considers territorial borderlands at various scales (national as well as supra- and sub-national) and in various forms (land borders, maritime borders), but also presents research on social borderlands resulting from border-making that may not be territorially fixed, for example linguistic or diasporic communities.

Amsterdam
University
Press

Bordering Tibetan Languages

Making and Marking Languages in Transnational High Asia

Edited by
Gerald Roche and
Gwendolyn Hyslop

Amsterdam University Press

Cover image: see p. 10
Photograph by Gerald Roche

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Layout: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 504 0
e-ISBN 978 90 4855 271 9 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789463725040
NUR 630

Amsterdam
University
Press

Table of Contents

Amsterdam University Press

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, the editors would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their patience and perseverance during the long and complex process of finalizing this book. We are also grateful to the staff at Amsterdam University Press for their assistance with this volume, to the reviewer who provided helpful feedback on all the contributions and to Tobias Stefan for his assistance with the final stages of proof-reading and indexing.

This book emerged from two events, and thanks are also due in this regard. The first event was a panel on 'Language Revitalization in the Tibetospheric Borderlands', at the 6th Asian Borderlands Research Network conference, 'Borderland Spaces: Ruins, Revival(s) and Resources', in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), 13-15 August 2018. The second event was the workshop 'Talking Borders: Making and Marking Languages in the Transnational Himalayas', held at the University of Sydney on 27 June 2019, in conjunction with the 52nd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics and the 25th Himalayan Language Symposium. We would like to thank the organizers of these conferences, as well as all the speakers and audience members at these events. In particular, we would like to thank Associate Professor Tsering Shakya, Canada Research Chair in Religion and Contemporary Society in Asia at the University of British Columbia, for his feedback at the event in Sydney.

We would also like to acknowledge that this book was made possible through a Transforming Human Societies Research Focus Area grant from La Trobe University and further supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Both editors would like to give special thanks to our families for their support and patience during the long process of bringing this volume together. Finally, we would also like to acknowledge the hard work, intellectual integrity, and moral courage of one of the volume's contributors, whose chapter could not be included in the final collection due to state-imposed censorship of their work.

About the Cover Image

The sign on this book's cover represents some of the complex everyday practices of language bordering in and around Tibet. There are three pairs of terms, in Tibetan script (above) and Chinese characters (below), all naming the same items at a small restaurant. In the first pair, the Tibetan (ཁོན་ཕྱུན *khon.h+phun*.) is a transcription of the Chinese term, 宽粉 (*kuānfěn*). In the second pair, the Tibetan རིང་ཕུས *(ring.phus*) is a transcription of the Chinese 酿皮 (*niàngpí*), but based on the regionally dominant, non-standard Sinitic language, Qinghaihua, which gives the pronunciation *rangpi* rather than *niàngpí*. The last pair uses different Tibetan (སྲན་ཉོག *sran.nyog*) and Chinese (搅团 *jiǎotuán*) terms to refer to the same dish. This sign was photographed in Sengeshong (སེང་གེ་གཤོང *seng.ge.gshong*), a village on the northeast Tibetan Plateau, where residents speak a language called Ngandehua. Local Tibetans consider Ngandehua to be a 'mixed' language. Photograph by Gerald Roche.

Amsterdam
University
Press

1 Introduction: Bordering Tibetan Languages

Making and Marking Languages in Transnational High Asia

Gerald Roche

Abstract
This chapter explores the relationship between language borders and state borders. It argues that both state and language borders are forms of structural violence that are mutually reinforcing. These interlocking forms of structural violence produce material, biopolitical, and representational inequalities and concrete harms. Therefore, like the placing of state borders, the placing of language borders is seen to be a non-trivial issue. The transnational Himalayas, stretching across the People's Republic of China (PRC), Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bhutan, are introduced as an ideal site for investigating how language and state borders interact. Furthermore, the role that Tibetan, as an imagined language, plays in the region is seen to have central importance to this dynamic.

Keywords: borders, languages, Tibet, Himalaya

Languages and borders

It is both widely agreed and frequently observed that the borders of nation states and languages do not match. This seemingly straightforward claim is sometimes made to celebrate and valorize linguistic diversity within a state, or to critique the fantasy of the linguistically homogeneous nation state where linguistic and political borders seamlessly align. What this claim leaves unexamined, however, is language borders themselves. It takes language borders to be precisely what they are not: natural, apolitical, and uncontested.

Roche, Gerald, and Gwendolyn Hyslop (eds), *Bordering Tibetan Languages: Making and Marking Languages in Transnational High Asia*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2022
DOI: 10.5117/9789463725040_CH01

This book examines where, how, and by whom linguistic borders are drawn. It looks at how language borders interact with other borders, particularly state borders, and how these interactions impact people's lives. In particular, we examine the negative effects that language borders produce as a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004).

This focus on borders, particularly state borders, as sites of violence, has become particularly pronounced in recent years, in the context of rising populism and exclusionary nationalism, as well as numerous border crises around the world: the 2015 European migrant crisis; Brexit and the looming border with Northern Ireland; the ongoing tragedies and travesties of Australian border 'protection'; the persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar and their flight across the border to Bangladesh and India; the detention camps on the US-Mexico border; border conflicts between India and China cross the Himalaya; and ongoing efforts to parse citizens and foreigners in India, to name but a few. In this context, scholarship is increasingly turning from discussions of *borderlands* as complex, fuzzy, contested zones of interaction, towards examinations of *borders* as sites of violence. This book is situated within the context of this turn.

As a quintessential form of structural violence, state borders are designed to be divisive (Konrad et al., 2019). They separate inside from out, here from there, citizens from foreigners, and us from them, thus setting limits for inclusion and exclusion and restricting movement and belonging (Jones, 2016). State borders create centers and peripheries, and in doing so also produce marginalization and remoteness (Saxer & Andersson, 2019). State borders create contours of difference exploitable by transnational capitalism – differing labor laws, environmental regulation, pay scales, and so on (Valencia, 2019) – thus allowing exploitation and environmental destruction to be carried out by transnational corporations. Miller (2019) argues that the global regime of nation-state borders works primarily in the interests of the global economy and its capitalist elite, creating a system that privileges the flow of profits and capital whilst enforcing the immobility and vulnerability of certain people, producing a form of 'global apartheid' (Dalby, 1998; Hage, 2016). Walia (2013) therefore argues that states and capitalism work together to form an integrated system of 'border imperialism' that both separates and binds together, creating a world system that requires borders to help maintain structural inequalities (Wallerstein, 2004).

This book addresses the complex intersections between state and language borders in Tibet and the surrounding regions in the transnational Himalayas.[1] State borders, both recognized and contested, carve the region

1 For a perspective focusing on languages and borders in the Himalayas, and including Tibet only tangentially, see Daurio and Turin (2020).

into realms of political exclusivity, stretching this mountainous heartland across six separate countries: China, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The chapters in this book examine case studies in China (see chapters by Suzuki, Ward, and Schmidt), Nepal (Donohue), Bhutan (Hyslop), India (Lepcha), and transnationally (Roche).

Ostensibly drawn to coincide with natural 'barriers' that pattern human diversity, the borders of this region in fact split communities, curtail mobilities, and disrupt long-standing patterns of exchange and interaction (Harris, 2013; Khan, 2015; Yeh, 2019). More significantly, however, the imposition of state borders in the region represents a shift in forms of sovereignty: from regimes of sovereignty over people, to regimes of sovereignty over territory (and thus all people within that territory). Although largely inherited from imperial forebears (Gamble, 2019), these new borders differ in collapsing territory and population into singular relations of sovereignty to the state (Relyea, 2017) in novel ways. These borders thus work to obliterate previously existing relations of sovereignty that were complex and multiple – often bifurcated between land and bodies, as well as 'nested' at different scales (Simpson, 2014). A major issue is therefore not simply where the borders have been placed, and what prior forms of political organization they have erased, but also how they have fundamentally altered the relationship between people and political authority.

As a canonical form of structural violence, state borders are intimately linked to other forms of borders, including linguistic, 'racial', and ethnic borders. State borders do not simply represent the limits of state power. In territorializing state power and generalizing it to a particular population, they also create and maintain a variety of 'interior frontiers' within state territory (Stoler, 2012, 2017).

At the simplest level, these interior frontiers are administrative, dividing state territory into various zones where state power is applied differently: special economic zones, autonomous regions, states versus territories, rural versus urban space, and so on (Cartier, 2011, 2015; Mbembe, 2003). But beyond this, interior frontiers are also created between populations within state territory, by dividing that population into 'races'. This process of racialization is foundational to the state (Foucault, 2003), though how race manifests within a particular context, and the extent to which it reproduces the canonical, biological notion of race, varies (Omi & Winant, 2014; Wolfe, 2016). Finally, interior frontiers are also created within citizens, as internalized frames for dividing up the world around them and the people in it. Such interior frontiers include, importantly, the naturalization of hegemonic images of language and the placement of language borders (Ives, 2004). Borders thus

shape "who we think we are and our understanding of our individual and collective power [as well as] our sense of possibilities and therefore, quite literally, our life chances" (Wonders, 2015, pp. 193-194).

All these interior frontiers – between territories and populations, and within citizens – disappear or lose their salience at state borders. State borders thus do not exist simply at the edges of state space. They pervade it.

This does not mean that state borders are present everywhere and always. State power must also be activated and enacted through action – through *bordering* (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Individuals and institutions within a state are constantly called on to recognize and act on the categories imposed within state space, to actualize the state's interior frontiers, and their own. In doing so they not only inscribe those borders, but also reproduce the borders and the state itself.

Following Butler (2004), we can think of those who reproduce and enforce state power as 'petty sovereigns' – non-state agents to whom state power is 'outsourced' or 'delegated' (Wenner, 2020). Yeh (2019, p. 5), in her discussion of non-state sovereignty in the Himalaya, claims that petty sovereigns are particularly prominent in the Global South, where states are weak, and sovereignty is exercised by "local strongmen, vigilantes, insurgents, illegal networks, gangs, and warlords." However, the discussions within this book show that petty sovereigns can emerge anywhere, as anyone, not just through those in designated roles that permanently concentrate power and wield it over others. Instead, petty sovereigns appear whenever we speak.

Throughout this book we meet a variety of petty sovereigns who actively or incidentally deploy state authority and legitimacy to make and mark language borders. In Ward's contribution we see children and care-givers in Amdo, the northern region of Tibet, acting as petty sovereigns when they mark a border of mutual exclusion between Tibetan and Chinese languages. Lepcha, meanwhile, looks at how language activists in Sikkim act as petty sovereigns when they attempt to purify the Rongring language of Tibetan loanwords. And in chapters by Hyslop and Suzuki, we encounter the possibility that linguists may act as petty anti-sovereigns, interrupting and problematizing state authority and the common sense it generates.

To understand how speakers and listeners act as petty sovereigns in relation to language borders, we can begin by acknowledging that states have the capacity to define, authorize, and legitimate what counts as a language and what does not – what qualifies for codification and reproduction, and what gets relegated to the status of dialect, jargon, lingo, patois, or accent. The creation of these borders is never simply about "linguistic materials" such as "phonemes, lexemes, and syntactic or morphological rules" (Urciuoli,

1995, p. 538). Rather, linguistic borders are set and languages differentiated when linguistic features are interpreted within a particular social, historical, and political context, through particular ideological lenses (Irvine & Gal, 2000), and in relation to state power and its reproduction by petty sovereigns. Therefore, as several of the contributions to this volume demonstrate, what counts as a language in one state may be a non-language in another, and vice versa.

This volume's contribution by Donohue traces how in Nepal, on the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region in China, a chain of related speech varieties are described and recognized through a complex set of terminologies; just over the border in China, all this variety and terminological complexity is subsumed under a single Tibetan language. In his chapter on glottonyms, Suzuki examines how practices of labeling speech varieties among Tibetans in China trace a significant interior frontier, carving off a number of speech varieties in opposition to, but subordinated within, a hegemonically imagined single Tibetan language. And as I show in my own chapter, the differentiation of languages is sometimes outsourced by multiple states to transnational actors, leading to peculiar and complex forms of collaboration between antagonistic states.

How languages are differentiated and where language borders are placed are non-trivial issues; the placement of language borders has a number of profound real-world effects. These effects are, firstly, material (Flores, 2017): languages and their speakers receive resources for institutional production, development, and reproduction. Material inequalities apply both to languages themselves (what sort of access they have to resources for development, reproduction, and so on), as well as to the social groups that use, identify with, and are identified with them (Roche, 2019b). So, it is possible for a social group to have access to resources, but not their language, and vice versa. Either way, language can and does serve as a contour for economic inequalities.

Material inequalities between language forms have consequences for human lives, including not only reduced life chances and *quality* of life, through differentiated participation in education,[2] as well as economic and civic life, but also reduced *quantity* of life, via differential participation in healthcare, law and order, and so on. We can also think about how forms of linguistic inequality are entangled with relations between economic inequality and reduced lifespan (Therborn, 2013), or racism and poor health (Sullivan, 2015;

2 Much of the literature on this topic stems from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's 1953 report on *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* (UNESCO, 1953).

Trent et al., 2019). If economic inequalities relating to language borders impact the quality and quantity of life, it is therefore relevant to think about these inequalities in similar ways to how Ruth Gilmore (2007, p. 28), and others, consider racism, as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."

Finally, the placement of language borders also has important consequences for identity, and the social distribution of esteem, respect, valor, and hope, all of which are both political resources (Hage, 2003; Appadurai, 2013) and important determinants of lived experience. Language borders not only differentiate, separate, and rank various types of people, but also immerse, engulf, erase, and eliminate these differences (Roche, 2019a). Language borders can fix people and populations into subordinated positions within a hierarchy or, by excluding them from the hierarchy all together, seek to eliminate them.

In short, then, the ways in which states place language borders are related to material, biopolitical, and representational inequalities and the production of associated harms. The chapters of this volume attest to these harms. Schmidt's contribution examines how the erasure of borders between spoken and written Tibetan impedes educational success (and presumably, therefore, the life-course) among Tibetans in India. In my chapter, I examine how a vicious cycle exists whereby material and political inequalities feed into each other to produce language shift towards Tibetan, which is itself a dominated language undergoing language shift, among a number of vulnerable communities in the region. Chapters by Hyslop, Donohue, and Lepcha invite us to think about when a border is recognized but ignored by the state: when a language is perhaps considered distinct, but still insignificant to the state, and is thus deprived of material and political support.

Such harms are not simply brought about by the capacity of borders to exclude and divide. It must also be acknowledged that borders enable violent forms of inclusion – incorporating people into both patterns of power and perception as a result of their physical location, within the reach of a specific form of state power. Therefore, whilst the literature on borders has tended to focus on how borders limit movement, we also need to attend to how borders prevent people from staying where there are *as who they are*. To be engulfed within a state means to be submerged within and reproduced by the logic of that state. Whilst scholars have recently called for free movement and a "right to the world" (Nevins, 2017), we might also consider the right to not just escape one state and access another, but also the right to stay where one is and not be subject to state violence. If mobility is a political act (Monsutti, 2018), immobility can be too; the right to stay (Oberman, 2011) is a necessary compliment to the right to freedom of movement.

Stasis in a world of borders can subject people and social groups to pervasive violence, as borders are reproduced in everyday interactions and interpersonal acts of language bordering. A key pivot for acts of linguistic bordering is the shibboleth: linguistic features that index the border between both language forms and social groups. Although typically minor, these differences can have profound effects. Frantz Fanon (2008) has described how shibboleths were used to "classify" and "imprison" Martinicans in France "at an uncivilized and primitive level" (p. 15), seeking to "fix" them, "the same way you fix a preparation with a dye" (p. 89), and leading the typical Martinican migrant in France to "lock himself in his room and read for hours – desperately working on his *diction*" (p. 5). When such 'linguistic profiling' (Baugh, 2005) becomes linked to domination, marginalization, and violence, seemingly trivial linguistic elements can "put speakers at risk" (Urciuoli, 1995, p. 539). In discussing how shibboleths have been used in violent conflicts, to distinguish friend from foe, the killable from those who must be protected, Louis Jean Calvet (1998, p. 24) notes that, "one can die on account of a phoneme, on account of a difference of pronunciation." The role that shibboleths play in making certain populations available for violence demonstrates the complex interconnections between differentiation and destruction.

Linguists and others often turn away from these complexities by recourse to the formulaic declaration, "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy." As Maxwell (2018) argues, this 'joke' is typically deployed in an effort to avoid discussing the political underpinnings of the language/dialect distinction; it is an act of abstention couched as aphoristic wisdom. Rather than serving to focus our attention on the political nature of language bordering, this stock phrase is more often used to suggest that language bordering is an artifact of the arbitrary use of power, and therefore beyond the scope of the study of language, and the disciplinary bounds of linguistics. However, as Maxwell (2018, p. 273) reminds us, "politics can be studied." But, doing so requires us to work at the borders of disciplines, engaging in both trans- and interdisciplinary research. This is precisely what this book aims to do, by focusing on a specific geographical context and its complex language politics, while working from a number of disciplinary perspectives.

Bordering Tibetan languages

Several features of the Tibetan context lend themselves to an analysis of bordering and languages. To begin with, Tibetan languages typically express a rich polysemic ambiguity when it comes to spoken languages, which defies

simple translation into English in terms of the language/dialect distinction (and the hierarchies it implies; see Lippi-Green, 1997). Different forms of speech are typically marked by the addition of *skad* (voice/speech/talk) or *kha* (mouth) following a place name, or some other limit of identity. For example, in written Tibetan we have not just *bod skad* 'Tibetan talk', but also *A mdo skad* 'speech of the Amdo region', *'brog skad* 'nomad talk', *Lha sa skad* 'Lhasa talk', *Sga ba skad* 'speech of the Gawa area' (Konchok Gelek, 2017) and so forth. This system is both scalar and fluid, enabling language and dialect to exchange place in relation to different speech forms, acknowledging difference without creating stable hierarchies. Far more rigid, however, is the binary distinction between speech and writing (*yi ge*; *yig*).[3] But even this opposition can be dissolved in the compound term *skad yig*, which, though it can be translated simply as 'language', carries different implications from the English term. The Tibetan language of language therefore provides a complex case for translating the binaries and hierarchies imposed by both Westphalian borders and Western language ideologies.

These vocabularies for speaking about language exist in relation to a variety of language ideologies that seek to insert or erase both difference and hierarchy in relation to linguistic variation. Although these ideologies are the subject of several chapters in this book (as described in the summary of contributions below), it is worth briefly noting, first of all, that there is an emerging consensus amongst linguists that what we call *the* Tibetan language is actually a cluster of related languages (Tournadre, 2014). Linguists and others also increasingly differentiate this group of languages from others that share both deep-history relations of common ancestry and more recent contact phenomenon (such as lexical borrowing) whilst also existing in zones of overlapping identities and cultural practices. Examples of these more distantly related languages include East Bodish languages (Hyslop, 2014) and Gyalrong languages (Jacques, 2017).

These seemingly naturalistic, objective renderings of language practices into linguistic objects are, however, contested. We see this particularly in relation to the Tibetan philological tradition, which takes literary Tibetan as the standard, canonical form of the language, and views linguistic diversity in the region in relation to this template, primarily through the dual lenses of drift and decay: spoken languages are seen as divergences from the literary form (Zeisler, 2006; Kellner, 2018). This divergence is typically seen as the corruption of the standard, due to 'mixing' with and contamination by other

3 Despite being conceptually distinct, speech and writing are typically blurred in practice, with both the writing system and texts being designed to aid recitation rather than silent reading. See Ekvall (1964) for an ethnographic account of Tibetan reading practices.

languages, particularly 'Chinese' (Bendi Tso & Turin, 2019). Diversity of spoken languages, therefore, is thought to be the result of centrifugal corruption, and an aberration in an ideal historical trajectory of sustained unity and purity.

Whereas linguists see the label 'Tibetan' as a hypernym that erases diversity, Tibetan philological ideologies construe 'Tibetan' as a naturalistic and self-evident singularity; efforts to insert difference within it are unfounded and destructive. This distinction between linguistic and philological practices of bordering is just one aspect of the complex and contested ideological positions that exist in relation to language in the region, and which this book explores.

Beyond these issues of dividing up and bordering languages in the Tibetan context, we can also note that Tibet also presents a wealth of ways to think about borders, bordering, and alterity beyond languages. The border (*mtha' 'khob*) has long been an important trope in how difference is conceived spatially, in both Tibetan speech and writing (Buffetrille, 2019). Mandalic models of spatialization in the Tibetan context (Makley, 2007; Roche, 2014) often imagine space as a pure center of Buddhist devotion surrounded by multiple borderlands inhabited by 'barbarians' (*kla klo*). Importantly, this sense of bordering and barbarism has often been related to language. As just one example, we see the Lhasa-born Sera Khandro, in her encounters with pastoralists from and in the 'peripheral' Tibetan region of Golok, stating that she could not understand their spoken language, and lamenting that, "when they speak, they seem like savage barbarians. It will be difficult for that which is called 'the Great Perfection' to flourish in their land" (Jacoby, 2016, p. 43). Tibetan civilizing projects and their linguistic prejudices not only targeted 'uncivilized' Tibetans, but also surrounding non-Tibetan populations, such as the Adi of Northeast India (Huber, 2008), and the various peoples referred to in Tibetan by the collective label 'Monpa' (Pommaret, 1999).

Beyond these issues of cultural and linguistic chauvinism aimed at peripheral peoples, we also need to consider the sunnier cousin of this supremacy: the phenomena of prestige and influence. The long associations between written Tibetan and the institutions of Vajrayana Buddhism, and the language's capacity to act as both a gateway to Enlightenment and a vehicle for various forms of spiritual power, have given written Tibetan a reach and influence unsurpassed by other languages of the region. Aspiring men from throughout the region have long circulated through the wide-flung monasteries in search of prestige and learning. Sacred scripts and oral performances of religious texts are, and have long been, intimate parts of daily life for many people and peoples throughout the region.

Given the political and historical complexities of borders in the region, the linguistic ambiguities surrounding language borders, and the cultural

practices associated with bordering, Tibet, its languages, and those surrounding it, provide a rich frame through which to examine how state, ethnic, linguistic, and other borders interact.

The various ways in which the authors of this book engage with these complexities is indicated through the volume's title – *Bordering Tibetan Languages* – and its capacity to evoke multiple overlapping and competing meanings while productively drawing our attention in different directions. To begin with, *bordering* can be interpreted in at least two ways: as an adjective and a verb. As an adjective, *bordering* draws our attention to how some of the languages discussed in this book are adjacent to, around, or nearby Tibetan languages. It separates these languages from both Tibetan space and Tibetan people. Meanwhile, as a verb, *bordering* draws our attention to how this distinction is made, between Tibetan languages and others. These two senses of the word are intimately connected. A language cannot become adjacent to another without an act of bordering to separate them. Bordering as a status is only achieved through bordering as an activity.

The term *Tibetan*, meanwhile, introduces important, irreducible, and deliberate ambiguity. Tibetan can mean both 'of the place, Tibet' and 'of the Tibetan people'.[4] These are not the same thing; some Tibetans live outside Tibet, and non-Tibetans live inside it. What then, are Tibetan languages? Are they only the languages of Tibetan people, or can this extend to languages spoken by other people in Tibet? What is the relationship between the spatial and social borders of these two meanings of the term? And what does it mean to be *bordering*, in the sense of adjacent to, Tibetan languages in the context of this ambiguity?

Meanwhile, in discussing *languages*, in the plural, the title draws attention to the multiplicity of languages spoken by Tibetans, in Tibet, and in surrounding areas. In doing so it reminds us that every form of diversity is also a plurality of acts of singularization: many borders make a diverse whole. Diversity, as a normatively valorized state in liberal democratic contexts, does not exist without some form of bordering and the structural violence this implies. To be *bordering languages* also raises the question – what does it mean to be adjacent to a multiplicity, to share an edge with a plural?

4 We have opted to deliberately highlight this ambiguity by eschewing the term 'Tibetic' in the book's title. 'Tibetic' was proposed by Tournadre (2014) to refer to the family of languages descended from Old Tibetan. This term is too limited to cover the languages and topics covered in this book. However, we have used the term in sections of this chapter and elsewhere in the book where linguistic precision is required.

The contributions

The contributions to this volume engage with this set of questions about the complexities, ambiguities, violence, and harms of linguistic bordering from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and with a number of different motivations. Contributors include anthropologists (Lepcha, Roche, and Ward), linguists (Donohue, Hyslop, and Suzuki), as well as educational experts (Schmidt). These differing disciplinary approaches mean that each author brings not only different theoretical approaches to the issue, but is also motivated by a different set of priorities and questions, thus providing us with a multifaceted overview of this complex topic.

In Chapter 2, Shannon Ward discusses how children and caregivers in the Amdo region of Tibet make and mark language boundaries between Tibetan and Chinese in their everyday linguistic practice. She demonstrates how children are both willful and skillful as linguistic agents, modifying the way they 'play' with language borders in different contexts: sometimes blurring them, and at other times not just maintaining borders, but vocally reflecting on them in their metapragmatic commentary. Ward analyzes how children's practices enact and respond to "heteroglot standard language ideology" – "a moral emphasis on multiple, competing standard languages." She notes that whilst this ideology enables speakers to maintain a distinction between Tibetan and Chinese as differentiated linguistic codes and social identities, this distinction takes place at a cost. As children come to identify 'Tibetan' with the literary form taught in schools, rather than the spoken standard they acquire at home and in their community, they also engage in a "radical compression of deep-rooted cultural associations between place and language." As a result of this compression, heteroglot standard language ideology conspires with other structural constraints to encourage Amdo children's language shift from their mother tongues to Mandarin.

Gwendolyn Hyslop, in her contribution in Chapter 3, looks at the relationship between Kurtöp, an indigenous language of Bhutan, and Chöke, the classical literary Tibetan language used across the Himalaya. She begins by observing that "[t]he languages of Bhutan are often assumed to be Tibetan dialects," but goes on to note that the country is home to nineteen distinct languages, none of which can be called Tibetan in any straightforward sense. Each of these languages has a distinct historical and linguistic relationship to Tibetan as a liturgical language and regional *scripta franca*, in addition to a distinct genetic relationship. Hyslop's meticulous comparative work examines the ways in which written Tibetan has exerted influence on spoken Kurtöp. This influence is evident in multiple borrowings: of lexical

items, sounds, and grammatical morphemes. Despite the heavy influence from written Tibetan, Hyslop argues that Kurtöp is clearly a non-Tibetic language, instead belonging to a little-studied language group, the East Bodish languages. Therefore, despite strong historical influence between languages, and the merging and blurring that this results in, borders between language families remain distinct, although not obviously at first blush.

In Chapter 4, Charisma K. Lepcha discusses Rongring, the language of the Lepcha people, who are indigenous to Sikkim and the surrounding area. She looks at the complex ways in which religion, language, and identity are intertwined. Her chapter traces these entanglements to the establishment of the Sikkimese Namgyal dynasty by Tibetan migrants from the north in the seventeenth century. Lepcha traces how religion was used as an aspect of statecraft by the Namgyal rulers, leading to the emergence of complex syncretic cultural forms that incorporated many aspects of Tibetan Buddhism into Lepcha practice, and were part of a broader process of Tibetanization. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Lepcha sacred texts, in the Lepcha script, are suffused with numerous Tibetan loanwords. In this context, Lepcha discusses a campaign of linguistic purism currently underway to remove Tibetan loanwords from Lepcha texts. She argues that these efforts to inscribe a distinct border between the two languages are unlikely to bear fruit, given the syncretic nature of Lepcha religion. In making this argument, Lepcha demonstrates how language borders are rarely singular, but are, instead, tied up with other forms of social distinction.

In Chapter 5, on "Glottonyms, identity, and language recognition in the eastern Tibetosphere," Hiroyuki Suzuki discusses the relationship between language names and language borders. In examining how language names can create and maintain certain kinds of social relations, Suzuki focuses on three cases. First is the controversy surrounding the term 'Tibetic', a label that has been proposed for the group of languages descended from Old Tibetan, and which has caused considerable controversy both amongst linguists and between linguists and sectors of the Tibetan community. Secondly, Suzuki looks at the Tibetan term *logs skad*, which is applied to a variety of speech forms used by Tibetans that are marked by their unintelligibility to mainstream Tibetans. The third case that Suzuki examines is that of 'mixed' languages. He argues that although labeling languages as mixed often has pejorative connotations, speakers of these languages often see this mixture as an important part of their identity. In examining these labels and the complex connections between language names and social relations, Suzuki argues that linguists have a responsibility to balance their commitments to specificity with Tibetan ways of thinking about and naming languages.

In Chapter 6, Dirk Schmidt brings the issue of languages and borders into the educational realm in his discussion of how linguistic standards operate as a border, separating written and spoken forms. He provides an overview of how and why this gap has been emerging over the course of the long history that separates our present moment from the creation of the Tibetan script in Tibet's imperial heyday of the seventh century. A focus on speech forms found in the Himalayan diaspora shows how this gap between 'how Tibetan is spoken' and 'how it is written' has widened due to natural language change. He then examines how this gap functions as a barrier to achieving literacy in Tibetan today, and how issues of learning to read are compounded by social and political factors – factors that tend to promote a singular, prestigious 'Tibetan language' to the exclusion of a diversity of living varieties.

Chapter 7 takes us to Nepal and Cathryn Donohue's work on Nubri. Nubri is one of Nepal's Tibetic languages, all of which are spoken along the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region in China. Donohue examines the complexities of linguistic borders in the Nubri region, and the ways in which prestige, intelligibility, and identity interact to produce an intricately textured language ecology. She shows how proximity to the border impacts patterns of multilingualism, and also how the border has impacted prior forms of mobility and connectivity between Nubri and Tibet. Donohue describes the language as presently being at a critical juncture where language shift towards Nepali appears imminent.

In the book's penultimate chapter, I continue looking at the issue of language shift, examining how Tibetan, as an imagined standard language, exerts what I call 'borderline dominance' – the capacity of a demographic and political minority to exert linguistic dominance over other smaller minority groups. My perspective is at once areal and community-focused. The chapter moves across state borders, between the People's Republic of China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and India, to look at communities across this transnational regional that are shifting from their heritage language to some form of Tibetan, or are otherwise renegotiating the borders of language and belonging in relation to Tibetan. I argue that this shift towards Tibetan is the result of both imperial legacies and contemporary international relations, and is also predicated on Tibet's ongoing, sovereign-like behavior and its pre-accumulated linguistic capital. This chapter shows how states and their borders menace smaller languages not only by creating a container within which national languages are promoted, but also by connecting communities to both national and regional language markets.

Finally, a contribution that we were unfortunately unable to include in this volume demonstrates how the issues we are discussing are politically

charged in the context of growing tensions in the region. This chapter explored how language ideologies and practices in a Tibetan school in China create temporal borders, differentiating between 'modern' and 'traditional' languages. It examined how government policy, scholarly discourses, and social relations recreate a set of chronopolitical binaries that position Tibetan as traditional (hence also backwards, and associated with the past) and Chinese as modern (and thus progressive, and associated with the future).

As we finalized this volume for submission, we were contacted by the contributor, who had been requested to submit the chapter for review by a representative of the Chinese Communist Party at their university. The author then sent us the revised, approved chapter, complete with the party representative's changes. The text was drastically changed. The terms 'Tibetan' and 'Han' had been systematically removed, nullifying the author's efforts to carefully examine how ethnicity and language were given chronopolitical dimensions in local educational policy, discourse, and practice. The word 'tensions' had been replaced with 'relations'. Reference to the marginalization of Tibetan language and culture was removed, as was a claim that the educational system was "failing to address issues of cultural relevance" for Tibetans. The author's conclusions, which were modestly and cautiously critical of educational policy in relation to language, were whittled down to a few superficial reflections without any substantive analytical component.

These drastic changes in some place impeded the intelligibility of the text, and profoundly impacted the article's intellectual integrity, and we thus regrettably decided that we could no longer include this contribution. This unfortunate incident demonstrates how borders assert themselves, and have their political impacts, in the most unexpected places. When we began this volume, the border of the PRC had not yet asserted itself in the realm of transnational knowledge production, but before we reached publication, this border had suddenly taken on a very real existence, bordering the limits of permissible knowledge and scholarly collaboration.

Conclusion: Beyond borders?

This introductory chapter has drawn on the critical border studies literature to examine state borders as forms of structural violence, and to relate this to the complex ways in which language borders are produced, resulting in a variety of harms. In closing this chapter and leading into the individual contributions of this book, I would like to briefly reflect on how we might

avoid or reduce some of the harms described in this introduction and throughout this book: of exclusion, erasure, marginalization, material deprivation, exposure to violence, and so on.

Critical border studies literature often proposes the abolition of borders as a solution to the structural violence they enact (Walia [2013] offers a particularly compelling argument in this regards). It is worth considering how the removal, opening, and transgression of state borders in the Himalayas would possibly provide avenues for social justice and the reduction of harms. Such developments might, for example, enable the creation of transnational networks amongst the speakers of marginalized and minoritized languages that would promote the circulation of knowledge, strategies and techniques for language maintenance and revitalization as well as material resources (Davis et al., 2019). It might help communities secure the 'right to stay' discussed above – to remain where they are but to escape the oppressive treatment by the state that has engulfed them and that threatens them and their language. Greater freedom of movement in a region with more open (or nonexistent) borders might also enable individuals and communities to seek linguistic justice by moving to wherever conditions are most favorable.

However, despite the promise of such developments, the prospect of open borders also raises important questions. Not all flows across open borders would necessarily benefit the vulnerable and marginalized. To what extent would open, porous, or abolished borders reproduce existing power inequalities and reinscribe the subordination of the disempowered? Would a world without state borders provide greater refuge and protection for the linguistically vulnerable, or increased exposure to multiplied sources of violence beyond the state? What relations of solidarity and mutual aid would ensure that a world of open borders would be more, rather than less, just? In short, how should border imperialism be undone to ensure the benefit of all?

And what about language borders? Is an abolitionist approach useful, and what would it look like? Here, I think that caution is once again warranted. Approaches aiming to complexify, blur, and puncture language borders run the risk of both reproducing and legitimizing the erasure of subordinated languages by state power, turning well-meaning post-structuralists into unwitting petty sovereigns. Often presented as a way to undermine inequalities, efforts to remove language boundaries can also reproduce existing power hierarchies and increase the vulnerability of oppressed populations, intensifying their exposure to harms (De Meulder et al., 2019). This is particularly likely to be the case in a world where state borders, and the internal frontiers they create, remain undone.

Rather than considering the abolition of language borders, we might want to consider their democratization as a path to greater justice and reduced harms (Young, 2011). Perhaps we need to think about how, when asserted by communities, language borders can work *against* state borders, to reassert suppressed sovereignty, and claim a right to stay in place whilst perpetuating non-subordinated distinction. Perhaps claims to language borders can serve to exteriorize an alternative set of interior frontiers that promotes the interests of the oppressed against those of the state. In short, reconsidering language borders for greater social justice might need to focus not so much on the borders themselves, but who gets to define them (Meek, 2011).

In the case of both state borders and language borders, efforts to reduce harms and move towards more just social and political structures and relations involve debates that permeate the literature on social justice elsewhere, drawing on the distinction between what Nancy Fraser (2003) describes as 'transformative' and 'affirmative' approaches. Affirmative approaches seek to retain borders of social distinction and recognition, but establish more equitable social relations by repairing the damages of status subordination through discourses of valorization and practices of affirmative action. Transformative approaches, meanwhile, aim to achieve greater social justice by abolishing the borders of social distinction that enable social hierarchies to form. Consideration of the issues above relating to state and language borders will benefit from deeper engagement with this broader conversation in the social justice literature.

By way of conclusion then, I will leave the reader with a question to consider when reading the chapters that follow: in each of the cases considered, what strategies and techniques of affirmation and transformation of both linguistic and state borders might enable the transition to a more just and less harmful set of social and political relations?

References

Appadurai, A. (2013). *The future as cultural fact: Essays on the global condition*. Verso.

Baugh, J. (2005). Linguistic profiling. In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. F. Ball, & A. K. Spears (Eds.), *Black linguistics: Language, society and politics in Africa and the Americas* (pp. 167-180). Routledge.

Bendi Tso & Turin, M. (2019). Speaking 'Chone', speaking shallow: Dual linguistic hegemonies in China's Tibetan frontier. In S. K. Sonntag & M. Turin (Eds.), *The politics of language contact in the Himalaya* (pp. 137-162). Open Book Publishers.

Buffetrille, K. (2019). The increasing visibility of the Tibetan 'borderlands'. In S. Gros (Ed.), *Frontier Tibet: Patterns of change in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands* (pp. 85-114). Amsterdam University Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctvt1sgw7.7

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.

Calvet, L. (1998). *Language wars and linguistic politics* (M. Petheram, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

Cartier, C. (2011). Urban growth, rescaling, and the spatial administrative hierarchy. *Provincial China, 3*(1), 9-33

Cartier, C. (2015). Territorial urbanization and the party-state in China. *Territory, Politics and Governance*, *3*(3), 294-320.

Dalby, S. (1998). Globalisation or global apartheid? Boundaries and knowledge in postmodern times. *Geopolitics, 3*(1), 132-150.

Daurio, M., & Turin, M. (2020). 'Langscapes' and language borders: Linguistic boundary-making in northern South Asia. *Eurasia Border Review*, *10*(1), 21-42.

Davis, A., Gamble, R., Gupta, S., Dutta, A., & Roche, G. (2019). Melting opportunities: Managing climate change and conflict in the Himalaya. *La Trobe Asia Policy Brief.* https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1068525/ltab03.pdf

De Meulder, M., Kusters, A., Moriarty, E., & Murray, J. J. (2019). Describe, don't prescribe: The practice and politics of translanguaging in the context of deaf signers. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 40*(10), 892-906.

Ekvall, R. (1964). *Religious observances in Tibet: Pattern and function*. University of Chicago Press.

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.

Farmer, P. (2004). An anthropology of structural violence. *Current Anthropology, 45*(3), 305-325.

Flores, N. (2017). Developing a materialist anti-racist approach to language activism. *Multilingua, 36*(5), 565-570.

Foucault, M. (2003). *'Society must be defended': Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (M. Bertani & A. Fontana, Eds.; D. Macey, Trans.). Picador.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth, *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 7-109; J. Golb, J. Ingram, & C. Wilke, Trans.). Verso.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research, 6*(3), 167-191.

Gamble, R. (2019). How dams climb mountains: China and India's state-making hydropower contest in the Eastern-Himalaya watershed. *Thesis Eleven, 150*(1), 42-67.

Gilmore, R. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.

Hage, G. (2003). *Against paranoid nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*. Annandale, NSW: Pluto.

Hage, G. (2016). *État de siege*: A dying domesticating colonialism? *American Ethnologist, 43*(1), 38-49.

Harris, T. (2013). *Geographical diversions: Tibetan trade, global transactions*. University of Georgia Press.

Huber, T. (2008). Pushing south: Tibetan economic and political activities in the far eastern Himalaya, ca. 1900-1950. In A. McKay and A. Balicki-Denjongpa (Eds.), *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in religion, history and culture: Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology* (pp., 259-276). Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

Hyslop, G. (2014). A preliminary reconstruction of East Bodish. In T. Owen-Smith and N. Hill (Eds.), *Trans-Himalayan linguistics: Historical and descriptive linguistics of the Himalayan area* (pp. 155-179). Walter de Gruyter.

Irvine, J., & Gal, S. (2000). Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In P. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities* (pp. 35-84). School of American Research Press.

Ives, P. (2004). *Language and hegemony in Gramsci*. Pluto Press/Fernwood Publishing.

Jacoby, S. H. (2016). *Love and liberation: Autobiographical writings of the Tibetan Buddhist visionary Sera Khandro.* Columbia University Press.

Jacques, G. (2017). Gyalrong language. In R. Sybesma (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese language and linguistics* (pp. 583-589). Brill.

Jones, R. (2016). *Violent borders: Refugees and the right to move*. Verso.

Kellner, B. (2018). Vernacular literacy in Tibet: Present debates and historical beginnings. In E. Krotz, S. Müller, N. Kössinger, & P. Rychterová (Eds.). *Anfangsgeschichten/Origin Stories* (pp. 381-402). Brill.

Khan, S. W. (2015). *Muslim, trader, nomad, spy: China's Cold War and the people of the Tibetan borderlands*. University of North Carolina Press.

Konchok Gelek. (2017). Variation, contact, and change in language varieties in Yul shul (northern Khams). *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *245*, 91-111.

Konrad, V., Laine, J. P., Liikanen, I., Scott, J. W., & Widdis, R. (2019). The language of borders. In S. D. Brunn & R. Keherin (Eds.), *Handbook of the changing world language map* (pp. 2175-2192). Springer.

Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States.* Routledge.

Makley, C. E. (2007). *The violence of liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist revival in post-Mao China*. University of California Press.

Maxwell, A. (2018). When theory is a joke: The Weinreich witticism in linguistics. *Beiträge zur geschichte der sprachwissenschaft, 28*(2), 263-292.

Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics (L. Meintjes, Trans.). *Public Culture*, *15*(1), 11-40.

Meek, B. A. (2011). *We are our language: An ethnography of language revitalization in a northern Athabaskan community*. University of Arizona Press.

Miller, T. (2019). *Empire of borders: The expansion of the US border around the world*. Verso.

Monsutti, A. (2018). Mobility as a political act. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 41*(3), 448-455.

Nevins, J. (2017). The right to the world. *Antipode, 49*(5), 1349-1367.

Oberman, K. (2011). Immigration, global poverty and the right to stay. *Political Studies*, *59*(2), 253-268.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States*. Routledge.

Pommaret, F. (1999). The Monpa revisited: In search of Mon. In T. Huber (Ed.), *Sacred spaces and powerful places in Tibetan culture*. Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.

Relyea, S. (2017). Indigenizing international law in early twentieth-century China: Territorial sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan borderland. *Late imperial China*, *38*(2), 1-60.

Roche, G. (2014). Flows and frontiers: Landscape and cultural dynamics on the northeast Tibetan Plateau. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, *15*(1), 1-25.

Roche, G. (2019a). Articulating language oppression: Colonialism, coloniality and the erasure of Tibet's minority languages. *Patterns of Prejudice, 53*(5), 487-514.

Roche, G. (2019b). *Linguistic justice, decolonization, and language endangerment.* Paper presented at the Foundation for Endangered Languages Annual Conference (Sydney, Australia 14-16 December 2019). https://easychair.org/publications/preprint/JsQp

Saxer, M., & Andersson, R. (2019). The return of remoteness: Insecurity, isolation and connectivity in the new world disorder. *Social Anthropology, 27*(2), 140-155.

Simpson, A. (2014). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press.

Stoler, A. L. (2012). Interior frontiers. *Political concepts: A critical lexicon*. https://www.politicalconcepts.org/interior-frontiers-ann-laura-stoler/#ref58

Stoler, A. L. (2017). 'Interior frontiers' as political concept, diagnostic, and dispositif. *Fieldsights*. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/interior-frontiers-as-political-conceptdiagnostic-and-dispositif

Sullivan, S. (2015). *The physiology of sexist and racist oppression*. Oxford University Press.

Therborn, G. (2013). *The killing fields of inequality*. Verso.

Tournadre, N. (2014). The Tibetic languages and their classification. In T. Owen-Smith and N. Hill (Eds.), *Trans-Himalayan linguistics: Historical and descriptive linguistics of the Himalayan area* (pp. 105-129). Walter de Gruyter.

Trent, M., Dooley, D. G., & Dougé, J. (2019). The impact of racism on child and adolescent health. *Pediatrics, 144*(2). https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1765

UNESCO (1953). *The use of vernacular languages in education*. UNESCO.

Urciuoli, B. (1995). Languages and borders. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 24*, 525-46.

Valencia, S. (2019). *Gore capitalism*. MIT Press.

Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing border imperialism*. AK Press.

Wallerstein, I. (2004). *World-systems analysis: An introduction*. Duke University Press.

Wenner, M. (2020). Functions of sovereign violence: Contesting and establishing order in Darjeeling, India. *Political Geography, 77.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102094

Wolfe, P. (2016). *Traces of history: Elementary structures of race*. Verso Books.

Wonders, N. (2015). Transforming borders from below. In L. Weber (Ed.), *Rethinking border control for a globalized world: A preferred future* (pp. 190-198). Routledge.

Yeh, E. (2019). 'The land belonged to Nepal but the people belonged to Tibet': Overlapping sovereignties and mobility in the Limi Valley borderland. *Geopolitics, 26*(3), 919-945.

Young, I. (2011). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton University Press.

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G., & Cassidy, K. (2019). *Bordering*. Polity Press.

Zeisler, B. (2006). Why Ladakhi must not be written – Being part of the Great Tradition: Another kind of global thinking. In A. Saxena and L. Borin (Eds.), *Lesser-known languages of South Asia: Status and policies, case studies and applications of information technology* (pp. 175-194). Mouton de Gruyter.

About the author

Gerald Roche is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Politics, Media, and Philosophy at La Trobe University, Australia, and a co-chair of the Global Coalition for Language Rights. He is an international expert in language revitalization and the politics of language in Tibet and the Himalayas.