HIMALAYAN STUDIES CONFERENCE
TORONTO 2022

CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

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Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #1
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14

09:00-10:30

Himalayan Linguistic Futures: Language as Expressive Practice, Learning, and Survivance I

This panel brings together diverse scholars working on language issues and linguistic rights within educational and religious contexts, and more widely in society at large. The Himalayan belt is one of the world's most linguistically diverse ecoregions, home to around 1/6th of the world's spoken and written languages. Notwithstanding its position as a global language hotspot, the Himalayan region is also a site of linguistic repression, epistemic injustice, transformation and innovation; an interconnected and multilingual zone in which speech communities and languages straddle political borders and have long been and still are in constant negotiation with multiple nation states, actively resisting sacred orthodoxies and state-led regimes of value and accreditation.

Informed by critical studies on stigma, oppression, language ideologies, borders and boundaries, linguistic rights, mother tongue education and the oral-written interface, the papers in this double panel explore complex questions around societal attitudes towards the use of different languages in schools, active translanguaging and linguistic knowledge-making, changing understandings of the relationship between spoken and written forms of language in Tibetan Buddhism, policy and planning in support of Indigenous languages, the gaps between international language rights and actual implementation and the multiple scales of linguistic oppression and resistance. The panel concludes with reflections by the discussant with a view towards seeing the papers through to publication in the near future.

Chair: *Mark Turin (University of British Columbia)*

Implementation of Linguistic Rights in Nepal
Anudeep Dewan (University of British Columbia)

Home to more than 120 languages, Nepal is linguistically diverse but most of these languages have been historically marginalized and many, endangered by the imposition of Nepali language, which is the official language of the state. While different international human rights instruments have been ratified in Nepal and provisions to protect linguistic rights enshrined in the new constitution of 2015, there are gaps in the actual implementation of these instruments that exist on paper to protect these rights. This paper emerges out of a research project that sought to understanding these gaps in implementing these policies and provisions in Nepal. I highlight some of the gaps identified by artists, writers, activists, and policymakers who have advocated for the promotion of these languages and people's linguistic rights, through a series of interviews and conversations that I have engaged with them in.

The Oral-Written Interface within Tibetan Buddhism
Patrick Dowd (University of British Columbia)

My research concerns the Tibetan language oral-written interface within Tibetan Buddhism, exploring the relationship between teachers, disciples and texts. Anthropologists have long observed Tibetans' reverence for their written texts, evidenced by Jack Goody's comment that "Tibet demonstrates the epitome of grapholatry," meaning the worship of script as idol. Yet for all this devotion to the written word, Tibetan books do not speak on their own. Unique among the world's Buddhist traditions, Tibetan Buddhism strongly emphasizes the need for a student to receive oral transmission (*lung*) and oral teachings (*khrid*) from a qualified teacher in order to authentically study and practice the teachings held within a written text. This teacher, in turn, must also hold the oral transmission and teaching from a previous master, a process described in traditional texts as being like "a golden rosary", where each individual is like a bead extending back to the composer of the scripture, be that the Buddha himself or another enlightened master. Based on in-depth expert interviews and several years of study in the culturally Tibetan Himalaya, my research seeks to illuminate Tibetan Buddhist understandings of the relationship between spoken and written language.

Translanguaging as Transknowledging: Linguistic Practices and Epistemic Diversities in Nepal Bhasha Schools in Nepal
Uma Pradhan (University College London), Prem Phyak (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Everyday linguistic practices in multilingual contexts challenge the neat compartmentalization of languages as distinct entities (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005). However, official policies continue to reinforce separatist ideology of language in education. Such policies not only construct hierarchies of languages but also reinforce a deficit ideology of Indigenous languages and epistemologies. This paper draws on the case of Nepal Bhasha, one of the Indigenous languages in Nepal, to discuss how Indigenous teachers use translanguaging as a pedagogical approach to negotiate with the official curriculum and languages to create 'ideological and implementational space' (Hornberger, 2005) for Nepal Bhasha and Newar Indigenous epistemologies in the classroom.

Drawing on the idea of translanguaging as 'a practical theory of language' (Wei, 2018), we analyze how creative and simultaneous use of multiple languages enable the use of embodied multilingualism and facilitate access to knowledge that may not be possible through the separation of languages. Translanguaging allows the multilingual speakers to use 'integrated repertoire of linguistic and semiotic practices' (Wei, 2011) to make sense of the world around them (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Analyzing the fluidity in language use in Nepal Bhasa schools in Nepal, this article argues that translanguaging practices open up new spaces of learning and challenge the deficit ideologies of Indigenous languages that tend to shape mainstream education. We discuss how translanguaging in multilingual contexts open up new epistemic possibilities and diversities and build creative links with the worlds of knowledge. The appreciation of translanguaging as transknowledging practice, therefore, appreciates the historical, political, and social embeddedness of language practices and enable the new spaces of transformational knowledge-making processes that provide legitimate space for Indigenous languages and epistemologies.

Misframing sacētanā: Epistemic Injustice, Deficit Ideology, and 'Mother Tongue' Education Policy in Nepal

Prem Phyak, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The discourse of 'mother tongue' education has received an increased attention in Nepal's national education policy debates in the post-1990 political regime. Framed within a right-based discourse, Indigenous/ethnic minority communities have taken mother tongue education as a right to preserve, promote and learn in 'mother tongues'. The constitution and major educational policies and programmes have ensured children's right to obtain education in their mother tongue. Yet, the implementational space of 'mother tongue education' is narrowing as schools continue to adopt an English as a medium of instruction (EMI) policy from the early grades. Research and consulting papers have highlighted the lack of mother tongue teachers, funding support, textbooks and awareness of language communities as major factors affecting the implementation of mother tongue education (e.g., Seel et al., 2015; Fillmore, 2020). However, such findings not only ignore the oppressive history against Indigenous languages but also, and more importantly, erase the collective activism of Indigenous people for equitable language policies. The purpose of this paper is to examine how dominant policy actors use sacētanā (awareness) as an ideological tool to rationalize the lack of implementational space for mother tongue education. More specifically, I discuss how schools misframe sacētanā of Indigenous people and position them as non-epistemic beings in language policy creation and implementation.

Building on 'misframing' (Fraser, 2009), 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007) and 'deficit ideology' (Gorski, 2011), I discuss how schools rationalize the erasure of mother tongue education. The data for this paper are drawn from an ethnographic case study of a public school from eastern Nepal. Located in a Yaakthung indigenous village, the school recently discontinued the teaching of Yaakthung mother tongue to implement an EMI policy. The nature of data I discuss include the interviews and informal interactions with teachers and parents and the observation of language practices in the school and community. I will also review the policy documents to discuss how the micro realities of mother tongue education are linked with macro deficit ideologies that see Indigenous people as non-epistemic and languageless subjects and reproduce monolingual mentality. The main argument I make in the paper is that misframing sacētanā is a political tool for policymakers to mask their inability to understand and implement the educational, linguistic and sociopolitical values of mother tongue education.

Himalayan Art Connecting Asia: The Legacy of John C. Huntington (1937-2021) I
Chair: Sarah Richardson (University of Toronto)

For more than 40 years, John C. Huntington served as Professor of Art History at The Ohio State University, teaching students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels about Asian art. While his broad interests spanned Buddhist art and architecture across Asia, he was particularly interested in Himalayan visual culture, and connected artistic traditions and their Himalayan histories. He leaves behind a legacy of training many of today's scholars who work and teach in Asian and specifically Himalayan arts, many of whom now work in colleges, Universities, and museums across North America and Asia.

This panel will bring together for the first time since his passing last year a few of John's graduate students who will reflect on his impact on their work and their training through the approaches and methods he shared, or in their teaching strategies and research interests today. We hope to use this panel space to think about some of the unique outlooks and methods he engendered in us, and how the research that we continue today is indebted to core questions and interests he encouraged in our early training with him. Further, John was keen to share and expand knowledge about the impact and contributions of the Himalayan artistic region across Asia, and he often taught and argued for Himalayan arts as a specific cultural contributor and not merely a conglomeration of East and South Asian elements as it had so often been previously discussed.

John was a larger than life, enigmatic teacher, who shared his passions and deep knowledge of photography, graphics and visual communications design, stone sculptures, initiation rituals, painting styles, Buddhist pilgrimage practices, Mount Meru cosmologies, Kushan coins, Daruma dolls and Japanese food with many generations of students, and who leaves behind much that we remain thankful for. Bringing together scholars who work on arts both ancient and modern, and who work as Himalayan specialists, broader Asianists, or contemporary art curators, this panel will explore some of the many gifts that John has left behind.

Lute, Sword, Snake, and Parasol: The Study of Representations of the Four Great Kings in China and its Tibetan Connections
Tianshu Zhu (University of Macau)

The Four Great Kings are guardians of the four quarters of the world. As a group, they are among the most frequently represented protective deities in Buddhist art across different traditions. In Tibetan Buddhist art, they are commonly painted at the entrance way at a Buddhist temple and sometimes appear in thanka paintings as minor deities. In their standard iconography in Tibet, they wear full armor with blowing sleeves and scarves. Each figure holds an exclusive attribute—lute, sword, snake, and parasol—from the east, south, west, to the north respectively. Such iconography of the Four Great Kings in Tibet is generally regarded as following a Chinese style. Actually, in the long history of representing the Four Great Kings in Chinese Buddhist art, the iconography of fixing on the set of lute, sword, snake, and parasol as the attributes of the Great Kings did not appear until the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368). And there is no direct textual base in the Chinese cannon for this iconography. The closest texts, which scholars have found and frequently cited, are two Tibetan liturgies on Bhaiṣajyaguru translated into Chinese in the Yuan and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties respectively. Overall, the scholars on Chinese Buddhist art perceive the formation of this iconography in China as an influence from Himalayas. Then, is this iconography originated in Tibet or China? In the past, since this iconography of the Four Great Kings in either China or Tibet is clear, and identifying the group image of the Great Kings of this iconography is no problem, comprehensive in-depth study on this iconography is lacking. This study pieces together the development of this iconography in China with extant visual and textual evidences. Ultimately, the history of this iconography reveals the mutual influence between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist art, an aspect, which has not been fully realized in the field.

Deconstructing Buddhism: Exploring Evidence of Early Vajrayāna Practices by the Paḷola-Śāhi Dynasty
Rebecca Twist (Pacific University)

The complex discourse on the beginnings of Vajrayāna Buddhism in art incorporates Buddhological texts and images as supporting evidence. Interestingly, both Buddhist images and texts have been found that can be attributed to the Paṭola Śāhi dynasty through inscriptions and dates. This dynasty ruled during the 6th-8th centuries over the country of Bolor, in what is today, Northern Pakistan. Bolor consisted of both the present regions of Gilgit and Baltistan, which were key components in the transcontinental travel system connected to the Silk Roads that were utilized by Buddhist monks and travelers. This paper explores the visual and literary record attributed to this dynasty. In a contextual examination of the Buddhist Gilgit Manuscripts, the colophons reveal their royal patronage of texts that feature some of the key aspects with precise symbolic meanings to initiates at different levels as part of the soteriological methodology of Vajrayāna Buddhism, such as mudrās, dhāranīs, mantras, maṇḍalas, and sādhanas. Moreover, using a lens of Buddhist theoretical principles and practice, I examine the Patola Śāhi dynasty's visual culture as well. These images reveal a pattern of visual signifiers that are most likely used to depict an early form of a sambhogakaya Buddha or meditational construct: indexical signs of the crown, silk ribbons, cape, and ornaments. As such, I propose that some are relevant to an early esoteric form of Vairocana Buddha as an archetypal Adior Primordial Buddha. As the descriptor of dharmakāya, he can be identified not only through the sambhogakaya traits, but also with the two distinct mudrās found on these images that serve as attributes and identifiers of Vairocana. Thus, by exploring both the literary and visual framework, I demonstrate that the Buddhist theoretical ideologies and practices patronized by the Paṭola Śāhi dynasty are possible constructs of early esoteric Buddhism.

Virupa in the Deccan: Parsing Vajrayana and Nath Sampradaya Legacies at Panhale-Kaji
David Efurd (Wofford College)

Depictions of mahasiddhas occur among the caves at Panhale-Kaji in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, India, a site spanning early Buddhist, Vajrayana, and Nath Sampradaya periods of occupation (third through twelfth centuries CE). One notes with great interest a site in which both tantric Buddhist iconographies and Nath identities are found, given certain legendary associations between traditions and shared reverence of siddhas/naths, in addition to divergent sectarian beliefs and practices. Previously, scholarly interpretation of some siddha reliefs had been plagued by a rigid demarcation between Vajrayana iconographies and later Nath Sampradaya reuse of the site, reflecting prejudices casting Nath practices as moralizing correctives to a degenerative tantric tradition, and leading to the misidentification of some images at the caves. More recently, Mallinson (2019) identified a prominent sculpted relief on cave 14, itself spanning eras of both Buddhist and Nath Sampradaya occupation, as Virupaksa, also known as Virupa in the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. This paper seeks to question how this relief and similar examples navigated complex sectarian histories at Panhale-Kaji, given strong similarities between the depiction of Virupa at the site and his representation in Himalayan art. Revisiting and questioning the original religious affiliation of reliefs is essential to clarifying the chronology of religious developments at Panhale-Kaji, as well as charting the development, sources, and reach of iconographies present in Nepalese and Tibetan sculpture and painting.

A Teacher of Enlightenment: Memories of John C. Huntington
Kimberly Masteller (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)

In the fall of 1994, I walked into Hayes Hall on the Ohio State University campus with a combination of excitement and trepidation, not knowing what to expect. I came to do my graduate study of South Asian art history with the famous Huntingtons. While I was Professor Susan L. Huntington's advisee, I and my cohorts were never the students of just one of them. The next four years were an intellectually rigorous, challenging, and inspiring time. From Professor John C. Huntington (1937-2021), I learned about the philosophies and methods of Buddhism and how they are manifested and communicated in the arts. I learned the practices of photography and field work, joining one of John's Ohio State documentation teams in Nepal, and I had my first taste of curation, working on a team-organized exhibit of the Rezk Collection. Together, John and Susan galvanized my life-long passion for Asian art and helped me to hone it into a vocation. In reflection, I see traces of John Huntington's teachings each time I give a lecture or gallery talk on Buddhism and in a recent Tibetan art exhibition that I co-organized with my own mentee, Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellow Isabel Vargas, called *Teachers of Enlightenment*. This paper will address some of my experiences in order to present John C. Huntington as a teacher and in honor of his transformative contributions to generations of students.

Migration and Transnational Futures I
Chair: *Sienna Craig (Dartmouth College)*

Migration and the Future of Aging in Place
Geoff Childs (Washington University), Sonam Lama (Independent Architect and Urban Planner)

Demographic trends portend emerging challenges for Himalayan elders to approach the end of the life course in their natal villages, places saturated in dense kinship networks and imbued with cultural meaning. Over the past decades declining fertility and increasing longevity signal that Nepal is approaching the latter stage of demographic transition which is characterized by population aging (an increase in the proportion of the population aged 60 or 65 and older). With the high propensity for young people to migrate, whether internationally for employment or from rural to urban areas for education, in situ family networks elderly people rely on for care are eroding quickly. This paper addresses the conference theme Himalayan Futures by presenting data from the authors' pilot study in Tsum and Nubri, Gorkha District, titled Migration, Aging, and Challenges of the Built Environment in Himalayan Communities. The paper focuses on family compositions and networks of assistance, including adult children who live in the communities and those who have moved elsewhere, to explore challenges the elderly face in navigating domestic spaces and the evolving nature of caregiving strategies.

Transnational Futures: Aspirations of the Lahure Life
Sanjay Sharma (National University of Singapore)

This paper offers a gender analysis of the aspiration of transnational futures. It analyses women's performativity and negotiations under patriarchy through their military-migration (*lahure*) aspirations. More specifically, the paper is concerned with the premigration aspirations and capabilities of young women from Nepal, and their transnational futures. Through ethnographic interviews and internet memes, this paper builds on the yet unfulfilled aspiration of Nepali women to become British Gurkha soldiers and goes beyond the Gurkha dreams with women's enlistment in domestic and foreign forces as a part of their *lahure* aspirations. On the one hand, these women with *lahure* aspirations challenge the traditional notion of men as the face of the military by seeking enlistment. On the other hand, they perform under the larger masculine tropes and traditional beliefs of living the *lahure* life, which by default is understood to be a "good life." While aspirations of the "good life" is a key driving force for transnational migration, migration as a *lahure* is surrounded by cultural and social factors that transcend beyond the "good life." Ironically, regimental migration may not necessarily lead to a "good life" because of the risks involved. Under such a scenario, the ideas of "migration as freedom" and the "capacity to aspire" can be deemed gendered and classist and highlight the conflict between the aspirations of the people from the Global South and Global North.

From Everest Summiteer to Taxi Driver: Sherpa as a Translocal Himalayan Community Based on International Migration from Nepal to the United States
Ornella Puschiasis (INALCO)

Sherpa migration in New York appears on the newspapers as an "anectdote" and has long been undocumented until recently (Sherpa, 2019), whereas Queens borough host the largest concentration of this Himalayan community outside of Nepal. Approximately 5,000 Sherpas live in New York, and play a key role back in their home village. In addition to financial remittances, those migrants export ideas and practices in Nepal called "social remittances" (Levitt, 1998) allowing nonmigrants's lives to be transformed without moving and reconfiguring Sherpa identity. Brickell and Datta (2011) go beyond the notion of "transnationalism" to speak of "translocality" and thus characterize this overlap of places in migrants life.

Multilocalization is the gateway of this research who intends to understand in which extent Sherpas living far away from their local village have a growing influence on everyday life in Nepal. Based on in-depth interviews and multi-sited fieldwork, from the Everest region to Kathmandu and New York done in 2016, this study in geography reveals a high level of "connectedness" and of resilience. Beyond its familial network, since 1996 the diaspora relies on the Sherpa kiydug. This non-profit association promotes a strong ethnical identity and the involvement in local committees in Everest region through social networks. Five years later, this mobility of Sherpas in United States, as for the Mustangi community (Gurung et al., 2021), is even more "essential" and offers a level of financial and social security who has been challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brickell, K. and Datta, A. (2011). Translocal geographies: spaces, places, connections. Ashgate.

Gurung, T.W., Amburgey, E., & Craig, S. R. (2021). Unsettling the American Dream: Mobility, Migration and Precarity among Translocal Himalayan Communities during COVID-19. Development and Change.

Levitt, P. (1998). Social remittances: migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. International Migration Review, 32(4), 926–48.

Sherpa, P.Y. (2019). Sustaining Sherpa language and culture in New York. Book 2.0, 9(1-2), 19-29.

Being, Belonging, and Community-Making in Transnational Spaces: A Case Study of Nepali Students as Transient Immigrants in Canada
Amrita Gurung (Concordia University)

Scholars have recently problematized literature on transnationalism by arguing that international student mobility is viewed in a very linear fashion as a one-way transfer of students from global south to the global north. Until early 2010, given the transient nature, the international student migrants drew little scholarly attention, due to which student mobility remains highly undertheorized. However, some recent studies have started to unpack student mobility and found it to be a highly dynamic and complex process. Studies have found that students act as links between places and people, and between time and space. They have also been described as facilitators of cultural exchange and transnational subjects who effect political and social change in their home countries. Although the existing studies provide valuable insights into student mobilities, the knowledge of students' roles in diaspora community making remains largely overlooked in the scholarship of diaspora and transnationalism. The shift in the ways in which international student migrants are viewed from one who migrated in a vacuum to facilitators of cultural exchange and knowledge has led scholars to rethink the role of international students in community making in diasporic transnational spaces. Following Sara Schneiderman's (2015) concept of 'village' as a central tenet of mobility and a set of social relations, participant observation will be used to assess the roles and interactions of Nepali students including my own in the making of a Nepali community in transnational diasporic space of Montreal in Canada.

Room NF 006
Postcolonial Nomadic Livelihoods in India and Pakistan
Chair: *Verena La Mela (University of Fribourg)*

The Impact of Market Exposure on Economic Security and Social Capital: Empirical Evidence from a Pastoral-Nomadic Community in Changthang, Ladakh
Adina Ara (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

With the increasing penetration of market in the nomadic area of Ladakh, there is evidence of changing preference among nomadic community of Ladakh. The younger generation, are leaving their traditional occupation of animal rearing and moving to cities in search for employment and education for their children. This paper tries to study the effect of market penetration on the economic security of the nomadic population of Changthang and does the effect on economic security in turn has effect on the social capital especially focusing on trust and cooperation. The data is collected, by conducting primary survey in the region of Kharnak and Kharnakling. The data analysis reveals that with the increase in the degree of exposure to market, there is an increase in the economic insecurity among the people of this region. The growing economic insecurity in turn has a negative impact on the social capital reducing trust and cooperation among people.

Intersections of Colonialism and Covid-19 within Nomadic Lives: Nation-State Machinations and Pastoralism within the Gujjar and Bakkarwal Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir
Afreen Faridi (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Tribal marginalisation exacerbates due to an absence of developmental discourse based on social-constructionist (Stammers, 1993, 1999) and eco-materialist (Foster, 2000) perspectives on rights and power. While the Indian government has promoted policy tools that enable tribal groups to represent their interests and become collaborators in the policymaking process, the tribal response to the state policy of marketisation and globalisation is nebulous (Agrawal, 2005). In this regard, there is a need to locate the extent of the 'integration' of tribes into the mainstream mode of production to enable appropriate policy recommendations for tribal welfare in the contemporary SDG paradigm. This shall be undertaken by situating shifts in modes of production and reproduction within the Gujjar & Bakkarwal tribe of J&K by locating changing structure of communitarian property and ownership rights.

The proposed paper shall analyse the implementation of the Forest Rights Act to determine the transformation in spatial mobility and land ownership amongst pastoral tribes in the 'modern' nation-state and the predominant market system through the notion of 'adverse inclusion' (Nathan & Xaxa, 2012). Such an analysis would unravel the prospective impact of colonialism and Covid-19 on both adults and children- through variance in land ownership within nomadic pastoralists of Jammu and Kashmir living in border areas and within a conflict zone in the era of a global pandemic. In the context of the lived experiences of the Gujjars and Bakkarwals, the framework will be used to view the impact of changed federal structure in the region post abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, impediments to spatial mobility due to the pandemic, and the existence of sectarianism in national and regional politics.

The Land Question of the Himalayas: The Monyul Case in Western Arunachal Pradesh, India
Ru-Yu Lin (University of Sussex)

Monpa's traditional territory, Monyul, has been through modern state territorialization in the early 20th century and separated into three parts in China, India and Buthan. The formal institution limits the indigenous pastoralists' access to the grazing land, compromising pastoralists' mobility and communities' long-standing trade and social ties. The Monpa's sacred landscape and resource repository have been others' battlefields, energy-mining sites, and national borderland of defence; also the mountain/land has become a transactional good in recent years. Roads, army camps, war-themed tourism parks, hydropower plants, reforestation plantations, and multi-storage concrete buildings, comprised a new landscape embodying the collective aspirations juxtaposing the religious and spiritual marks. On the local institution side, the traditionally gender-based allocation of land inheritance has been challenged, and ideas of wealth and family assets have been reorganized. This paper takes the lens of agrarian change and aims to provide an additional perspective on the visual and ethical perspectives of sustainable rural livelihoods and transboundary resource conflict. I argue that the way the mountain was recognised and experienced reflects the images of land transitioned through the technological and epistemological development encounter, which failed to languish the spiritual importance and ethical concerns of the key stakeholders. Including properties beyond matters can bring the legal and scientific understanding of the land true to its value. Bearing the disproportional prices of global warming, the indigenous condition could benefit from decolonising the definition of capital and expanding the conceptual frame of environmental justice.

Religion and Culture I: Connecting across Space and Time
Chair: *Lauren Leve (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)*

Interfaith Veneration of the Virgin Mary in the Himalaya
Joseph Evans (Villanova University)

The Virgin Mary is venerated by millions of South Asians of almost every major religious tradition. This trend extends into the northern Himalayan region of the subcontinent, where Mary is visibly present through a multitude of shrines, Catholic churches, and institutions that display her statues and images. While Catholicism is a small minority among the various Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist areas of the Himalayas, it retains a ubiquitous presence through a network of dioceses, educational institutions, and social services that are ingrained in the socio-cultural sphere. This paper will examine Marian veneration as a possible source of interfaith unity and harmony in the Himalaya. This paper will approach Himalayan veneration of Mary through a historical and cultural analysis and its relation to Marian veneration in other parts of the subcontinent. Although the Himalaya lacks the large shrines found in other parts of South Asia, such as Vailankanni, in Tamil Nadu, or Mariamabad, near Lahore, these sites serve as both pilgrimage sites for Himalayan devotees and inspiration for smaller interreligious devotion in Nepal, northern India, and Kashmir. This research also compares Catholic conceptions of Mary with the three dominant religious traditions of the Himalaya and identifies the importance of interfaith Marian veneration for the region. I will argue that Mary can serve as a bridge to enhance the future of interfaith unity and cooperation for pursuing peace and the common good.

The Divine as Child and Mother Goddess: On the History and Practice of Kunwarikā Devī Worship in the Garhwal Himalayas
Vineet Gairola (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad), Shubha Ranganathan (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad)

Kunwarikā devī is one of the forms of Adi Śaktī (primordial goddess) who is represented as a kanyā (unmarried little girl). She is worshipped both as a child and as a mother goddess in the Garhwal Himalayas. Earlier, her worship took place in 1927, and now the worship took off after 92 years from 2019 to 2021. The devī through her symbol known as barma ṭhañkrā (a long pole of wood with a dome on top with yantrās inside it held by a group of people), travels to different villages to give blessings to the devotees for their safety and well-being. It is an important site to look at the relationship between geography and divinity as Uttarakhand is referred to as the dev bhūmi 'land of the Gods'. The findings in this research are based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Bhattwari-Maṇiguha region and Kandārā village in the Rudraprayāg district of Uttarakhand. The paper elucidates how the history of the devī, her worship, story, and geography—all are connected with each other. This text also entails the relationship between personal emotional catharsis and the immediate environment where a deity is intimately connected with the entire community. The immediate liminal space between the inside and the outside becomes a creative space where an intrapsychic and a sociological interaction with the devī (divine) takes place.

The Dusshera of Kullu: A Unique 'Site' for the Assimilation of Cultures
Sujata Chaudhary (McGill University), Tarun Thakur (Himachal Pradesh University)

The international festival of Kullu Dusshera is a popular cultural and religious event of the Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh. It also exhibits a unique assimilation of mainstream Hindu gods and religious practices and already existing local structures of religious authorities. This was evident in the celebrations of October 2021 that involved an expiation ritual of Kushtu Kahika which was performed to 'undo' the impact of COVID-19 regulations that were in place in the year 2020. With these restrictions in place less than seven deities were invited to participate in Dusshera celebrations leading to resentment among uninvited deities and eventually to the performance of Kushtu Kahika ritual which is performed to 'correct' the wrong done by the community as a whole. The uniqueness of this performance lay in the fact it was performed during Dusshera which is a popular festival associated with mainstream Hindu gods and goddesses, Rama, and Durga. The performance of an indigenous ritual which finds no mention in the mainstream Hindu culture shows the continued relevance of local rituals and religious specialists involved in it. This paper treats Kullu Dusshera as an important 'site' where the religious practices of mainstream Hinduism and indigenous practices come together to exist in a manner that 'preserves' the authenticity of local religious traditions. The paper argues that despite process of assimilation local deities and rituals in Kullu district have retained their authenticity while at the same time they continue to adopt the pan-Indian Hindu practices.

Angun Bédang: Religious Revival, Tribal Enlightenment, and Futurities in the Indo-Chinese Borderlands
Shweta Krishnan (George Washington University)

Since the 1980s, the Tani tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam have striven to revive a religious discourse called Donyipolo. Members of this movement believe that Hindu, Christian and secular inroads decimated the authority of Donyipolo shamans in the Indo-Tibetan-Chinese borderlands. As a part of the effort to strengthen the authority of Donyipolo, the revivalists publish a book called the Angun Bédang, which translates to "the Enlightened Path." This book combines old shamanic verses with prayers composed in the past four decades by members of the movement. The songs teach adherents how to relate both to a spiritual world, populated by ancestral spirits and deities, and to the material world that they dwell in today. This reorientation to the spiritual and material world is seen as an "enlightenment," that will equip adherents with the capacity to shape futures that draw on tribal imaginations, world views and epistemes.

In this paper, I examine the Angun Bédang—both as text and as a material object that can be held, read, preserved—to ask how the book assembles tribal futurities as it circulates among the Tani tribes. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with adherents of the movement, this paper will ask how "tribal enlightenment" and "futurities" complicate competing notions of enlightenment and futurity that circulate in these regions vis-à-vis Hinduism, Christianity and secular modernity. Additionally, I will also examine the semiotic-material assemblage that the Angun Bédang produces, by showing how tribal enlightenment draws adherents into material-spiritual figurations in the Indo-China borderlands.

Room EM 119
Revisiting the Frontier: Colonial Legacies and Lived Realities in Himalayan Border-Worlds I

From regime change in Afghanistan in the North-West, Indo-Chinese tensions in the North, and the influx of Burmese refugees in the North-East, the Himalaya today are often at the center of key world events. For those living in these rugged borderlands, however, such geopolitical tensions are a part of everyday life. Before territorial borders became ubiquitous, the frontier was the dominant spatial idiom to frame the limits of sovereignty and political relations. At the same time, the frontier was much more than a political concept; it could signify a moral justification for imperial expansion, a zone of emerging political relationships, an ensemble of political techniques and technologies, the limits of scientific geographic knowledge, a literary trope, an exotic and unruly landscape perceived to be populated by equally exotic and unruly people, or a place to ratify colonial masculine stereotypes. Himalayan frontier space was, thus, perceived in multiple ways, constructed through multiple practices, and experienced as multiple life-worlds.

But what changed when these frontier spaces became borders? And what impact does the legacy of producing frontier spaces have on the everyday lives of people who dwell in what are today referred to as Himalayan borderlands? Taking these questions as starting points of enquiry and tools for collective analysis, the papers on this panel address the following themes: The meaning of terms such as border, frontier, home, and 'Himalaya' for communities living in places that are designated as 'borderlands,' and the ways in which these terms manifest themselves in everyday objects and practices; The changing and contested meanings of political authority, space, place, and territory in the context of Himalayan borderlands; The role and means of circulation of ideas, people, and things in the construction of Himalayan identities; Continuities and changes in colonial and pre-colonial ways of knowing on the ecological, ritual, economic, and political practices of Himalayan borderland communities; The impact of development discourses and modern identity politics in borderland subject formation; The role of infrastructures such as roads, dams, bridges, and fences as well as cartographic projects in the creation of Himalayan frontiers and borderlands.

Chair: *Galen Murton (James Madison University)*

Friendship and International Relations in the Himalayas: Bhutan and Beyond
Nitasha Kaul (University of Westminster)

The shifting lines been strategy and sympathy have played an important role over time in constructing frontiers. This article posits that friendship has been a particularly fertile and creative category against the backdrop of imperial expansion and modern state consolidation in the Himalayas. The term 'friendship' is deployed as a key diplomatic category in Bhutan's most significant geopolitical relationship, that with its much larger neighbour India. However, the origin of this friendship is always traced back to the mid-20th century post-colonial period. In contradistinction to this, I constellate a much longer history of this friendship with a special focus on the landmark 1910 Treaty of Punakha between Bhutan and Britain, which was a key turning point in Bhutan's relations with its southern neighbor (British India at the time) and placed Bhutan's external relations under the guidance of Britain. This present work the first detailed scholarly analysis of why this treaty was significant and identifies the factors that were at work in how it came to be signed. The 1910 treaty was signed at a watershed moment after the then recent installation of a monarchy in Bhutan in 1907, and against the great game backdrop of Qing activities in Tibet and British interests in the region; throughout the 20thcentury, the impact of this friendship treaty was of paramount significance, and its shadow continues well into the 21st century.

Bhutan, Sikkim, and India's 'Mongolian Fringe'
Swati Chawla (O.P. Jindal Global University)

Phrenological and racial taxonomies invented in nineteenth century Europe were writ large upon policy and realpolitik in the Himalaya and the northeast in the colonial period. British Indian Foreign Secretary Olaf Caroe conceptualized the "Mongolian Fringe" in a 1940 official note as India's "inner ring of defense," comprising Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the "North East Frontier Tracts." He believed that the inhabitants of this region had a "predominantly Mongolian population," and were of an inferior racial stock than the people of the plains. The postcolonial state inherited this prejudice. In 1950, India's first Home Minister, Sardar Patel, cautioned Prime Minister Nehru about the "pro-Mongoloid prejudice" along the country's northern and eastern frontiers. However, racialized thinking did not just inflect colonial and postcolonial attitudes, but also fueled struggles for self-determination. In the decades after Independence, political leaders across India's "Mongolian fringe"—from Ladakhi Buddhists to Naga nationalists—claimed to be part of "the great Mongolian family," and demanded greater autonomy based on racial and cultural difference from India. In this paper, I will show how the Himalayan Buddhist kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim deployed the vocabulary of racialized othering of their peoples as "Mongoloid" in their negotiations with the Cabinet Mission and other constitutional bodies. They emphasized their connections with Tibet, and distanced themselves from Indian princely states, to argue against joining the Indian Union at the cusp of the transition from colonial rule and the lapse of British paramountcy.

The Ghost of the Disappeared Tibetan State: How Tawang became a Flashpoint in China-India Border Disputes
Dibyesh Anand (University of Westminster)

Frontiers of empires and colonising nation-states have been homelands for people and yet those very people have witnessed their lives, histories, cultures and stories being shaped by, and in some cases, dictated by, larger empires and nation-states. Tibet and Himalayan region has been acute and continuing witness to this. The paper deals with China India border dispute in general and Tawang in particular. It argues that despite the efforts of modernist China and India to rewrite history, it is the legacy of traditional Tibetan dispute in what is seen as Himalayan frontier region. The paper will focus on cartographical state and its contested relations with its neighbours that continues to shape China-India border, diplomatic, and political processes through which British India and then independent India severed Tawang from Tibet and occupied it, while China occupied Tibet, erased traditional state, and exercised modernist sovereignty over it. The paper will also argue for a politically engaged scholarship on the region that speaks truth to the power of empires and colonising nation-states.

A New Monastic Geographicity? Buddhist Tourist Circuits in the Indian Himalaya
Swargajyoti Gohain (Ashoka University)

Post 1959, with the reconstitution of a Tibetan diasporic community in India, important monasteries displaced from Tibet were rebuilt in India. Not only have these monasteries contributed to preserving and promoting Tibetan Buddhist traditions in India, but they also led to a revival of Buddhist pilgrimage and tourist circuits. While scholars have focused on the reinvention of Buddhism in India through analysis of Buddhist sites and universities (Bodh Gaya, Nalanda etc.), in this paper, I am interested in seeing how performance of monastic Buddhism through revival of monastery spaces, Buddhist festivals, and Buddhist sacred spaces have led to a reinvention of Buddhism in the Himalayan borderlands, in a departure from an older "monastic geographicity". I examine the new tourist circuits that coincide with monastery circuits in western Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India. These Buddhist monasteries in the Indian Himalayan regions blur the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism by tapping into the spiritual tourism potential in India. Performance of monastery festivals, construction of sprawling monastery quarters, opulent guesthouses, and other tourism infrastructures contribute to increased visibility for monastic Buddhism. Unlike the diasporic reinvention of Tibetan Buddhism in India, discussed by Toni Huber, Donald Lopez and other scholars, such performativity through tourism in contemporary India enables new forms of community and networks among Indian Himalayan Buddhists.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #2
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14

11:00-12:30

Himalayan Linguistic Futures: Language as Expressive Practice, Learning, and Survivance II

Chair: *Prem Phyak (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)*

This panel brings together diverse scholars working on language issues and linguistic rights within educational and religious contexts, and more widely in society at large. The Himalayan belt is one of the world's most linguistically diverse ecoregions, home to around 1/6th of the world's spoken and written languages. Notwithstanding its position as a global language hotspot, the Himalayan region is also a site of linguistic repression, epistemic injustice, transformation and innovation; an interconnected and multilingual zone in which speech communities and languages straddle political borders and have long been and still are in constant negotiation with multiple nation states, actively resisting sacred orthodoxies and state-led regimes of value and accreditation.

Informed by critical studies on stigma, oppression, language ideologies, borders and boundaries, linguistic rights, mother tongue education and the oral-written interface, the papers in this double panel explore complex questions around societal attitudes towards the use of different languages in schools, active translanguaging and linguistic knowledge-making, changing understandings of the relationship between spoken and written forms of language in Tibetan Buddhism, policy and planning in support of Indigenous languages, the gaps between international language rights and actual implementation and the multiple scales of linguistic oppression and resistance. The panel concludes with reflections by the discussant with a view towards seeing the papers through to publication in the near future.

Language Shaming among Ethnic Minoritized Students and Teachers in Nepali Schools
Pramod Sah (The Open University)

This presentation reports on the perspectives of teachers and students from an ethnic minoritized community to understand how the school's dominant language policy and societal language beliefs can lead to a context of language shaming, drawing on a critical ethnography of language-in-education policy in Nepal. The analysis shows that the school's language policymaking is a process of "objectivizing of subjects" (Foucault, 1982) with the language skills that identify with the nation-state, which results in the language ideology that stigmatizes the use of local/Indigenous languages in education. In addition, stigmatizing such languages is also embedded in high-caste and high-class narratives available in the immediate community. Therefore, I argue that the societal attitudes about the use of language in education, be it their own mother tongue or a national language, are shaped by what ideological and discursive spaces are available for those languages in schools and immediate communities.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry, 8*(4), 777-795

Multiple Conceptualizations of Tibetan Languages in Chone
Bendi Tso (University of British Columbia)

This paper examines the contested conceptualizations of Tibetan language in contemporary China. It focuses on Chone Tibetan which has experienced dual linguistic oppression from Chinese, the national language, and Amdo Tibetan, the regional standard, and is losing its vitality since 1950s. I examine people's varied descriptions of their heritage language, ranging from 'sacred language,' 'black language,' 'golden language,' 'useless language,' 'unique language,' and so on. In situating these conceptualizations within their own socio-historical contexts and putting them in tension with one another, this paper seeks to understand multiple forces, and their counterforces, in shaping the present linguistic landscape of Chone. Instead of understanding the linguistic landscape in Chone through the single lens of linguistic oppression and resistance, I argue that it is a space where various contestations, negotiations, and accommodations constantly intersect.

Glossaries for the Gods and Other Users: The Newar Online Dictionary Project
Christoph Emmrich (University of Toronto)

Among translators of Newar their complicated relationship with the range of available dictionaries at their disposal is one of the less well-kept professional secrets. Although the field is blessed with the existence of several lexicographical masterpieces, such as those compiled by Hans Jørgensen, Ulrike Kölver and Iswarananda Shresthacharya, Thakur Lal Manandhar and Anne Vergati, Indra Mālī, or the Cwasā Pāsā, to name only the most important ones, everyone who seriously reads Newar texts knows that it is advisable to keep at least three, if not more Newar dictionaries handy on one's desk or one's screen- and to keep some space for a few more Nepali, Hindi, or Sanskrit ones. Newar is not only a notoriously heterolingual idiom with texts containing both older and more recent lexical variants and drawing for their vocabulary from one or more regional prestige languages. Current reference works, as good as they may be, can turn out to be sensitively inconsistent or limited in their coverage. At the same time, copies of these dictionaries are hard to find, both in print and electronically, dramatically curtailing the ability for laypeople and academics worldwide to understand and translate Newar texts. This talk will detail how the emerging Newar Online Dictionary (NOD), a collaborative SSHRC-sponsored project based at the University of Toronto and partnering with a team from the University of Virginia, will try to make finding Newar words easier for more people and particularly for the global Newar community.

Digital Libraries of the Himalayas: Forms and Politics of Knowledge Production
Aarjav Chauhan (University of Toronto), Robert Soden (University of Toronto)

Digital libraries (DL), organized and managed collections of digital information, present a mode of convergence between the social and material bases of knowledge work and the relations of the participating people who produce knowledge [1]. Like the affordances of a traditional library, an effective digital library serves the needs, activities, and contexts of the people who use it, create it, and contribute to it [2]. In addition to aiding in the creation and use of knowledge, DL challenge existing practices of knowledge and the boundaries of knowledge communities [1]. DL when understood as maintainers of knowledge commons [4], provide an equitable platform for community-based peer-production of information and knowledge that justifies indigenous practices. DL constructed in and for the Himalayas encounter the tasks of catering to diverse social epistemics and navigating the landscape of sensitive cultural information [3]. They shape the politics and futures of knowledge production through community-based collaborative collections of journals, maps, music, art, and manuscripts [3]. This research is an evaluation of existing digital libraries of the Himalayan region. It aims to understand the social, technical, and political boundaries within which these DL function. Drawing on interviews with DL creators, curators, and participating communities, we question how studying DL within culturally diverse regions, such as the Himalayas, can tell us about information, knowledge, and processes of social order. This interdisciplinary study draws on from theories from science and technology studies, human-computer interaction, and information ecologies to provide a holistic understanding of DL catering to the Himalayas.

1. Van House, N. A. (2003). Digital libraries and collaborative knowledge. Digital library use: Social practice in design and evaluation, 271-95.

2. Bishop, A. P., Van House, N. A., Buttenfield, B. P., & Schatz, B. (2003). Introduction: Digital libraries as sociotechnical systems.

3. Drew, G. (2012). Digital Himalaya and the collaborative publishing experience. American Anthropologist, 114(4), 680-681.

4. Hess, C. & Ostrom, E. (Eds.). (2007). Understanding knowledge as a commons: From theory to practice (p. 24). Cambridge, MA: MIT press.

Himalayan Art Connecting Asia: The Legacy of John C. Huntington (1937-2021) II
Chair: *Sarah Richardson (University of Toronto)*

For more than 40 years, John C. Huntington served as Professor of Art History at The Ohio State University, teaching students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels about Asian art. While his broad interests spanned Buddhist art and architecture across Asia, he was particularly interested in Himalayan visual culture, and connected artistic traditions and their Himalayan histories. He leaves behind a legacy of training many of today's scholars who work and teach in Asian and specifically Himalayan arts, many of whom now work in colleges, Universities, and museums across North America and Asia.

This panel will bring together for the first time since his passing last year a few of John's graduate students who will reflect on his impact on their work and their training through the approaches and methods he shared, or in their teaching strategies and research interests today. We hope to use this panel space to think about some of the unique outlooks and methods he engendered in us, and how the research that we continue today is indebted to core questions and interests he encouraged in our early training with him. Further, John was keen to share and expand knowledge about the impact and contributions of the Himalayan artistic region across Asia, and he often taught and argued for Himalayan arts as a specific cultural contributor and not merely a conglomeration of East and South Asian elements as it had so often been previously discussed.

John was a larger than life, enigmatic teacher, who shared his passions and deep knowledge of photography, graphics and visual communications design, stone sculptures, initiation rituals, painting styles, Buddhist pilgrimage practices, Mount Meru cosmologies, Kushan coins, Daruma dolls and Japanese food with many generations of students, and who leaves behind much that we remain thankful for. Bringing together scholars who work on arts both ancient and modern, and who work as Himalayan specialists, broader Asianists, or contemporary art curators, this panel will explore some of the many gifts that John has left behind.

Lessons from the Field: Considerations for the Future of Himalayan Art History
Kerry Lucinda Brown (Savannah College of Art and Design)

While significant effort has been spent in recent years to repatriate objects stolen from Nepal's Kathmandu Valley, the opportunity to study Nepalese or Himalayan art at the university level is limited. Broad art historical survey courses at the undergraduate level rarely address Himalayan art, despite the recent push to globalize and diversify art history survey courses. Even in some of the more recent Global Art History survey textbooks, there is limited mention of art from the greater Himalayas and certainly no sections dedicated to the Indian Himalayas, Nepal, Tibet, or Bhutan. Often, the arts of the Himalayas are relegated to the periphery, as secondary to the more dominant geographies and cultures of South and East Asia. This paper addresses these concerns, while considering new ways forward, directly inspired by the mentorship I received under the guidance of Professor John C. Huntington at The Ohio State University. As both an undergraduate and junior graduate student, John encouraged me to experience the complexities of reading and interpreting visual forms, while also considering the underlying religious and cultural connections. John's willingness to consider how his students would benefit from his professional projects allowed for direct, experiential learning opportunities that brought art history to life. With this came opportunities to conduct field work in India and Nepal, in addition to invitations to collaborate on professional projects. As this paper will explore, John promoted the study of Himalayan art to understand the connections between South, Central, and East Asia. Rather than being at the periphery, he saw Himalayan art as situated in the center of dynamic cultural exchange across Asia. Within these experiences are lessons that can be used to develop strategies for promoting stronger engagement with Himalayan art history moving forward.

Marking Impermanence: The Life of the Object in Sonam Dolma Brauen's Conceptual Art
Sarah Magnatta (University of Denver)

In 1959, the family of artist Sonam Dolma Brauen (then age 6) made the heart-wrenching decision to leave their home in Tibet, traveling 1000 miles on foot through dangerous terrain while avoiding Chinese armed forces along the route. Throughout that journey, Brauen's mother, Kunsang Wangmo, carried with her an object of extreme importance: a small metal mold in the shape of a stupa. This mold—a device used to create images out of clay and sometimes ashes—was used by several generations of Brauen's family for its traditional function: to make tangible objects related to Tibetan Buddhist practice, those multiple and indexical images serving to "mark" impermanence and accumulate karmic merit.

Decades later, Brauen uses the same metal mold to create plaster images for her conceptual artworks, including those used in Red Carpet (2011) and My Father's Death (2010). The mold thus continues its role as a tool "marking" impermanence, the haptic nature of its creations reflecting the otherwise ephemeral status of the people or concepts invoked. But the mold also shifts from its "traditional" function as religious object; it breaks from the fate of many of these metal objects now sitting in museum collections (often unethically obtained) as static relics of the past. I propose a conversation regarding Brauen's artwork through a "biography" of the object as theorized by Arjun Appadurai. How might new functions emerge from old forms? And how might contemporary art be viewed through this changing life of the object?

Temples of Local Color: Representations of Taiwanese Identity
Christina Wei-Szu Burke Mathison (Ohio State University)

Acknowledging how John Huntington instilled in his students a desire to recognize and analyze distinct features of the development of Buddhism in regions throughout Asia, this paper considers the presence and role of temples in colonial painting during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945). The Japanese government used many aspects of society to assimilate their new Taiwanese subjects, including working to change faith practices. Shintoism was one way to instill in the colonized the understanding of the divine nature of the emperor, and the colonial government erected Shinto shrines throughout the island of Taiwan. The goal was to replace local Buddhist and Daoist religious practices that were a part of the identity of the Taiwanese people with Shinto, and therefore Japanese, beliefs. Similar to the development of Buddhist practices stemming from the Himalayan regions and spreading throughout Asia, temples in Taiwan developed their own local flavor and remained essential to the community despite the occupation. To the Japanese adjudicators of the imperial exhibitions in Taiwan and Japan, one aspect of the "local color" of the *nangoku*, or Southern Country, was captured in the regional architecture of Taiwanese temples. For these adjudicators, the temple architecture was an exotic feature of Taiwan. For Taiwanese painters such as Chen Cheng-po (1895-1947), the local temples represented a Taiwanese identity based in local tradition and cultural practices that contrasted with the goals of assimilation. Unbeknownst to the colonizers, the presence of the temples in paintings by Taiwanese artists served as powerful symbols of Taiwanese heritage.

Sometimes Legends Are True: Reflecting on John Huntington's "Buddhist Art, Theory, and Development" Seminar Almost Two Decades Later
Sarah Richardson (University of Toronto)

As a new Master's Student in Art History in the fall of 2004 I was excited to be taking the course "Buddhist Art Theory and Development" with my new supervisor, John Huntington. This was a very important class for John, and he saw it as the foundational requirement for all his graduate students. Indeed, he was so confident in this, that he had us deliver as one of our course work objects a set of clean, clear, and illustrated notes from the course, a five star binder with inner tabs given topics like "Sutras" "The Life of the Buddha" and "Mount Meru" that I still have today. The semester long course and its organization, along with the plethora of images he supplied in his lectures and the explanatory diagrams that he shared throughout the class, are indeed the first "Buddhist Art" course that I ever took and did lay a framework for my understanding of the art I would continue to study. For this paper I will revisit these notes, and reflect on how he so successfully conveyed a huge density of material and helped use sets of organized images to help us remember concepts that I still return to in my own teaching and research today.

Chronicling Refugees, Exile Communities, and Divided Families across the Himalayas

Chair: *Carole McGranahan (University of Colorado Boulder)*

The Career Choices of Nepalese Migrants' Children in Japan
Masako Tanaka (Sophia University)

Nepalese is the sixth-largest foreign immigrants in Japan, of which 10% of them are underage. Most of their residential status is "dependent," so they cannot extend it once their guardian leaves Japan. However, they will be able to apply for their residential status, e.g., a Long-term resident visa, if they complete high school level education in Japan. Therefore, they need to complete it to maintain their legal status in Japan. As background information, the paper introduces a variety of educational resources, including private schools established by Nepalese migrants in Japan.

Based on data obtained through the interviews of Nepalese migrant children aged between 15 to 25, the study aims to illustrate their career options, including their choices of schools, where they live, and what kinds of jobs they want to do after they graduate from Universities. The study highlights the careers of so-called "1.5 generation migrants" who studied at English medium schools in Nepal before migrating to Japan. They study at public schools, night schools, private tuition courses, or remote learning. The paper discusses the reasons behind their school choices, such as languages medium, affordability to pay tuition fees, or their legal status. It also features their dilemma between maintaining their own identity as Nepalese and integration into Japanese society. The study suggests the importance of further research on Nepalese migrants' children compared to their peers from other countries and Nepalese migrants' children in other destinations.

The Nepali Diaspora and Housing Politics in the U.S.
Andrew Nelson (University of North Texas)

As part of a larger project on housing politics and evictions in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex (DFW) of Texas, this paper focuses on the housing experiences of the Nepali diaspora in DFW. Based on exploratory research with a range of diasporic identities—students, refugees, DV-holders—I will analyze the relationship between race, class, immigration status, gender and housing. In particular, the paper will consider immigrant perspectives on housing policy in the U.S. by drawing from ethnographic portraits of interactions between immigrants and landlords, real estate agents, social service providers, activists/advocates, and neighbors. In conclusion, I will discuss how diasporic experiences relate to larger questions about housing justice in a context of rising rents and evictions.

The Meaning of Housing and Land Ownership for Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees in the United States: A Creative Non-Fiction Approach to Storytelling about Refugees and Home
Kathryn Stam (SUNY Polytechnic Institute)

Rakesh Baniya is now in his early twenties, tall and confident. If I flip through his Facebook photos, I see him on a trip to Joshua Tree, Hindu festivals, a video of him driving his father on a three-wheeled motorcycle, and then image after image of houses that Rakesh has listed for sale. Now a real estate agent in Cleveland, Rakesh works along with many other Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. When I met Rakesh ten years ago, he was in middle school. His family had recently resettled from a Nepali refugee camp to Utica, New York. I helped him with his homework. His mother used to invite me over for a typical Nepali lunch—dhal bhat—rice and spicy lentils, with pickled achaar vegetables and a spoonful of plain yogurt. My Nepali wasn't good enough to say much but I could show her that I appreciated her food by letting her refill each section of my brass plate one more time. I propose to write and present a story about the perspectives of formerly stateless people like the Rakesh and his multi-located communities of families and friends across the U.S. I am interested in what a creative non-fiction narrative can say about Himalayan/Nepali lives in the diaspora that a traditional research paper cannot, and vice versa.

A Refugee Forever: Bhutanese Refugees in Camps at the End of Resettlement
Lopita Nath (University of the Incarnate Word)

In 2020, the Bhutanese refugee resettlement program was formally ended. Agency offices like the IOM were closed, while the UNHCR office in Kathmandu began to plan what and how to deal with the remaining population of about 6809 in 2528 households. The official decision was easy, close and consolidate the seven camps to two, in Beldangi and Pathri, in the southeastern Nepal. This was hailed as one of the most successful refugee resettlement programs. However, those left behind in the refugee camps tell a different story. This paper will examine the stories of the refugees that did not resettle and the reasons why some of them chose not to. Many of the remaining population made rational choices not to leave, choosing homeland over living in a foreign country, while there were many who were not eligible to resettle, and had to make peace with the situation. Based on interviews in the refugee camps in Nepal, this paper will highlight stories of sacrifice, despair, love of homeland, hope of return, nostalgia, and memory. Third country resettlement is the last durable solution to a refugee crisis. however, the case of the Bhutanese refugees in the camps with pending decisions about the future of the 6809 people, raises the question about their status, citizenship, socio-economic and psycho-social responsibility. Will these people be absorbed into the Nepali population, or will they be able to return to their homeland Bhutan as bona fide citizens, or will they just fade from the minds and hearts of the people and be forgotten?

The Chronicles of Exile: A Generational Perspective of a Tibetan Community-in-Exile
Swati Condrolli (Panjab University)

This paper explores the experience of exile across three generations of the Tibetan community in Dharamshala. The community has completed more than six decades in exile in India now. It is an attempt to understand exile Tibetan community from a generational perspective. The general trend in generational studies on Tibetans has been that their classification is made based on the age groups or the decades when they arrived in India. However, this paper diverges in its categorization of generations by dividing them based on who happens to be the first Tibetan from their family to come to India in order to avoid over simplification of their narratives. Ethnographic field work for this research included long in-depth interviews with all the three generations of Tibetans in Mcleodganj, Dharamshala over a total span of eight months. The study draws three arguments for each generation. Conversations with the first generation reflects a deep and immense sense of gratitude towards India with an inherent disappointment with the inability to be able to return to their home-land. This sense of gratitude for the second generation is also accompanied with acclimatization in the host-country and thinking about their futures with the emerging realization that the return to homeland seems a far-fetched reality. The third generation seems to be caught in the question of where they belong with a claim of belonging with place of residence and an acceptance of exile as a permanent feature of their lives.

Room NF 006
Bhutanese Futures: Tensions, Preparations, and Prospects

This panel draws together four early career researchers who present a range of disciplinary perspectives on issues facing the future of Bhutan. Like many of its neighbors, Bhutan has undergone rapid development since the latter half of the 20th century, with exponential rises in technology, accessibility, and tourism. This has led to clear benefits, such as expanded access to education and healthcare, and significant improvements to infrastructure. Yet these developments have also led to tensions with the nation's concurrent goals of cultural preservation, mitigating the effects of global climate change, and strengthening their recently instituted democracy. Together, these forces lead to the need for individuals and institutions to navigate competing pressures of disparate priorities for their futures.

Sonam Deki provides insight on the impacts of climate change on Himalayan settlements and a case study of the current policies implemented in response to the threats faced in the region. In his paper, Sonam Nyenda presents the impacts of modernity on a 13th century family monastery as its leadership recasts the institution to better navigate the future, by re-establishing a residential renunciant community, restoring avenues for traditional education, and reinvigorating festival and dance performances with the goal of a systemic revitalization of its intangible cultural heritage. In her contribution, Deki Peldon explores the roles of geopolitics and spheres of influence in regional democracies, presenting considerations and potential impacts on the strength of democracy in the future. Matthew Robinson presents recent research conducted amongst the Bhutanese diaspora community in New York City to ascertain the mechanisms by which their children are educated in the cultures and traditions of their Himalayan homeland. Together, these papers highlight current research in environmental studies, religious studies, politics, and education that draw attention to the future trajectories of Bhutan and the broader Himalaya.

Chair: *Ariana Maki (University of Virginia)*

A Case Study on Climate Change and its Effects on Himalayan Nations
Sonam Deki (Royal University of Bhutan)

The study will examine the threat of glacial lake outbursts on the environment, economies, and human lives in Himalayan settlements. Global climate change threatens both the ecosystem and human society. Temperature rise has led to the rapid melting of ice in the northern region of the Himalayas, causing floods and affecting those living downstream. This paper will provide a case study based on documented incidents from the past.

The settlement patterns of the Himalayas are often concentrated along riverbanks due to the agricultural practices and practical concerns. Many countries such as Bhutan and Nepal depend on the predictability of perennial rivers and streams. However, while climate change has become a great challenge to developmental plans and activities all around the globe, it is particularly acute in the Himalayas. If significant climate change mitigation strategies are not adopted it will lead to various consequences such as floods, drying up of headwaters, threats to traditional agricultural systems, settlement displacement, and the loss of flora and fauna. Thus, the purposes of the study are to make people aware of the crisis and illustrate the significance of climate change policies to guide developmental plans and activities.

Facing Time and Change: A Case Study of Sumthrang Monastery in Central Bhutan
Sonam Nyenda (University of Virginia)

A text revealed by 14th century Buddhist master Orgyen Lingpa (1323-1360), *Brief Life of Padmasambhava* (Katang Dŭpa), says, "time does not change, but the human [does]". Most societal changes, intentional or unintentional, happen due to socio-cultural, political, or developmental activities that stem from human thoughts, choices, and actions.

Also subject to these forces is Sumthrang Monastery in central Bhutan, which, since its 1228 CE founding has been affected by religious politics, and, more recently, by contemporary socio- cultural realities and the modern education system. As one of the oldest extant monasteries in Bhutan, it was at one point a thriving Buddhist practice center and cultural touchstone. However, over the course of its twenty-eight successive lineage holders, it experienced centuries of vicissitudes. Today, Sumthrang monastery is undergoing a significant transformation, as its leadership community is revisiting their activities, trying to ascertain and respond to contemporary needs in an attempt to ensure their institute both befits modern times and maintains its relevance in the future.

This paper will summarize key events in Sumthrang's history, highlighting the roles it has played in the community and broader region before turning to the challenges it faces today. We will then review the changes that have impacted the resident monastic community, and the range of initiatives currently being taken up by the Sumthrang lineage to reinvigorate the monastery as a site of learning and a cultural repository.

Impacts of Nationalism and Regional Influences on the Political Transitions of Bhutan and Nepal
Deki Peldon (Royal University of Bhutan)

Democracy is facing a crisis as its values, including political rights and civil liberties, are declining around the world. If democracy is to prevail, some reasons for its decline need to be addressed. To this end, this paper addresses how nationalism and regional influences have affected the respective political transitions of Bhutan and Nepal. The research question is approached by analyzing leadership stability, ethnicity, and social systems, as well as the roles of regional giants India and China in Bhutan's and Nepal's political transitions. The findings show how viewing broader contexts of the conceptions of nationalism in Nepal and in Bhutan may contribute to refined understanding of the comparative transitions. In addition, regional influence, especially the significant role exerted by India in both cases, may help explain the differences in the political transitions of Bhutan and Nepal.

Educating for a Bhutanese Future: Examining Educational Dimensions of Bhutanese Expatriate Life in New York
Matthew Robinson (University of Virginia)

Focusing on the Bhutanese community living in New York city, I investigate how expatriate Bhutanese living in the U.S. approach educating their children in terms of exposing them to Bhutanese cultural, linguistic and religious values and practices. As they grow up in the U.S., the Bhutanese expatriate community endeavors to provide their children with access to *tshechu*, religious events, Dzongkha language instruction, and a variety of other formal events in the community. But how else are Bhutanese living in New York shaping the experiences of their community with the aim of cultural continuity, and how do community members—particularly youth—respond to these experiences?

Drawing on interviews with New York residents who are part of the Bhutanese community, I examine community members' beliefs and aspirations. Additionally, I draw on environmental factors, including community members' homes and local community spaces and/or religious sites, to interrogate how and to what extent spaces become educational landscapes, providing cultural resources and/or linguistic "affordances" (Gibson, 1979; van Lier, 2000), from which community youth can draw. The resulting portrait of expatriate Bhutanese life in New York reveals learning "in the practices of everyday life" (Lave, 2019, 1), including the implicit orientation toward a particular Bhutanese future that is embedded in that learning.

Gibson, J. J. (1979). The ecological approach to visual perception. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lave, J. (2019). Learning and everyday life: Access, participation, and changing practice. Cambridge University Press.

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Religion and Culture II: Environment and Sacred Geographies
Chair: *Frances Garrett (University of Toronto)*

"The Gods Must Be Angry:" A Study of Sacred Geography, Buddhist Belief, Environmental Implications in the Langtang Valley, Nepal
Ananta Hallahan (Rangjung Yeshe Institute)

Himalayan sacred valleys, referred to as "hidden lands" or *beyul* (*sbas yul*), serve as sanctuaries of ecological diversity, rugged alpine beauty, and Himalayan Buddhist heritage. Historical narratives attributed to *beyul* commonly involve the subjugation of local deities and wrathful spirits into dharma protectors (*chos skyong*) in reenactment of Guru Rinpoche's actions, and invoke a dire necessity to flee lands plagued by war, disease, and political strife for hidden valleys protected by steep mountain passes. The Langtang Valley (*glang 'phrang*), also known as Namgo Dagam (*gnam sgo zla gam*), is a prominent Nepalese example of *beyul*—a variety of what scholars of religion describe as sacred geography envisioned as a tantric *mandala*. The *beyul*, envisioned as a tantric *mandala*, serves as an ideal refuge for a healthy Buddhist society protected by powerful dharma protectors, spirits, and territory gods (*yul lha*). This ethnographic account of the people of the Langtang Valley and their recovery after the 2015 earthquake provides snapshots of perceptions of the landscape as sentient and fiercely karmic in nature. An understanding of the land as a tantric *mandala*—integrated with local stakeholders' ecological and developmental concerns—can be correlated to an active appreciation of the ecology in which Himalayan Buddhist moral constructs are embodied. In light of this understanding, we may examine efforts to counter increasing environmental degradation, such as ever-worsening glacial retreat caused by climate change, and improper waste disposal exacerbated by the Nepalese tourist trekking industry.

Surroundings and Agro-Pastoralist Harmonizing with the Help of Buddhist Ritual Practices and Local Deities' Offerings in the Highland Settlement of Zangrak (Kermi) Village in Northwestern Nepal
Sagar Lama (ICIMOD)

In this paper I will discuss traditional way of surrounding protection, having better crops and increase livestock numbers in Zangrak (Kermi:Nepali) village. In this way, people of Zangrak used to take support of village god's offering, serpent pray and Buddhist ritual practices to keeping peace, healthy and prosperous for both beings and surroundings. Zangrak is situated in northwestern part of Nepal (2700 m, asl), bordering to Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Small village about 100 households with 500 population, Nyingma Buddhism traditional followers and spoken ancient Tibetan dialogue. In different time period, it influenced by Shamanism, Kyagyupa and Nyingmapa sect respectively. Now such kind of traditional practices are dying in this communities, changing of livelihood pattern, sending children to school, government and NGO's development activities and as well new concept of environment and climate change. In this changing way, I am curious to study and explain through these following questions and points; (1) Number of main Local gods and major festivals, Shamans and mediator's (Dangri) roles and responsibility in the community. (2) How to conduct Buddhist ritual to make rain (Chharbeb), and stop (Namkag) on time, Serpent worship (Lubtor and Lubsang) to keeps water sources clean and stop serpent harms and diseases if something happened wrong into those serpents sensitive zone etc. (3) What are the major reasons giving up these practices and beliefs?

Himalayan Futures Between Religion and the Environment: The Case of the Boat on the Buddhist Sacred Lake
Lauren Leve (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)

In 2017, I was approached to join an interdisciplinary team studying climate change in the Himalayas. A group of scientists had identified a set of glacial lakes in Nepal's Khumbu as a site for their research. However, they had also been told that the lakes were sacred to the Buddhist inhabitants of the region. As an anthropologist who specializes in Himalayan Buddhism and culture, I was asked to help them navigate this conceptual landscape. This paper details the controversies that greeted us and analyzes the intersecting dynamics of knowledge, agency, and authority that their proposal to collect water samples from an inflatable raft made visible in a hotly contested political (and natural) climate. Nepal's constitution of 2072 (2015) granted indigenous communities increased ability to approve or reject scientific work—a longstanding desideratum given many scientists' observed disregard for religio-cultural traditions associated with a sentient landscape that defies categorical distinctions between religious ethics and the physical environment. Yet, this was only one of many local concerns, which also included economic dependence on tourism (including scientific research) and fear of possible negative impacts of climate change. Also at play in the high-altitude drama were questions of futurity which took the form of arguments about rationality, protection, and ritual verses scientific power. This presentation explores the ontological frictions at stake in our permitting experience and their connection to affective ecologies, the politics of identity, and claims about—and of—"the sacred" in the lived problem-space of the Anthropocene.

Sacred Trees and Chaityas: How an Old and New Worldview Meet
Dmytro Markov (A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies)

In Nepal, as well as in India, a cult of sacred trees is still alive and is a part of mainstream religion. Such trees as pipal and banyan has a special role. Pipal (*aswattha*, bodhi tree, a tree of enlightenment) has a close association with Buddha, as a tree under which Siddhartha got enlightened, while for Hindu tradition it is mainly connected to Vasudeva (a form of Vishnu). As D. Haberman writes, in fact from a traditional Indian Hindu point of view all trees are sentient but there is a group of the most important, among which pipal is a "king of trees". The border between nature and human is quite fluid if existing in that "traditional" paradigm—unlike a modernist understanding.

A cult of pipal and other sacred trees among Nepalese Buddhists is still poorly investigated. But all Nepalese Buddhist respect pipal and agree it couldn't be heart in any way—quite the same as Hindu. While the modern development of urban centers of Nepal Valley and new ideas about the preservation of ancient monuments, including numerous chaityas, is getting stronger, the problem with trees encroaching old chaityas arose. In that case activists (example of Chiva chaitya initiative in Kathmandu) and architects usually take decision to cut off the tree to save heritage. In that situation we see a contradiction between a traditional and contemporary understanding of a sacred tree in Nepal.

Revisiting the Frontier: Colonial Legacies and Lived Realities in Himalayan Border-Worlds II

From regime change in Afghanistan in the North-West, Indo-Chinese tensions in the North, and the influx of Burmese refugees in the North-East, the Himalaya today are often at the center of key world events. For those living in these rugged borderlands, however, such geopolitical tensions are a part of everyday life. Before territorial borders became ubiquitous, the frontier was the dominant spatial idiom to frame the limits of sovereignty and political relations. At the same time, the frontier was much more than a political concept; it could signify a moral justification for imperial expansion, a zone of emerging political relationships, an ensemble of political techniques and technologies, the limits of scientific geographic knowledge, a literary trope, an exotic and unruly landscape perceived to be populated by equally exotic and unruly people, or a place to ratify colonial masculine stereotypes. Himalayan frontier space was, thus, perceived in multiple ways, constructed through multiple practices, and experienced as multiple life-worlds.

But what changed when these frontier spaces became borders? And what impact does the legacy of producing frontier spaces have on the everyday lives of people who dwell in what are today referred to as Himalayan borderlands? Taking these questions as starting points of enquiry and tools for collective analysis, the papers on this panel address the following themes: The meaning of terms such as border, frontier, home, and 'Himalaya' for communities living in places that are designated as 'borderlands,' and the ways in which these terms manifest themselves in everyday objects and practices; The changing and contested meanings of political authority, space, place, and territory in the context of Himalayan borderlands; The role and means of circulation of ideas, people, and things in the construction of Himalayan identities; Continuities and changes in colonial and pre-colonial ways of knowing on the ecological, ritual, economic, and political practices of Himalayan borderland communities; The impact of development discourses and modern identity politics in borderland subject formation; The role of infrastructures such as roads, dams, bridges, and fences as well as cartographic projects in the creation of Himalayan frontiers and borderlands.

Chair: *Arjun Sharma (KU Leuven)*

Geographies of Securitization across Himalayan Borderlands
Nadine Plachta (University of Toronto)

In recent decades, development support has transformed the lives of Nepal's northern borderland communities. Bilateral agreements between the Nepali and Chinese governments targeting economic cooperation and financial assistance have facilitated the building of roads and transport corridors along previous trading routes to expand commerce, while hydropower projects and cross-border transmission lines are planned and imagined as expedient technological solutions for driving local economies. Once at the geographical margins of the state, the borderland is of strategic value today, and governing it has become central for the state-building projects of both China and Nepal. It demands rules and regulations for investment, economic production, resource management, and the movement of people and goods, as security concerns remain high.

For borderland communities, the desire for greater connectivity that materializes through the promises and dreams of development also comes with threats and fears. Focusing on these infrastructural transitions and reorientations, this presentation addresses several key concerns: *How do people engage with, resist, or support the formalities of state laws? In which ways are the actions to secure the border and mark territory representative for broader spatial manifestations of power across the Nepal-China borderland? And what are stories of success and failure within these new spaces of control?* In answering these questions, I consider how the Nepal-China borderland has become a creative and productive space at the margins, but is also imbued with fantasies, frictions, and conflicting interests.

Apportioning Scarcity and Abundance in Dolpo Geographies
Logan Emlet (Yale University)

This paper presents a genealogy of the distribution and implications of scarcity in Dolpopa landscapes. I aim to denaturalize the current geography of scarcity by showing how scarcity geographies shift over time in response to political and economic forces. Working with Lefebvre's regressive/progressive method, I animate what Taussig has called a moral topography. First, I track representations of scarcity in Dolpo backwards from a 2017 local municipality planning document through several hundred years of antecedents and draw out a few of the diverse genealogies that condition the current constellation of scarcity. Then, I proceed to work forward from a reading of several 16th century biographies of accomplished lamas, highlighting divergences that demonstrate the contingency of the present: roads not taken present found in song and story that unsettle the taken-for-grantedness of the present scarcity politics. In doing so, I demonstrate the way that the reigning national moral topography of scarcity discursively rationalizes selective inclusion and extensive enclosure of Dolpopa ways of being. I argue that a wide range of Dolpopa theoretical and artistic sources provide ample alternatives which, in contrast to currently hegemonic interpretations of the landscape, encounter place in ways that develop abundant indigenous futures. I close by extrapolating the importance of these place-based articulations in Himalayan borderland politics today.

Becoming a "Revenue Village:" Colonial Frontier-Making and its Legacies in a Himalayan Borderland Community
Arjun Sharma (KU Leuven)

Colonial and Imperial histories of places that are today considered as Himalayan borderlands tend to focus on the regional scale at the expense of villages and smaller communities. Such a focus makes it difficult for postcolonial scholars to understand the impact of colonial state formation on the everyday politics around resources such as land and water, that village communities living in these ecologically and geopolitically sensitive borderlands, are currently engaged in. This article draws on colonial archives as well as lesser studied village level land revenue maps and documents to understand the relationship between regional processes of colonial state formation in the Himalayas, and how these were received by communities located in the Indian Himalayan borderland region of Ladakh. By supplementing archival research with geospatial analysis and ethnographic research in the Ladakhi village of Phyang, it is shown that while colonial technologies like cadastral mapping, censuses, property regimes, and codification of customary institutions for managing water, created a new identity of Phyang as a 'revenue village,' and its inhabitants as 'state subjects', precolonial notions of community membership continued to persist, evolve, and interact with state definitions. These overlapping and sometimes competing definitions of village and community are visible in ongoing land and water conflicts, which are discussed in the article. In undertaking this analysis, scholars of Himalayan and other borderland regions are encouraged to not simply subsume places within larger regional and national scales, but rather examine how these scales are made through the everyday practices of being within and making places.

Infrastructural Affects: Making Territories with Roads and Towns across Himalayan Frontiers
Galen Murton (James Madison University)

To what degree are Chinese claims to territorial control across Himalayan borderlands contingent on Beijing's identification of Tibet as an inextricable part of the People's Republic of China? And how does the development of roads, border towns, and other built environments trouble Sino-Indian tensions across the region? Taking these questions as a starting point to examine contemporary life in shifting territorial spaces across Himalayan borderlands, this paper approaches 'the living frontier' through two analytical frames. First, I conceptualize the 'Tibetan Frontier' to historicize the high degree of regionality and fluidity of boundary-making practices in Tibet at the turn of the 20th century; these spatial histories are fundamental to current disagreements over post-colonial borders throughout the broader Himalayan region. Second, I propose 'infrastructural affects' as a heuristic to critically examine the lasting legacies of the Simla Accord in geopolitical terms; I use several cases of road and town building across the McMahon Line and Line of Actual Control to highlight how infrastructure development continues to function as a territorial device across Himalayan frontiers.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #3
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14

14:00-15:30

Pathways of Tourists and Mobile Professionals in the Himalayas
Chair: *Roger Norum (University of Oulu)*

Alternative Community in the Himalayas: 'Responsible Community' or Tourists with a Twist?
Yadav, Vijalakshmi (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

The Himalayas have held an elevated position in the minds of not only the local inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, but also as the final destination for the spiritual quest of Hippie travelers during the sixth and seventh decades of the previous century. This has also been understood as the fascination with the Orient by scholars of the Hippie movement. However, this position of influence as a physical monolith, and home for spiritual awakening has not been limited to this period. Over time, while the nature of these travelers has changed (including, but not limited to nationality, reasons for travel, etc.), importance of the Himalayan ranges, and certain places therein has remained intact, if not witnessing a rising trend.

The current paper is a part of extensive field work done in Himachal Pradesh and Goa. It explores important elements of the alternative identity of this community of travelers which is concentrated in select regions of Himalayan belt in India as well as Nepal. It emphasizes the importance of conservation, preservation, and sustainability in their ideology, lifestyle and agendas for the future. Their attitude towards borders and importance of national identity has also been analysed. Themes of centrality of nature as the basis for action, the intersection of nature and spirituality, and its implications for the ecological, social, and economic crisis in the region have also been explored. The project highlights the centrality of the spiritual approach in prioritising sustainable growth and tackling climate change at the individual and collective level.

Tourism, Climate Change, and COVID-19: A Case Study from Mustang, Nepal
Emily Amburgey (University of British Columbia), Tashi Gurung (Arizona State University), Sienna Craig (Dartmouth College)

How does the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on Nepal's tourism industry alter long held views among many Nepalis that this industry would sustain mountain communities facing the grave effects of climate change? This article takes up this question from the perspective of a specific mountain community, that of Mustang, a culturally Tibetan region on the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, and a place that has been at once a politically sensitive border zone and a coveted tourist destination for decades. This paper stems from our collective ethnographic research conducted with Mustangi communities in Nepal and New York City spanning the last two decades to investigate the nexus between tourism and the consequences of two forms of disaster: climate change and the ongoing pandemic. We argue that the pandemic has undermined elements of Mustang's economic future and simultaneously prompted a resurgent appreciation for and reliance on more "traditional" modes of community governance and social support; yet the fact that these dynamics are unfolding amidst ever-present concerns over the effects of climate change in the Himalaya adds a layer of complexity to thinking about the future — of tourism but also of Himalayan lives, from the built infrastructures and the community resilience needed to sustain both. We contribute to research that holds disaster policies and practices accountable to how cultural dimensions shape and are shaped by the ways people act as agents of their own recovery, especially one as protracted as COVID-19 and as unpredictable as climate change.

Tourism Livelihoods and Socioecological Adaptation on Nepal's Tamang Heritage Trail
Ian Bellows (Cornell University)

Tourism is an important livelihood activity in some mountain communities in Nepal. The last two decades have seen the emergence of numerous new tourism destinations, including the Tamang Heritage Trail (THT) trekking circuit in Rasuwa District. However, the future of the THT as a tourism destination and the continued relevance of tourism to its primarily Indigenous Tamang host communities is not clear. Like borderland mountain regions elsewhere, communities in Rasuwa have experienced rapid sociocultural change, integration into larger social and political systems, and the emergence of new cross-border economies driven by broader processes of development, globalization, and state formation. Mountain communities must also increasingly contend with accelerating climate change impacts and the aftermath of disruptive events like the 2015 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced with this complex calculus, local people are increasingly aware previous templates for life choices such as where to live and how to make a living are increasingly in question while new ones remain in flux. I investigate the differential adoption of tourism-related livelihood activities in two of the THT's host communities and how they may enhance or erode the capacity of households and communities to adapt to changing social and ecological conditions. I also examine the possible futures and afterlives of tourism development in Rasuwa against the backdrop of accumulating contemporary challenges and a shifting political economy of rural livelihoods.

The Chronopolitics of Expatria: Other(ed) Time in a Community of Mobile Professionals
Roger Norum (University of Oulu)

The temporal and spatial enclosures of transient actors reveals much about the social processes of being, becoming and belonging. Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal, this paper focuses on how early-career mobile professionals experiences of liminal time and space—of being always, already departing for somewhere else—structures their day-to-day lives and often liberate them from the social and cultural norms, mores and strictures of 'home'. I consider the ways in which Kathmandu-based expatriates respond to transience through the production and reproduction of hypersociality—an urgent form of social interaction typified by rapidly formed, intensified social relation, extensive and frequent social obligation and ritual, and shared discourse of ephemeral social exchange. I use the hypersocial, as produced in contexts of transience, to explore the multiple discourses, practices and processes of meaning-making that together shape notions of individual and collective mobile identities. This paper contributes to emerging work on mobile socialities, temporality of migration, the anthropology of labour, and South-South migration trajectories.

Room VC 105
Controversies on Sacred and Impure Blood

This panel focuses on the controversies that call into question the role and value of blood in some contemporary practices in Nepal. Anti-sacrifice activists condemn sacrificial blood, which is meant to strengthen *shakti* and to nourish deities and spirits, as contaminating, as unsanitary, and as a sign of barbarism or primitivism. At the same time, women's rights activists oppose practices that posit menstrual blood as impure or contaminating and re-evaluate it as a sign of dignity and pride. These debates have a long history that has been shaped by Hindu prescriptions of vegetarianism, the Buddhist precept of not-harming, ethnically divergent approaches to ritualized female sexuality, and secularizing and democratizing movements promoting animal and human rights. This panel is based on the assumption that, in the embodied confluence of violence and sexuality, species and gender, spectacle and occultation, death and reproduction, a focus on the crucial role blood plays in turning both sacrifice and menstruation into highly contested spaces may help us understand better the motivations, sensitivities, strategies, articulations, and aspirations of both reform and reaction in contemporary Nepalese society.

Chair: *Chiara Letizia (Université du Québec à Montréal), Christoph Emmrich (University of Toronto)*
Discussant: *Janice Boddy (University of Toronto)*

Once and Future Bleeding: Women, Priests, and Texts in Newar Preemptive Menstrual Rites
Christoph Emmrich (University of Toronto)

This paper looks into the ritual background of current Nepalese activism around menstruation practices by discussing the role of blood in texts specific to the Newar liturgical tradition. There, the preoccupation is less with the actual monthly menstrual event in its singular iterations than with the menstruating subject as such who is the protagonist of a ritual intervention that is required to take place once in a lifetime and in a specific but rather wide time window before menarche. The two Newar ritual sequences called *bārhā tayegu*, or "placing in seclusion" and *bārhā pikāyagu*, or "taking out of seclusion," are reminiscent of mainstream South Asian menstrual prescriptions in so far as they include crucial interventions such as isolation, cleansing, and a change of clothes, as well as key affective states such as fear, anxiety, and boredom. Yet, they occur purposefully without blood being involved in any physical way. On the pages of the ritual manuals associated with these rites and used by the male priests, however, blood is highlighted as the one main concern of the event. This raises questions as to the blood-oriented history of these rites inscribed in its male-transmitted literature, the absence, during the performance, run by women, of the main polluting or empowering substance around which the rite is built, and the ritually constituted futurity of menstrual blood in the domestic sphere and in the life of a Newar girl child.

Blood as Conceptualized in Menstrual Education in Nepal
Solenne Hamon-Fafard (Concordia University)

Extensive literature has been produced on chhaupadi, the practice of isolating women during their periods, which is illegal, but still practiced in some parts of western Nepal (Robinson 2015, Karadiya 2015, Atmaya 2018). Chhaupadi is the most extreme form of cultural practice surrounding religious conceptions of menstrual impurity. However, the restrictions placed on menstruators vary in degree across the country, depending on several religious, ethnic, caste, and economic factors. Thus far, much less research has emphasized creative strategies of resistance and education and the women behind the activist movements that challenge chhaupadi, contributing to its criminalization in Nepal in 2005. At the core of this is activism that combats the notion of menstrual blood as impure blood. These activist initiatives subvert what they see as the patriarchal Brahmanical Hinduism narrative of the priestly caste, known as the Bahun in Nepal, which largely shape the dominant attitudes towards menstruation. Menstrual education by Nepali activists is done both formally (through lesson plans and workshops in schools and community centers) and informally (through community radio and social networks). Within the formal menstruation education sector, creative workshops include storytelling, reading illustrated books, short-story writing, sewing classes, drawing, and theatre. This research focuses on how menstrual blood is conceptualized in the menstrual education movement in Nepal.

Blood Sacrifice in the Discourse of Judicial Activism in Nepal: The Case of Gadhimai mela
Chiara Letizia (Université du Québec à Montréal)

In 2014 a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed at the Nepal Supreme Court challenging the mass sacrifice of thousands of buffaloes and other small animals at the Gadhimai Mela, a festival held every five years in Bara District, Southern Nepal. While the Supreme Court decision technically applies only to mass sacrifices at the Gadhimai Mela, it lays down principles that are applicable to sacrifices in any temple in Nepal and ends up being a discussion of the place of animal sacrifice in Hinduism and in modern Nepal. In the wake of the anti-sacrifice protests sanctioned by the Court's decision and of an increasing media presence that has mainly covered the discourse of the festival's opponents, it is safe to say that the legitimacy of animal sacrifice in Nepal can no longer be taken for granted. Drawing on court documents (the petitions, the responses and the decision), on interviews with the parties (the petitioners — mainly animal welfare activists—the respondents, the lawyers and the judge) and of the observation of the campaign for a *Bloodless Gadhimai* in 2019, this paper analyses the way in which in which the importance of the material offering of blood as the appropriate ritual way to appease the goddess and bring life and prosperity is contested by remarks on hygiene, on contamination of the environment, and on the defilement of holy places and questioned by affirmations that the true sacrifice is that of negative passions and that a vegetarian offering is just as valid.

Blood is for Demons: The Rise of Daivik Shakti Neo-Shamanism in Pokhara
Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (CNRS)

In the city of Pokhara, on every street corner, signboards indicate "places where to be seen". Sometimes it is a shop with its window on the street, other times, an arrow leads you to a tiny brick building in the yard of a house, or through a maze of corridors and dark stairs, up to a dedicated room on the fourth floor of a building. In all these heterogeneous places, intercessors wait for customers. Possessed either by *jhankri*, *nag*, *devi* or Shiva, or by them all, their life stories are varied, and often marked by extravagant behavior, but all profess in common a rupture at some point, when they stopped eating meat and participating in sacrificial offerings. This double cessation of the collective life punctuated by the great calendar rites and their post-sacrificial feasts opens onto the initiation of another collective movement. It is depicted as a sort of perpetual movement which has only one object, its own accomplishment and growth, through the transmission of *daivik sakti*, divine force, to patients soon transformed into disciples, then into intercessors in their turn, and who will transform their patients into new intercessors, and so so on. The refusal of the communal blood of the sacrifice leads to new, urban, socialities not only the villagers recently installed in urban environment, but also with them, their shamanic spirits, who normally reside and animate the various elements of the wild world, the sources, the rocks and the trees, and even their specific paraphernalia, the *dhyangro* drum, which, from its traditional form, concentrating in itself the sacredness of antiquity through the soot and grease with which it is covered and the tissues which envelop and conceal it, becomes in its "daivik" form, a brand new and clean object hung on the wall in plain sight.

Room VC 215
Climate Change, Natural Resources, and Local Livelihoods in the Himalayas
Chair: *Dinesh Paudel*

Himalayan Environmental Crisis: Comparing THED and Climate Change
John Metz (Northern Kentucky University)

Over the last five decades scholars, development experts and some Himalayan people have twice become hyper-concerned over impending environmental catastrophes. These concerns have mobilized major efforts to defuse the threat with interventions by development agencies of the Global North. The first of these, labeled the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation (THED), perceived that the exploding population of mid-twentieth century mountains of Nepal were converting forests to agricultural fields, exposing the steep, barren slopes to monsoon downpours, thereby unleashing torrents of floodwaters and sediment onto the hundreds of millions living in the lowlands. In the early 21st century climate change (CC) at the "third pole's" "water towers" threaten to destabilize monsoon rains, winter snows, and farmers in the mountains and lowlands. These two environmental "crises" differ in major ways. First, the culprits causing the problems are opposite—the ignorant mountain farmer in THED versus the mega-consumers of the Global North in CC. Second, the depth and quality of the scientific enquiry of these crises differ: for THED they were superficial projections of midlatitude processes, while climate scientists have closely examined the ways climate extremes will intensify. Yet, there are important ways these "crises" are similar. First, financial interventions to ameliorate the crises come from, and serve the interests of, the Global North by funding development projects to block communist expansion and by using markets to push CC costs onto the Global South. In addition, for mountain residents solving immediate subsistence needs dominate, while deforestation and CC remain future concerns.

Climate Change and Environmental Issues: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh (India)
Jagbir Singh (Swami Shraddhanand College)

India is a very large country, covering 3.28 million square kilometers, or 2.4 per cent of the world's land surface area. It has the second largest population in the world, Climate change is one of the main environmental challenges facing the Indian Himalayan Regions particularly Himachal Pradesh, today. The threat is especially severe in places where people's livelihoods depend on natural resources. In such areas climate adaptation measures take on a special significance for safeguarding rural livelihoods and ensuring sustainable development by local community. Himachal Pradesh state is facing several problems. Climate change is associated with various adverse impacts on agriculture, water resources, forest and biodiversity, natural disasters e.g. cloud burst, flooding, forest fire etc., health, and increase in temperature. A majority of population depends on agriculture directly or indirectly. Climate change would represent additional stress on the ecological and socioeconomic systems that are already facing tremendous pressure due to rapid industrialization, urbanization and economic development. This paper analyzes the climate change and Environmental Issues in Himalaya Region. Local community can play important role to save the environment for using indigenous knowledge.

Diverging Viewpoints on Cordyceps Harvesting and its Ecological Impacts: A Q-Method Study and Survey of Cordyceps Harvesters in the Himalayas
Suraj Upadhaya (Iowa State University)

Due to the unsustainable cordyceps harvesting rate and practices, high-altitude ecosystems are under human pressure. For maintaining the ecosystem's functioning and human well-being, it necessitates Conservation. However, Conservation often involves contentious and complex decision-making dilemmas that do not have clear solutions yet need urgent attention. Such issues and problems typically involve stakeholders with divergent viewpoints and interests, leading to disagreement, controversy, and political dispute. However, the consequences of unsustainable harvesting patterns and rates on ecosystem functioning or well-being are not well understood. As the pressures on fragile high-altitude ecosystems increase, the deficit of knowledge about their status is likely to increase. How do we fill this growing gap in our understanding of human impacts? One way to accelerate this understanding is to harness the divergent viewpoints of stakeholders. We identified four distinct harvesters' viewpoints on cordyceps harvesting and its ecological impacts using Q methods. Community-centered harvesters believe that cordyceps and their habitat management should be done with collaboration between local communities and government. The central viewpoint of government-oriented harvesters is the harvesting of cordyceps, and pasture should be managed and regulated. Profit-oriented harvesters distinguish themselves by focusing on profitability and against rules and regulations. Finally, conservation-oriented harvesters believe that there is a connection between nature degradation and the harvesting of cordyceps. We argue that an understanding of different viewpoints held by harvesters will assist policymakers in formulating better policies to maintain ecological and economic integrity in the high-altitude ecosystem.

What Does Natural Farming in the Indian Himalayas Tell Us About Post-Colonial Agriculture Science Research and Extension?
Syed Shoaib Ali (Ambedkar University)

The paper draws upon ethnographic fieldwork in the Indian Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh to examine the state's investment in Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF). SPNF is backed by the state as a nationalist eco-friendly cost-effective alternative to the capitalist, Western chemical-based horticulture. Ensuring that SPNF gains traction on the ground has, however, been far from simple. Several institutional structures have been created that sit alongside--and sometimes in tension- with the existing agricultural extension system.

We observe that the state leadership's quest for an alternative paradigm and quick transformation relies on the very tropes of productivity, scalability, and profitability situated in the rhetoric of cascading crises. Our analysis summons some of these contradictions alongside how senior bureaucrats, trainers, and extension workers make things work. We note that the timescape of urgency and scalability eclipses the groundwork and potentiality for consistent smaller investments towards building perception and a civic sensibility - such as working with women who work in smaller kitchen gardens instead of large apple orchards or developing interdisciplinary research and public engagement on existing and situated concerns of agrochemical use.

We make three clear arguments: One, the timescape of urgency eclipses the potentiality of SPNF as a techno-scientific and agro-ecological paradigm. Second, notions of scalability induce a politics of who is worthy of collaboration, and what concerns are worth public engagement. Third, we reiterate the critique that agriculture extension research and practice in India is understood as a unidirectional generic role anyone can perform. To that end, there is a near-complete lack of sociological or anthropological engagement in shaping science and technology.

Cannabis Futures in the Indian Himalayas
Prasenjeet Tribhuvan (Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur)

The Cannabis Sativa plant is indigenous to the Western Himalayas in India and has been a traditional source of food, clothing and leisure for the resident communities for centuries. It has been historically subsumed within socio-cultural framework of the region and has been a 'humble' object (Miller 2007), of great utility, but mostly inconspicuous. However, in the last couple of decades, cannabis has become an influential commodity owing to its role in attracting domestic and international tourists to the region. Despite being a lucrative option for the local community, engaging in cannabis trade is highly risky owing to its illegality. The NDPS Act of 1986 which illegalizes cannabis also dictates strict punishment for associating with it in any way (as a consumer, producer or a dealer).

While Cannabis policy in India has often been criticized for being an imperialist imposition from the global West and for being excessively repressive, in the Himalayan regions it is particularly ridiculed for being ignorant of the long standing socio-cultural practices and uses of cannabis. Moreover, its recent economic significance has created further pressure on the administration to re-look at the cannabis policy. This paper will chart out the possible paths that cannabis policy can take (including a possibility of a policy status quo) and assess the socio-cultural, economic and ecological ramifications of each of these paths in the region. The paper will present and discuss voices from the field, analyze debates and research work and finally recommend the most viable policy option for Cannabis.

Room NF 006
Roundtable: Envisioning a Just and Plural Climate Change Science for the Himalaya
Chair: *Constanza Rampini (San José State University)*

Participants: *Ritodhi Chakraborty (University of Canterbury), Andrea Nightingale (University of Oslo), Hemant Ojha (University of Canberra), Ornella Puschiasis (INALCO), Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (University of British Columbia)*

The production of climate knowledge in the Himalaya is a complicated affair (1). Techno- managerial experts note the lack of data infrastructure, regional social-ecological diversity, improperly implemented scientific methods and the absence of trans-border collaboration (2). Local people, in contrast, frame the knowledge of changing socio-ecological conditions in diverse ways reflective of how it is embedded in their everyday lives and hopes for the future. Meanwhile, critical scholarship highlight the need for knowledge production that addresses historical power relations, observes analytical tools as products of political economic conditions, and refrains from extracting 'data' from human and more-than-human worlds (3,4,5). Questions of whose knowledge is deemed legitimate, and who gets to decide how we represent, communicate and suggest ways to live with regional social-ecological transformation, continues to hang in the balance.

In this context, this session envisions a just and plural climate science for the pragmatic necessity of adaptive decision-making at various forms of human collectives, from local to regional level. The discussants, at different stages of their career, will share their observations as climate change researchers with expertise in different parts of the Himalaya to think through the politics of climate science tools (climate models, remote sensing, D&A algorithms), citizen science mobilizations (conceptual or material), climate reductive thinking in measurements of local impacts, and knowledge plurality. We position ourselves within the dialogue happening in other regions, where 'hegemonic digital environmental governance' is touted as a solution for combatting science denialism at the cost of further marginalizing plural worldviews and cosmologies (6).

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3. Chakraborty, R., Gergan, M. D., Sherpa, P. Y., & Rampini, C. (2021). A plural climate studies framework for the Himalayas. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *51*(February), 42–54.

4. Nightingale, A. J., Eriksen, S., Taylor, M., Forsyth, T., Pelling, M., Newsham, A., Boyd, E., Brown, K., Harvey, B., Jones, L., Bezner Kerr, R., Mehta, L., Naess, L. O., Ockwell, D., Scoones, I., Tanner, T., & Whitfield, S. (2019). Beyond Technical Fixes: climate solutions and the great derangement. *Climate and Development*, *0*(0), 1–10.

5. Ojha, H. R. (2020). Building an Engaged Himalayan Sustainability Science. *One Earth*, *3*(5), 534–538.

6. Machen, R., & Nost, E. (2021). Thinking algorithmically: The making of hegemonic knowledge in climate governance. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *April*.

Room EM 105
Representing Himalayan Pasts and Futures through Art and Literature
Chair: *Sarah Richardson*

Shift in Visions: Studies of Early Photography in the Hill Kingdoms of Punjab Province and Adjacent Areas 1860-1930
Ankana Sen (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad)

Since the photography arrived in India during British rule, the early images showcased mixed photographs born out of Western and Indian aesthetics. In Indian history of visual tradition/culture, murals and miniature paintings had long been the preferred style of depicting the portrait of rulers, mythology and everyday life in India. In the eighteenth century, European artists started documenting princely states, tribes and topographical scenes in a realistic manner (company paintings). During mid of the nineteenth century, many photographers were commissioned by the East India Company to record British Raj.

Before photography, the *Pahari miniature painting style* flourished in Western Himalayan Regions (WHR) as a tool to depict various themes based on cultural, mythological and spiritual beliefs. Soon after the 1860s, the spreading out of the British photographers in the hill states of Punjab province played a crucial role in changing the visual approach and aesthetics in the region. This paper explores the photography produced in WHR and adjacent areas during the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The study primarily focuses on landscape and pictorial photography in WHR and examines specifically the central role of *Samuel Bourne* (b.1834 – d.1912). Based on the literature, it also discusses the documentation, dissemination and interpretation of images created in the region by Indian and Western practitioners.

Nepali Climate Fiction and Future-Making
Evan Tims (Henry Luce Foundation)

As a Henry J. Luce Scholar in Nepal, I have partnered with QCBooks and LaLit Magazine in facilitating a climate fiction and Nepali futurism workshop. Twelve Nepali writers have produced extensive climate fiction and other creative work which explores imaginaries of Nepal's future. The workshop has doubled as a participatory ethnographic experience, through which I have studied imaginaries of social change, climate catastrophe and shifts in nature and culture. I am editing a volume of the participants' climate fiction which will be published within the next two months as an anthology, the first such work to be published in Nepal. I also will draw from the ethnographic aspect of the workshop in publishing an article on Nepali futures in fiction with LaLit magazine this spring.

The participants range in age from 16 to 24, including students and young professionals. The workshop has been structured along a temporal linear framework, so each session requires a new fiction piece set in Nepal further in the future. Thus, each participant has produced works ranging from the year 2025 to 2122, following themes including nonhuman perspectives and climate adaptation. I will read excerpts from this work during my presentation and outline the various futures that recurred in participants' work and discussions. Literature has a crucial role in engaging and representing the process of future-imagining, or what Donna Haraway refers to as speculative fabulation. This body of work thus offers a direct perspective into the imagined timelines of Nepal among a group of young writers.

Where is Shangri-La? Imagining Kathmandu in Film
Dikshya Karki (Heidelberg University)

In this presentation, I will explore the myth of Shangri-La, which has been attached to the Himalayan region ever since John Hilton first wrote about it in his novel *Lost Horizon* (1933). The utopian place has been imagined and offered a geographical location by many Himalayan countries who see it as a means to increase tourism. I will explore different facets of Shangri-La by discussing its filmic imaginings in two English language films, *The Night Train to Kathmandu* (1988) and *Dr Strange* (2016), filmed in Nepal. By analyzing the plotlines, characters, and choice of monuments in Kathmandu used to create Shangri-La on screen; I locate the search for an undiluted world of eastern mysticism by filmmakers. The characterization of Nepal via Kathmandu through notions of Shangri-La opens a world of transnational imaginaries that encompasses colonial fantasies and neo-liberal interests. The reception of the films in Nepal and beyond which celebrate such imaginings reiterates its significance in popular culture as oriental mythmaking and local touristic aspirations to gain a share in global markets.

Circulating Desires: Tourism, Instagram, and Landscapes Photography in Kumaon (India)
Damini Pant (University of California San Diego)

Imaginaries of Kumaon, one-half of the hill-state of Uttarakhand (India), as a remote, rural, mountainous landscape contrasted to the densely populated Indian plains has long generated desire for travel to the region. These imaginaries are evidenced in nineteenth century written documents and photographs and can also be seen in the circulation of posts on Instagram and other social media which highlight the remoteness and natural beauty of the region. However, the same signifiers, remote, rural, and underdeveloped are often a source of state and non-state anxieties about migration out of the region. Tourism is often seen as an ideal solution to mitigate these anxieties. Paradoxically, the tourist desire for remoteness is premised on the absence or erasure of the communities who live there.

In this paper, I aim to interrogate how the circulations of contemporary images of Kumaon articulate with historical imaginaries of the region to shape desires for tourism and spatial mobility in the region. I approach Instagram (IG) as both an archive and a field site of contemporary production, uptake, and circulation of images. Landscape photography remains the most common genre of tourist photographs of Kumaon found on IG. Scholarship on visuality stresses on it as a socially embedded practice i.e., what is seen and how it is seem in profoundly social and implicated in broader power relations. Taking a cue from conversations about the politics of visuality, I ask how sight or practices of seeing/unseeing are regimented through the circulation of these images via social media infrastructures.

Room VC 212
Roundtable: Pedagogies and Practices for Nepal and Himalayan Studies
Chair: *Galen Murton (James Madison University)*

Participants: *Heather Hindman (University of Texas Austin), Shangrila Joshi (Evergreen State College), Todd Lewis (College of the Holy Cross), Ariana Maki (University of Virginia), Carole McGranahan (University of Colorado Boulder), Andrew Quintman (Wesleyan University)*

From uneven impacts of climate change and projects of decolonization to geopolitics of international development and post-conflict reconstruction, Nepal and the Himalaya are at the center of global debates that bridge academic fields and methodological orientations. In other words, teaching Nepal and Himalayan Studies is inherently intersectional, interdisciplinary, and critical to our time. As historical experience conditions and complicates collective futures across the region, one might argue that it's never been more crucial or urgent to teach on, of, and in the Himalaya. But how do we instruct Nepal and Himalayan Studies? What disciplinary lenses, analytical frameworks, and canonical literatures are most useful, and to what ends? What works in the classroom, and how do we know when things work for our students? (and more importantly, when things don't work!)

This roundtable session brings together scholars teaching Nepal and Himalayan Studies across a range of disciplinary fields, including but not limited to anthropology, art history, environmental studies, geography, history, religion, study abroad, and more. By sharing experiences with 'pedagogies and practices' both in and outside of the university classroom, the panel aims to accomplish two key tasks: 1. to share and support best practices for teaching on this important place and part of the world in a variety of interdisciplinary contexts; and 2. to generate a working syllabus and teaching toolkit for instructing Nepal and Himalayan Studies in both the immediate and longer-term future.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #4
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14

9:00-10:30

Room VC 101
Spatiotemporalities and/of Infrastructures in the Indian Himalaya I

The Himalayan region is as important to environmental and climate scientists, given its globally important geographical attributes, as it is to social researchers, on account of unique cultural forms and contingent relationalities with mainstream states and economies. More recently, however, places across the Himalayas have witnessed critical social-economic transformations that are changing built environments, ecologies, and politics in important ways. At the heart of these processes lie infrastructural developments. From rail and road networks to hydroelectric projects, and from real estate and construction-linked investments to telecommunications, big and small infrastructures are reshaping people's relationships with each other, with the region, and the environment, while producing uncertain futurities. Moreover, these shifts reconfigure spaces and temporalities constitutive of historically situated communities and livelihoods. This panel considers the larger political ecologies and cultural politics of infrastructures through attention to their spatiotemporal aspects. Infrastructures look to speed up social/economic processes, but their fixity may equally create bottlenecks. As historical temporalities intersect with emergent ones, it is not given that the former will be necessarily subsumed. Frictions at their interface may create the space for maneuver and autonomous assertions. Papers part of this panel will elaborate on the spatiotemporalities and/of infrastructures through work on highways, urbanization, water, tourism, and other aspects of the changing Himalaya.

Chair: *Rohit Negi (Ambedkar University)*

Negotiating the 'Waterless' City: Discursive, Situated, and Embodied Dimensions of Water Crises in Shimla, India
Yaffa Truelove (University of Colorado Boulder), Naomi Hazarika (University of Colorado Boulder)

In 2018, government officials in Shimla, India declared the city to be "waterless." The waterless city designation referred to the stoppage of piped water flows for weeks on end to the city's 200,000 inhabitants, some of whom were already unconnected to the centralized network. While state officials and the media in Shimla attributed waterlessness to climate change and nearby river flows rapidly decreasing, other evidence suggests that the city has experienced extreme water scarcity even when river levels were adequate due to socio-technical processes including the politics of distribution. Furthermore, even in times of relative stable urban water reserves, specific class, gender, caste, and ethnoreligious groups already experience unequal forms of constructed scarcity and water insecurity due to absent infrastructures, water connections, and uneven water rights. This paper presents preliminary findings regarding the discursive, situated and embodied dimensions of Shimla's water crisis. We begin by tracing the differing discursive constructions of crisis and "waterlessness," and move on to an analysis of the intersectional caste, class, and gender dimensions of the waterless city. We conclude by calling for further work on the embodied urban political ecologies of water in India that unpacks the ways caste in particular, along with gender and class, becomes reproduced through the multiple discourses and lived experiences of sudden and chronic forms of infrastructural breakdown.

Temporal Tunnels: Exploring Shifting Spatiotemporal Rhythms at the Rohtang Tunnel
Anu Sabhlok (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research), Kesang Thakur (Himachal Pradesh University)

Infrastructures rework our conception of space and time and the Atal tunnel connecting the Kullu valley to the tribal district of Lahaul and Spiti is no exception. Up until very recently, the Lahaul valley in the state of Himachal Pradesh was only accessible via the Rohtang Pass for about half a year. Rhythms of life in Lahaul centered around the closing of the Rohtang Pass and the almost complete migration of locals to the lower valleys in the Himalayas. Completed in 2020, the Rohtang tunnel has existed in Lahauli hopes and imaginations for more than a century. With the tunnel's opening, winds of change are sweeping fast through this 'remote' valley. In this paper, we interview local youth to bring forth their aspirations, challenges and experiences as they both manage and shape the changes that are taking place. Alongside, we also draw from writings in the Hindi language Lahauli cultural magazine Chandratal to see how the Atal tunnel is reshaping ideas of home, environment, politics and business. We discuss how new connections are being forged even as earlier ones are bypassed. Narratives revolve around new business ideas, changing family dynamics and ecological fragility. One thing stands out amongst all these accounts and that is the emphasis on retaining the unique socio-ecological connections that have shaped Lahaul even as they can't wait to 'modernise.' There is an insistence in these young voices to develop an ecologically sustainable and culturally relevant model of development that is uniquely 'Lahauli'.

City on a Hill: A Historical Spatial Ecology of Water Scarcity in Shimla
Ankur Parashar (Ambedkar University)

Water scarcity has become a permanent feature in Himalayan cities. Despite recurrent water crisis events in the Himalayan cities, the relationship between urban space and water scarcity remains underexplored. Water scarcity is rooted both in the water infrastructure inherited from the pre-colonial and colonial period meant for the population of that time and embodying in itself the exclusions and biases of that time. In the context of countries like India, or what we collectively call Southern urbanization, the historicity of the cities needs to be taken into consideration to start any meaningful conversation about their present. To understand the water crisis, we need to understand the specificity of mountain urbanization. The urban space of the region should be looked as the production of a specific socio-temporal form rather than just a geographically contingent thing. In this paper, I look at the interaction between the water scarcity and the urban through the lens of political ecology. I contextualize the water scarcity in the context of Himalayan urbanization where the scarcity the urban space is intertwined with the case of Shimla. I develop Himalayan urbanization as an epistemic category which needs to be explored on its own. The case study of spatial development of Shimla would show how the urban space in Himalaya and its relationship with water scarcity is unique and require a separate section within the urban studies in the global south.

Dam(n)ed Landscape: Large-scale Infrastructures and Disrupted Ecosystems in the Himalaya
Ashim Kumar Manna (KU Leuven)

The paper investigates the transformation of the Tehri Garhwal is undergoing rapid transformation in terms of its topographical and environmental diversity led by large-scale infrastructure investments. Projects such as the Tehri Dam and the ongoing construction of the Char Dham Highway have been termed strategic to national interests and are rapidly the region from a revered to an operational landscape. The paper investigates the critical role of mega-projects guided by the logic of 'accessibility' and 'harnessing' natural resources, resulting in reduced ecosystem functioning within the Himalayan region. The paper analyses the role of the large-scale infrastructure via an ecological lens to highlight the 'disruptive' character of large-scale infrastructure. The aim is to position the case study as an opportunity to investigate the changing Himalaya and to juxtapose its ambitions of economic growth and development to questions of territorial degradation and fundamental limitations of natural resources, which can inform a discourse of environmental crises. To make this argument, it creates a 'thick description' of the case study and how financial and infrastructural accessibility significantly reshaped the fragile territory and created new urban formations. The paper is part of ongoing research investigating the Garhwal region, where once efficiently organized Himalayan landscapes are increasingly ignoring considerations of location, slope, drainage, and preservation areas and becoming susceptible to natural disasters and risks induced by climate. The paper acts as an invitation to revisit the role of infrastructure, its reinvention, and how they assist in adaptive and reduced environmental impact.

Herding in the Himalayan Contemporary: Continuity, Change, Uncertainty, Possible Futures I

This panel examines the diverse forms and contemporary complexities of herding in the Himalayan region, foregrounding the ways that differently positioned herders navigate questions of continuity and change amid a gamut of sociopolitical and environmental challenges. Throughout Himalayan pasturelands, a gradual decline in traditional practices, knowledges, and pastoral lifeways seems to have become a common topic of concern. At the same time, grounded analyses of these precarities indicate that loss and uncertainty co-exist in many ways with adaptation, agency, and novel future possibilities.

Bringing together a diverse and vibrant set of case studies of herding from Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Nepal, and Ladakh, we examine the ways in which forms of herding and pastoral systems are evolving in response to multi-scalar patterns of socioeconomic transformation, the politics of conservation and development, acute experiences of disaster, and other patterns of crisis. In this way, these papers articulate with existing scholarship focused on changing herding lifeways (Bishop 1999; Gagne 2019; Tan 2017), multispecies relations (Fijn 2011; Govindrajan 2019), pastoral uncertainties (Nori & Scoones 2019) and issues of environmental and climate justice in the Himalayan bioregion (Chakraborty et al 2021). Collectively, we show how chronic and emergent injustices shape the presents and futures of Himalayan pastoralism—challenging the power asymmetries and state or development agendas which have continued to define herding possibilities, if unevenly, across the region. Highlighting the situated knowledges and agencies of herders, we foreground the ways that herding lifeways continues to matter, materially, politically, and ethically amid shifting horizons of possibility.

Chair: *Austin Lord (Cornell University)*

Herding Morphologies in the Langtang Valley: Disaster, Climate Change, and Unsettled Moral Ecologies
Austin Lord (Cornell University)

Herding lifeways in the Langtang Valley are changing in response to intergenerational change, climate change, and the devastating losses of the Langtang Disaster of April 2015. In the wake of the disaster, many Langtangpas speak of herding as a lifeway at risk, since most of the remaining herders are elders and rising generations are unlikely to replace them. Climate change generates another layer of vulnerability. The decline of herding, a slowly developing kind of crisis, deeply entangled with the rise of tourism, is troubling for many people because herding is a critical aspect of Langtangpa identities and an ethical practice within situated (yet unsettled) moral ecologies. How do the Langtangpa herders who remain work to create spaces of possibility amid these pressures, in a landscape filled with absences?

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted over a seven-year period, I examine the ways that the Langtangpa herders conceptualize the changes and crises they have experienced, navigate contemporary dilemmas, and envision uncertain futures. I also examine how the Langtangpa herders make sense of feelings of anticipatory grief and *solastalgia*—a concept developed by philosopher Glenn Albrecht which to describe feelings of being displaced in place amid environmental change. And yet, a closer look at herding reveals a great deal of dynamism, resilience, and agency—an ongoing process of innovation and adaptation rather than a linear or overdetermined narrative of displacement and decline. Despite the severe impacts of the 2015 disaster and chronic precarities attenuated in its wake, Langtangpa herding remains vital.

Roots and Routes of Pastoral Displacement: A Multiscale Analysis of the Genesis and Implementation of the Grazing Ban in Sikkim, Eastern Himalaya
Rashmi Singh (Ambedkar University Delhi)

In this paper I unpack the social, political, and ecological context that led to a grazing ban and pastoralists' displacement in Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP), Sikkim, India. I explore the 'roots'- the multiscale factors that contributed to the genesis of the ban, and the 'routes' - modes of exclusion that were adopted by the state for pastoral displacements.

Building from the Sikkim case, I argue that the genesis of a conservation initiative that results in displacements may not always be linked with the state's conservation intentions only; instead, these initiatives can be a result of contestations between the local resource users of protected areas and the state's own political agenda and intra-state battles. In addition, the role of local institutions and associated actors becomes critical in deciding the fate of implementations of such initiatives at the local scale. The case of Sikkim's Grazing Ban depicts the larger phenomenon of 'green grabbing of pastoral land' across Himalaya, where the state continues to use the claims of 'desertification' to appropriate pastoral landscape for the 'green' plans. This study contributes to the call for rethinking the linkages between science and policy in the pastoral landscapes, and addresses the social, cultural and ecological complexities of resource use and conflict at the local scale. Without this, conservation initiatives and pastoral futures in the Himalayan region may continue to lead to major unjust displacements.

Agencies of the Present: Landscape-Making and the Herders of Lower Mustang, Nepal
Dane Carlson (Principia College)

Within the vast temporal and spatial footprints of the rangelands of Nepal's lower Mustang district, herder landscape-making practices and agencies unfold. Herders in Mustang today are at the forefront of radical change. They negotiate the complexities of declining fodder, erratic precipitation and shifting demographics through actions in the field. Yet the agencies of these herders are ignored.

Most herders in Lower Mustang today are immigrants from Nepal's mid hills or other mountain districts who have come to the mountains for paying work amidst the ongoing emigration of many of Mustang's people. Many herders unfamiliar with the high desert note having been told very little about the rhythms of the landscape in which they live and work, and some have no option but to scavenge woody fuel from the sparse landscape. These and other realities are made more difficult by the almost universally acknowledged decline of available fodder. Yet herding continues, and some find new ways to engage with a shifting and often alien landscape as they move through it.

Through the lens of herder practices in situ, this work examines the intra-active nature of their agency and the conditions through which it is ignored and obstructed while emergent and critical to the present and possible futures. This research is part of a larger effort to demonstrate that agencies emerging from land-based practice and relations on the ground have profound importance to the present and future, particularly in a development context dominated by foreign aid agencies.

From Shelter to Touristic Site: The 'Gothstay' Concept and Changing Notions of Yak and Yak Herding in the Nepal Himalaya
Jiban Mani Poudel (Tribhuvan University)

Climate change, the migration of youth, tourism, development interventions, biodiversity protection programs are imposing pressures on herding livelihoods and increasing the vulnerability of pastoral communities across the Himalayan region. Against this broader backdrop, this paper offers an ethnographic analysis of the linkages between pastoralism and tourism in the Phalaut region of Eastern Nepal, highlighting the emergence of new forms of representation and livelihood opportunities that focus on livestock tourism. More specifically, I examine the ways in which the celebration of a yak festival and the new concept of "gothstay" are transforming conventional notions of animal husbandry. The yak herders of Phalaut have been organizing a yak festival since 2017 with the aim of promoting tourism—an event which is producing new meanings, values and symbols, different from the customary usage, which reshape the ways the yak and yak herding is represented. With the advent of new forms of yak-tourism, rational, instrumental and conventional ways of describing yak are no longer sufficient to understand yak herding in relation to tourism. Moreover, the concept of "gothstay" (similar to a homestay) is transforming the traditional notion of goth—reconfiguring the goth from the herders' traditional living place to a touristic site for learning and knowing Himalayan pastoral culture and lifestyle. Could this become a potential alternative source of livelihood for Himalayan herders who have very limited options for making a living?

Values of Education I

Economic and symbolic values attributed to education are deeply intertwined and future-oriented: individuals, families and states make enormous economic investments in formal education with the belief and hope that it will pay off in some distant future—in the form of economic progress, increased social standing and through the symbolic currency of an educated population. This unwavering faith in education has not only resulted in the dramatic increase in young people's participation in formal education in the Himalayan region, but also a pervasive commercialisation of education. Given all this, families are willing to make substantial financial sacrifices and/or take debts to ensure a better future for their children. Similarly, there is a gradual blurring of boundaries between public and private education, with public schools increasingly charging money for various aspects of education.

Addressing the financial landscape of education in the Himalayas and the socio-cultural and moral meanings surrounding it, this panel opens for an interdisciplinary debate on values, valuations, investments, returns and debts attached to educational processes, institutions and/or systems in different parts of the Himalayan region. What are the values of education—and how do conflicting values of education clash? How do these shape and are shaped by people's vision for their lives? And how are these intertwined with existing and/or new social inequalities?

Chair: *Karen Valentin (Aarhus University)*

Values of 'Quality Education?' Blurred Public-Private Boundaries in State-Run Schooling in Nepal
Uma Pradhan (University College London)

While public education in Nepal is in theory open and free of charge to all until grade ten, it is widely acknowledged that there are numerous, more or less hidden education-related expenses, which are heavy burdens to many families. While government schools do not charge any recurring monthly tuition fees, the one-off fees such as annual admission fees, termly exam fees, and costs of school uniform, tie, belt and diaries have become integral to the financing of public education. Other costs arise from an increasing demand for educational services offered by private actors and institutions to pupils of government schools and which by many parents, teachers, and school management committees are believed to be necessary in order to ensure "quality education" in the public sector.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the outskirt of Kathmandu, this paper explores how ideas of "quality" central to the market-led dynamics that increasingly drives the education sector of Nepal have infiltrated practices of financing public education among school administrators, teachers and parents. This helps solving actual financial problems in the everyday management of schools, partly to enhance what they believe counts as "quality education." With its focus on the costs of "quality education" in the context of a blurred public and private education system in contemporary Nepal, this article combines a perspective on the symbolic currency of (modern) education key to debates in educational anthropology with one on value central to the anthropology of money.

Actors and Networks in the 'Aidland': An Analysis of the Value of Interpersonal Relations in Aid Work in the Nepali Educational Sector
Rajeshwar Acharya (Aarhus University)

Foreign aid in the education sector is often imagined as a 'battlefield' where the donors and national actors struggle for power and ideology. In such 'battels', educational aid relationship is considered as being manifested through strict conditionality, restricting the autonomy of national institutions. Drawing on in-depth interviews with the Nepali government officials in the Ministry of Education, donor representatives, and education experts, this paper examines how the value of inter-personal relationships is implicated in, and shapes the outcomes of, aid relationships and everyday aid work in the education sector in Nepal. During the professional career, actors move across several organizations or in different positions within the same organization forming multi-layered personal and professional relationships with their colleagues. Such formation of 'aafno manche', an informal inner circle that is formed by reciprocating favors, indicates donor/recipient relationship as a multifaceted and layered construct.

The paper argues that educational aid in Nepal is embedded in matrices of complex inter-personal relations, which has the possibility of generating both complexities and opportunities for the involved actors in the educational-aid work. This paper asserts that employing an actor-oriented analysis of aid relationships can help to move beyond a very limited view on developmental/educational aid, i.e. the question of whether foreign aid works, and bring in the 'personal' in the foreign aid discussions.

Complexities of Locating the "Community" in Some Urban "Community Schools"
Shyam Kunwar (Martin Chautari), Pratyoush Onta (Martin Chautari), Devendra Uprety (Martin Chautari)

Currently, two different types of schools are in operation in Nepal—one, private schools also called institutional schools, and two, "public" schools, which used to be called government schools. Most of these public schools were initially opened by local activists not for profit but for the children of the area they lived in. These schools were nationalized during the Panchayat years for political reasons. Such a move had a deleterious impact on the overall education system. Later, it was realized that the move to take the schools from their founders was a mistake. Since 2001, attempts have been made to give the ownership of these schools back to the "community." A World Bank funded project was implemented to materialize this effort backed up by legal arrangements. The back to community project failed miserably owing particularly to the opposition of the union of teachers and the Maoists.

Since the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015, the schools now fall under the jurisdiction of the local governments. I.e., the local government leadership can now basically run the schools as per their wish. While this has brought the management nearer to the schools, the question of "community" that the school supposedly serves has become elusive, particularly in the urban areas (cf Pradhan, Shrestha and Valentin, 2019). Through ethnography of some public schools of the Kathmandu Valley this paper shows the complexities of locating the "community" in the so called "community schools." This shows that while in paper the number of students in these schools remain more or less the same, in reality the students, and concomitantly the parents, of these schools are quite "mobile." While such a mobility does impact the teaching-learning process, it also raises a fundamental question re: which is the community that the school is supposed to serve, and the community that supposedly protects, runs, funds and supervises the schools. Moreover, since the majority of the parents are mobile and thus are not voters, the local ward/municipal leadership also is not seen very concerned about the public schools.

Room VC 211
Borderlands, Livelihoods, and Identities
Chair: *Verena La Mela (University of Fribourg)*

Reimagening the Paradise
Tehneet Abbas (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

"In a protracted conflict as the one in Kashmir, the life of people remains suspended often, in the time between the next encounter, killing, arrest or curfew" (Zia&Kaul, 2018). The Kashmir conflict has been raging for almost thirty years now and has had far reaching ramifications on social, economic and political front. The economy in particular has been one of the worst hit in the region, this accompanied by the lack of industrialization and a nascent private sector has led to high unemployment rates. The women of this region in particular, carrying the double burden of patriarchy and conflict have sought economic freedom and respite in entrepreneurship. A wide range of entrepreneurial adventures including but not limited to boutiques, cafes, car showrooms, handicraft stores have been a go to for the women of the valley. This paper focuses on such female entrepreneurs under the age of 21-40 and the challenges that lie therein, keeping the factors of class, education and status as constants. The study enquires how these young women assert their economic agency in a predominantly patriarchal society which is reeling under a military conflict. The research selects a sample of 20 women through purposive sampling and employs an in-depth face to face interview with these women to explore the changes they are bringing within the society.

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Postcolonial Himalayas: Complex Indigeneities and the Discourse of Competing Victimhoods in Kashmir

Nitasha Kaul (University of Westminster)

In this paper, I investigate the complexities of 'indigeneity' as they obtain in multiply colonised contexts by focusing on the relationship between indigeneity and post/coloniality in the case of Kashmir. After a brief canvassing of the Kashmir conflict as it is typically perceived (simplistic terms of India-Pakistan territorial dispute), I shift focus to Kashmir Valley (the epicentre of the conflict in Indian administered region) and analyse the ways in which identity and indigeneity are set to work in this post/colonial conflict. I argue how the roots of Kashmir conflict are Eurocentric colonial, but its contemporary manifestation demonstrates the colonial exercise of power by post-colonial states. In this way, the Kashmir imbroglio today is post/colonial. There is an overwhelming body of evidence about the ways in which the 'native' Kashmiri Valley population—both Hindu and Muslim—have suffered multidimensional trauma in the last few decades at the hands of the military and militant forces both, yet these injuries are never comprehended together but are always politically articulated in a segmented manner through what I call "discourse of competing victimhoods" (DCV). DCV operates through the Kashmiri Muslims (KMs) referring to their killings, enforced disappearances, rapes by Indian forces in response to the Kashmiri self-determination struggle, and Kashmiri Hindus (Kashmiri Pandits, KPs) referring to their forced displacement, killings, rapes by militants as a strategy of an anti-India Islamist movement. DCV can range from political use of selective histories and memories to denial of the extent of suffering on either side by the other.

I demonstrate how this polarisation links to complex claims to indigeneity on each side. The KPs are held up as the original indigenous inhabitants of Kashmir Valley going back millennia. Disputing this, KMs refer to the Central Asian originating Afghan and Mughal dynasties that ruled the region at different times prior to the British sale of the territory and its peoples in a 19th century treaty. The Indian state, especially in its 21st century Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) version, sees the KPs as the indigenous Kashmiris whose suffering justifies repression of KMs. In fact, so much so that violent Hindu fundamentalist views and actions in contemporary India are widely justified by the rhetorical question: 'What about Kashmiri Pandits (KPs)?'. Here, the fate of indigenous KPs is a question that answers itself and justifies any colonial manoeuvre of the post/colonial state. On the other hand, KMs refer to the constant repression (curtailed rights, internet and media censorships, intimidation, surveillance, public humiliation, identity erasures) that achieved new proportions with India abrogating autonomy of the region in a constitutional coup in August 2019. In recent years, land and domicile laws have been changed to allow Indians easy access to the region. Here, KM fear of demographic settler colonial style change with the Indian influx makes for emphasis on KM indigeneity claims as the inhabitants who are being erased. DCV ensures that different ideas of indigeneity are used in parallel in support of varying emancipatory goals. I conclude by reflecting upon what decolonial pathways might mean in such post/colonial conflicts with complex indigeneities.

Partition of India: Fractured Narratives of Divided Families in Ladakh, India
Sonam Joldan (University of Ladakh)

The effect as the result of partition of India in terms of socio-economic and culture in the 'central region of the partition countries' has widely been written. But in the 'peripheries', where, also equally affected and has been little studied (Wahid Siddiq, 2015: 17). As such, this study focuses on the 'remote region of Newly Union Territory of Ladakh' in India. The region once situated at 'Cross Road of Asia' having trade linkages with different regions/countries comes to an end. The linkages between Ladakh and Tibet comes to end with the occupation of Tibet by the People Republic of China. And the linkages between Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan ends as the result of the partition.

This study focusses on the linkages between and Ladakh and Baltistan. The story of the partition of India in Ladakh region continued even after the drawing up of the Line of Actual Control (LoC), as it shifted in the two subsequent wars with Pakistan, in 1965 and 1971. People in the border villages in Ladakh have fractured narratives; how their families, relatives were divided during the shifting of territories between the two nation- states. Sadiq Ali Sadiq who was settled in Balti Bazaar (market) in Kargil was one such divided family. During partition, he was in Kargil along with his father who has a shop in Balti Bazar. Most of his family members were in Kharmang village, which is in the other side of LoC. Like him there are thousands of divided families Kargil and Leh districts in Ladakh. This study is mostly based on the first-persons accounts, untold stories. The stories of the divided families and traders of Ladakh. An ethnographic approach be applied with special focus on qualitative technique.

Struggle for Existence in the Era of Spatial Expansion: A Case Study of the Endangered Umla Village in the Trans-Himalayan Region of Ladakh
Skalzang Dolma (Central University of Punjab)

Ladakh, a trans-Himalayan region situated in the northwestern part of India is renowned for its scenic beauty and people's hospitality. Its cultural practices and the presence of Buddhism acts as a unique selling point in Ladakh. The region is located in close proximity to the ancient silk route and has witnessed the footprints of traders, travellers and adventurous for a fairly long time in the pre-and post-independence era. The year 1974 opened up an additional economic opportunity in the form of the tourism sector in Leh town and the area surrounding the town started prospering with better road connectivity, telephone connectivity and all other measures which determine a region as "modern". However, despite such development being carried out, a village called Umla still lacks basic facilities like telephone connectivity, proper road connectivity, water scarcity and the issue of migration despite not being far away from Leh town. Thus, this paper examines the issue of "centralized development" of Leh town and the trend of rural-urban migration resulting in a cause of concern for village extinction, further, it mentions the rationale behind the villager's perception of being overlooked by the local authorities and the challenging role that the women of the village play in continuing with the practice of agriculture and inhibiting the village from getting extinct. From the case of this particular village, we get the idea that the majestic mountains of Ladakh reside not only the beauty and serenity but also in various issues and challenges which get overshadowed.

Geopolitical Multilayers of Cross Border Trade: Borders and Regions of Northeast India
Jublee Handique (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Cross-border trade relations between the countries play a crucial role in driving the local economy of the border regions. Cross-border trade has different layers of understanding; the formality and informality and the 'shadow' nature of trade, and the types of actors in the border create a 'perspectival' understanding of cross-border trade, borrowing specifically from Rumford's (2011) Multiperspectival study of the border. Chris Rumford (2011) mentioned the state's diverging viewpoints and the people inhabiting the border. Rumford's construction of 'seeing like a state' vs. 'seeing like a border' is the predisposition to look at borders from the perspective of the state vs. taking into 'the account of perspectives from those at, on, shaping the border' henceforth this work will use Rumford's 'multiperspectival' border study to understand the cross-border trade of Northeast region in India. Cross-border trade in the unsettled post-partition borders works closely with state intervention through developmental policies initiatives and continuous surveillance due to prolonged security anxiety among the states. In India, all the formal commercial activities with its neighbours occur through Land Customs Stations (LCS), and the country has established about 40 LCSs in the Northeast region along the border. It is seen that trade through LCSs has multiplied over the years with distinct spatial characteristics. Northeast (NE) India comprises eight states and is the gateway to East and Southeast Asia. Due to its strategic location, the region has geopolitical importance and is the foci of policies like 'Act East Policy' and 'Look East Policy.' Due to its geographic advantage, the region has traditional trade linkages with the neighbouring regions since the time immemorial. However, today, Northeast India is a frontier region of India. Moreover, in this frontier region of the state, India's geoeconomic 'hope' through developmental trade policies contradict the geopolitical security anxieties and state politics. Hence, studying the varying spatial manifestations and layerings of cross-border trade in the Northeast India region are worthy, and therefore the work will take into account these aspects of border trade.

Room VC 212
Roundtable: Working Across Disciplines: Socioenvironmental and Sociotechnical Interfaces in Himalayan Research

Chair: *Katie Oven (Northumbria University)*, Discussant: *Karen Seto (Yale University)*

Participants: *Jeevan Baniya (Social Science Baha), Anudeep Dewan (University of British Columbia), Nick Rosser (Durham University), Surya Narayan Shrestha (NSET), Mukta Tamang Lama (Tribhuvan University)*

The Himalayan region has been an important site for theoretical and methodological innovation in both the social sciences and natural sciences. However, these trajectories often run parallel to each other, rather than in conversation. In recent years, several transdisciplinary collaborative research partnerships have sought to build bridges across such siloed domains of knowledge. Many such initiatives also aspire to inform policymaking through public-facing scholarship.

This roundtable brings together several scholars involved with the Sajag-Nepal project to reflect upon the opportunities and challenges of working across disciplines. Funded by UK Research and Innovation's Global Challenges Research Fund from 2021-2024 under the title "Preparedness and Planning for the Mountain Hazard and Risk Chain", Sajag-Nepal examines how best to develop and use new interdisciplinary research to inform better decision-making and reduce the impacts of multi-hazards such as earthquakes and landslides.

Six members of the partnership will reflect upon their experiences of collaboration. We will present initial findings that offer new ways to understand earthquake and landslide risk and community responses to it, and situate these within a broader context that considers the relationship between scientific and Indigenous knowledge systems in understanding and mitigating disaster risk. Discussant Meredith Reba will comment upon the Sajag-Nepal framework from the vantage point of her own long-term involvement in another transdisciplinary collaboration, the NASA-funded Urban Himalaya project. Ultimately, we ask how transdisciplinary collaboration may move beyond sharing ideas to functional integration in our research practice and policy-engaged advocacy, and consider how such research may contribute to Himalayan futures.

Recasting the Northeastern Himalayas: Rewriting Histories of Lived Experiences

How are socio-political spaces with blurred and overshadowed histories centred and prioritized by interconnected living organisms who are most affected by them? How do indigenous and community-based knowledge systems from India's periphery ignite a conversation about everyday life here? How do they rewrite their own histories by themselves?

For this panel, the focus is on the Northeastern Himalayas (for this panel this term would encompass all the eight states of Northeast India), a region historically viewed as a homogenous geographical space and as a resource frontier where all sources of life: plants, animals and individuals were stripped of their agency. As decades passed, anthropologists and researchers emerged from within these communities who through their in-depth empirical and theoretical interventions have sought to overturn and challenge the prevailing peripheral position of their lifeworlds and their depiction by privileged ethnographers. By collaborating with different individuals and communities from within the region they now attempt to recast the region.

Our session is an endeavour in this regard. We are a small collective of individuals who hail from different ethnolinguistic and indigenous communities from the states of Manipur and Assam. Through this session, we will be presenting our work spearheaded by our understanding and our experiences as we navigate life both inside and outside of our communities. We also think about our own positionalities in this journey since we hail from different ethnolinguistic and caste-based communities. Despite our different life-worlds we position our papers in relation to one another, opening multiple avenues of intersubjective dialogue. This dialogue then helps to pave the way to establish an alternative praxis of ethnographic engagement which attempts to overturn existing structures of power. For instance, Ngaihte's paper through his engagement with the Zo community(s) draws our attention to the insidious ways in which indigenous ways of knowing, relating, and working with the environment are appropriated by non-indigenous scholars and organizations to reproduce "solutions" which in the name of diversity replicate colonial violence within their practices. In a way following Tuck and Yang (2012) one could argue that decolonization (environmental preservation in this regard) becomes a mere metaphor since land continues to be held and articulated upon by individuals who favour settler histories.

Choundhary's paper attempts to understand the gradual endangerment and the imminent extinction of the Yak in Sikkim. It tells us how the Yak, an indispensable part of the ecosystem of the Dokpa community of Sikkim is now on the verge of extinction owing to rising temperature. This introduces us to another lived reality affecting the Northeastern Himalayas: climate change. Haraway (2015), Curley (2021), Kimmerer (2013) and Tsing (2015) have challenged the rise of the Anthropocene by turning to plants and other living species for important lessons as to how we can decentre and deprioritize ourselves and our perspectives to (at least begin) understand climate change. Hence Ngaihte and Choudhary's papers are a stride in that direction since here through multispecies engagement they seek to decolonize how we rethink the Northeastern Himalayas.

However, owing to the intersubjective dialogue that all the presenters immerse themselves in for this panel, we also realize that we inhabit varied and multiple lifeworlds. Intersecting with climate change are also the re-emergence and re-entrenching of the political and racialized identities here in the Northeastern Himalayas, facilitated by massive waves of migration from the region. This is where Roluahpuia and Lunminthang's papers help us to recognise these overlapping experiences by rooting their work in understanding how difference is articulated from within the region. Both papers attempt to recast the Indian nation by introducing different ways of understanding how power is shared amongst distinct communities in different geographies both inside and outside the region. Roluahpuia's paper attempts to recast the nation by questioning why the experiences of individuals who are constituted as subjects of racialization in India's cosmopolitan cities are written out from the larger nation making enterprise of India. In doing so he opens an alternate way to understand how racialized subjects from the Northeastern Himalayas come to embody the tenuous relationship between nation making, national identities and national citizens. Lunminthang's paper attempts to historicize and analyse difference and state governance within Manipur by problematizing the usage of categories such as urban and rural within the state. He then questions as to why and how 'hill states' come to be seen as dichotomous to the more privileged valleys, the geopolitical administrative centres of the state.

Like Roluahpuia, Shivangi's paper seeks to understand how community and associational networks of the Northeastern borderland are reproduced in Delhi thereby creating borderland geographies by migrant students in Delhi. Guided by our lived experiences of belonging to the Northeastern (and the Eastern) Himalayan region (in different ways with different degrees of privilege), of being written out of the larger Indian narrative and navigating complicated power hierarchies both within and outside academia we come together to constitute this panel. In a way, the session through our work, we hope, would provide alternatives of thinking about exclusion, racialization, marginality, indigenous futurity, and environmental practices and how the nation itself can be restructured by understanding the politics unfolding inside and outside the eight different states of the region. Our ethnographic journeys also transcend being restricted to a particular thematic area thus giving an idea of the overlapping narratives that emerge out of the Northeastern Himalayas.

Chair: *Shangrila Joshi (Evergreen State College)*

Vulnerability and Resilience: Climate Change and the 'Deep Ecology' of Zos in Northeast India
Samuel Ngaihte (Manipur University)

From their portrayal as vulnerable geographies to their role as agents of environmental conservation, the focus on the indigenous dimension in the examination of climatic change over the last decade has become a popular framework. This dominant lens through which the indigenous peoples are forefronted by scholars, policymakers, political leaders and the media as essential to the 'success' of the project of tackling climate change is problematic not only because it reframes these populations through the romantic and reductive notions of the 'local' and the 'traditional' and therefore perpetuate their colonial categorizations and relations, but also because it presupposes a singular linear development or totalizing narrative of a climate crisis where 'indigenous knowledge' are now introduced to amplify the diverseness of the 'solutions' that are offered. The conceptual space to account for the historical particularities and trajectories that have shaped the understanding of the phenomenon of climate and environmental crisis and the uniqueness of their vulnerabilities and territorial adaptive capacities continues to be substantively side-lined. This paper explores the traditionary 'deep ecology' of the Zo communities in the Northeast of India to highlight the importance of situating environmental concerns and its attendant injustices within the broader framework of the longer-term aspirations of indigenous and marginalized communities.

Urban, Rural, and the Himalayan Hills: Landscape Connectivity and Governance
Michael Lunminthang Haokip (Ambedkar University)

The study of democracy and governance in urban, rural and hills spaces bring interesting facts for the academics to question further. The Colonial concept of "Urban" and "Rural" in the parlance of governance and administration needs to be extended to incorporate another important socio-natural entity, the Hills. In many countries of South Asia "Hill Areas" have never been a priority in the administration, imagination or narrative of governance since colonial times. The situation further escalates where the Hills share common administration with the valley especially in a state like Manipur. The colonial administration neither bridges the gap nor solves the problem. In the post-colonial era, the problem further escalates. This brings a lot of issues like mis-governance, conflicts, un-development etc. Democratization for instance is swift and better in the valleys whereas the Hills are left out in the process. Devoid of fair and better life chances, the Hills as a result become home to insurgent groups and hideouts for different non-state agents. In these situations, can democracy, development, security, education...etc climb the hills or do people have to climb down the hills to get the benefits of present-day necessities? Hill Governance never attracts media or policy makers but is always included within the geographical boundaries of any given country. In these situations, how can we connect this geographical importance with governance? How do we re-imagine the hills as the centre of governance rather than being situated at the periphery of geography and politics. The paper will evaluate the concept of governance and the colonial concept of "urban" and "rural" and the concept of development in the "hills" within the context of the Indian state of Manipur.

Climate Change and its Impact on Eastern Himalayan Yaks Focusing on Sikkim
Sanghamitra Choudhury (Bodoland State University)

India's unique geography and geology combined with climatic diversity, make it susceptible to a range of climate-induced natural disasters. The threats from global warming to India's climate stability are more intricate and layered as compared to many other countries. According to the special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), agricultural economies like India would suffer the most from the repercussions of global warming in terms of profound heatwaves, floods, and droughts. Preserving diverse forms of life on land requires targeted efforts to forfend, instaurate, and promote the conservation and sustainable utilization of ecosystems.

Yaks, the lifeline of pastoral nomads in high altitudes of the Eastern Himalayas are facing the threat of gradual extinction owing to rising temperatures in the region. The yak is one of the most enduring symbols of Sikkim. Yaks provide local communities milk, butter, churpi (rock hard cheese), wool, and meat besides utilized in communicating from one place to another. According to the Tribune, around 250-300 domestic yaks have been found dead due to starvation after being trapped under untimely snowfall in 2018 in the cold desert region of North Sikkim. The paper will analyse the effect of climate change on the lives of yak, focusing on the nomadic communities especially the Dokpas engaged in yak rearing in North Sikkim. The paper will further endeavour to connect the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 15 and 13 in connection to the yak population of Eastern Himalayas, especially the high altitude regions within Sikkim.

Understanding the Creation of Migrant Borderland Geographies in the Center
Shivangi Kaushik (University of Oxford)

This paper is grounded in the experiences of migrant students who migrate from the distinct ethnolinguistic communities hailing from the Northeastern states of Manipur and Assam to Delhi, for pursuing their higher education. Owing to their sociocultural beliefs, their indigenous cosmologies as well as their history of being marginalized from the sociocultural discourse of India, they are mostly seen as the racialized Other in Delhi. Amidst these nationally produced hegemonic narratives of racialization, my work is about understanding the processes and collectivities through which these students redefine their belongingness through the creation of a borderland geography in the center. My paper suggests that despite these students migrating from India's geographical and political periphery of the Northeastern Himalayas, they subvert marginality in the process (Tsing 1993). By building relationships amongst them, by joining different student bodies, by establishing Northeast societies in their respective colleges, by becoming part of church fellowships they create borderland geographies in the center that is Delhi. By transporting community making tenets like *Tlawmngaina* (selflessness) from their home in the region they ground their ethnic identities in Delhi and refuse to be thought and talked about merely as a Northeasterner in Delhi. Thus, ethnicity for these migrant students then becomes an important way to understand how they choose to identify themselves within institutions of higher education in Delhi. The paper then seeks to understand even my own problematic positionality. Even though I also hail from one of the states and from one of the communities of the Indian Eastern Himalayan region nonetheless coming from a caste-based background of the Assamese community there are differences in the ways we belong here. The paper will then also try to understand how students coming from different ethnolinguistic communities within the region relate to one another and think about their own positionality in Delhi especially in terms of creating networks of solidarity.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #5
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15

11:00-12:30

Room VC 101
Spatiotemporalities and/of Infrastructures in the Indian Himalaya II

The Himalayan region is as important to environmental and climate scientists, given its globally important geographical attributes, as it is to social researchers, on account of unique cultural forms and contingent relationalities with mainstream states and economies. More recently, however, places across the Himalayas have witnessed critical social-economic transformations that are changing built environments, ecologies, and politics in important ways. At the heart of these processes lie infrastructural developments. From rail and road networks to hydroelectric projects, and from real estate and construction-linked investments to telecommunications, big and small infrastructures are reshaping people's relationships with each other, with the region, and the environment, while producing uncertain futurities. Moreover, these shifts reconfigure spaces and temporalities constitutive of historically situated communities and livelihoods. This panel considers the larger political ecologies and cultural politics of infrastructures through attention to their spatiotemporal aspects. Infrastructures look to speed up social/economic processes, but their fixity may equally create bottlenecks. As historical temporalities intersect with emergent ones, it is not given that the former will be necessarily subsumed. Frictions at their interface may create the space for maneuver and autonomous assertions. Papers part of this panel will elaborate on the spatiotemporalities and/of infrastructures through work on highways, urbanization, water, tourism, and other aspects of the changing Himalaya.

Chair: *Anu Sabhlok (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research)*

What's Your Status? Water Infrastructure in Urban Mountain Towns
Rinan Shah (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment)

Translation of water in its natural form as rain, snow or glaciers into consumable water at the households is done via infrastructure. Water, with its flowing characteristic is arrested and transported across distances using reservoirs, filtration devices, pipelines of varying widths, subsidiary tanks and many others along with power houses. The water distribution supply is mostly gravity-based. Power houses are primarily needed where pumping water above the source is needed. In the mountains, infrastructure that makes up the water supply and distribution system does not always have a safe completion and effective integration into the system. Most of them are incomplete, abandoned in the construction state or even after completion, out of use, etc. The changes in the urbanization and development pattern of the town itself or its surrounding areas might cause infrastructure into disuse or in a state of the unknown. Mountain towns have physical constraints in terms of growth. Using the case of Darjeeling town, I argue that the creation of new water infrastructure is oftentimes incomplete and fails to integrate with the existing systems creating an array of effects for the system as a whole as well as the communities dependent on them. With time, the existing systems are seen to go into disuse. This work moves away from the focus on the contested macro infrastructure such as hydropower to look at comparatively micro infrastructure.

The Seasonal Town: Emergent Spatiotemporalities in the Urbanizing Himalaya
Rohit Negi (Ambedkar University)

Development scholars have noticed the decoupling of rural poverty and well-being from agriculture and other traditional livelihoods, and the greater importance of highly mobile and delocalized livelihoods across the Global South. In this context, the Indian Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh has been hailed as an exemplar. While there is undeniable though uneven economic mobility across the state, what of its spatiotemporally? As more capital makes its way to interior regions, where and how is it fixed, and how do these processes reconfigure prevalent rhythms of life?

This paper considers the changing materiality of the settlement of Bharmour, centre of the agri-pastoralist Gaddi community in Himachal, alongside the intersecting temporalities experienced by its residents. The pastoralist seasonal time has historically structured the rhythms of the region. Since the late colonial period, but with greater intensity since the 1970s, the state seeks to discipline time through the broader discourse of tribal development. More recently, state-backed capitalism aims to flatten time towards the accelerated circulation of people, information, and commodities. Theorizing spatiotemporality from Bharmour shows that despite these changes, seasonal rhythms continue to shape the town's temporalities, calling attention to the aspects of history and human ecology in the research on the emergent urban.

Fixity, Friction, and Temporality: Infrastructure in the Eastern Himalayan Town of Kalimpong
Anisa Bhutia (Tata Institute of Social Sciences)

Infrastructures, once made, are hard to unmake. We live with the repercussions of their wear and tear. Some infrastructures get repaired, and some get forgotten. Further, it is important to explore 'when' rather than 'what' infrastructural systems have come to be. Big infrastructures create a fixed temporality in the region. In my field site, a journey to Kalimpong shows the presence of massive bridges that affirm the town's colonial past. The names and years embossed in such infrastructures further fix the time when the British Empire spent capital on such infrastructures. Additionally, an extensive set of networks and assemblages already in place aids in infrastructure growth of the future. In the present decade, the town's urban growth in the form of new buildings, railways lines, etc, is aided by already built networks of roads. The existence of old and new infrastructure alongside brings forth the messy reality of the infrastructures built in different times. Such existence of other infrastructures creates friction in the singular linear narrative of the town's temporality. Through this paper, I present cases of some infrastructural repairs and some that ended up becoming the 'ruins'. While doing so, we also study what these networks were and how they led to the accumulation of different infrastructures in the form of railways, ropeways and roads. Ultimately the town exists among its infrastructural past, present and future.

Walled Anticommons within Overused Commons: A Dual Tragedy in Spiti Valley, India
Surajit Chakravarty (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi)

The Spiti Valley, located at a height of 12,000 ft above sea level, has witnessed rapid economic transformation in the last decade, fuelled by a surge in the tourism sector. The attendant construction boom, without adequate infrastructure improvements, adds multiple stresses on the ecosystem, threatening the commons, in an oft-repeated story of Himalayan tourist destinations. Another curious phenomenon is the sudden proliferation of boundary walls around properties, which can be observed all over Spiti Valley, particularly in the village/towns of Kaza and Tabo.

Open spaces between dwellings were previously used in a non-exclusive manner, especially for access, for small animals to wander, as children's playing areas, and for social gatherings. But in view of rising property values in the tourism-driven economy, walls, usually built with concrete bricks, decisively demarcate claims of private property. Consequently, a 'tragedy of the anticommons' has unfolded, where scarce resources, formerly shared in everyday practice, are hyper-fragmented by multiple private owners. The occurrence of a dual tragedy—of the commons and the anticommons—in the same communities at the same time, points to the complexities of planning and administration in rapidly transforming settlements in ecologically sensitive regions. This paper inquires why such a situation arose, with a focus on the nexus between the two parts of the dual 'tragedy'. It is argued that the mainstream metropolitan scale of planning is not suited to small towns, where a multi-scalar community-regional approach has to be instituted from the start.

Room VC 115
Herding in the Himalayan Contemporary: Continuity, Change, Uncertainty, Possible Futures II

This panel examines the diverse forms and contemporary complexities of herding in the Himalayan region, foregrounding the ways that differently positioned herders navigate questions of continuity and change amid a gamut of sociopolitical and environmental challenges. Throughout Himalayan pasturelands, a gradual decline in traditional practices, knowledges, and pastoral lifeways seems to have become a common topic of concern. At the same time, grounded analyses of these precarities indicate that loss and uncertainty co-exist in many ways with adaptation, agency, and novel future possibilities.

Bringing together a diverse and vibrant set of case studies of herding from Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Nepal, and Ladakh, we examine the ways in which forms of herding and pastoral systems are evolving in response to multi-scalar patterns of socioeconomic transformation, the politics of conservation and development, acute experiences of disaster, and other patterns of crisis. In this way, these papers articulate with existing scholarship focused on changing herding lifeways (Bishop, 1999; Gagne, 2019; Tan, 2017), multispecies relations (Fijn, 2011; Govindrajan 2019), pastoral uncertainties (Nori & Scoones 2019) and issues of environmental and climate justice in the Himalayan bioregion (Chakraborty et al., 2021). Collectively, we show how chronic and emergent injustices shape the presents and futures of Himalayan pastoralism—challenging the power asymmetries and state or development agendas which have continued to define herding possibilities, if unevenly, across the region. Highlighting the situated knowledges and agencies of herders, we foreground the ways that herding lifeways continues to matter, materially, politically, and ethically amid shifting horizons of possibility.

Chair: *Dane Carlson (Principia College)*

When Climate Precarity Meets Political Precarity: A Case of Tibetan Refugee Nomads from Ladakh, India
Tenzin Yangkey (University of Arizona)

Herding in the Ladakh region is a common yet dwindling practice as Ladakh faces changing political and socio-economic conditions. In the Changthang region of Ladakh, Changpa (Ladakhi) and Tibetan refugee nomads continue to practice herding and support their livelihood. However, in the last few decades, they are facing compound challenges to sustain their traditional herding livelihoods due to urbanization, youth migration, and generational change. In this study, I look at how Tibetan refugee nomads in Changthang Samad (out of eight different locations) perceive climate change and its impact on their livelihood. Tibetan refugee nomads relocated to the region in the 1960s, following the occupation of Tibet. By studying Tibetan nomads' livelihood strategies that they use to meet the changing physical environment (with political, and socioeconomic change in the background), I will explore how their political status affects their ability to employ specific livelihood strategies. Drawing from the political ecology of climate adaptation and political geography literature, I situate the experience of Tibetan refugee nomads and their plight in the global climate conversation as well as the regional climate change dialogue. I will also build upon the plural climate studies framework proposed by Chakraborty et al (2021) and explore the intersection of climate precarity and political precarity in Ladakh with the case of Tibetan refugee nomads.

Hired Herding and the Future of Pastoralism: A Case from the Western Himalayas
Aayushi Malhotra (BITS-Pilani)

Pastoral literature in India remains devoid of discussion on hired herding, even if many scholarly works have identified its existence in other places and contexts. Under the assumption that labour is largely drawn from within the households in traditional pastoral settings in India, possibilities of hired herding have not been adequately explored. In this paper, I shed light on hired herding practices among the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh.

Hired herders often known as *puhals*, have traditionally been employed by the Gaddi pastoralists under specific institutional arrangements to supplement their labour needs. However, the needs and norms for hiring puhals are evolving with the changes in pastoral practices. Amidst the volatile shifts in livelihoods and the declining interest among the youth to pursue pastoralism, hiring puhals among the Gaddis is acquiring new forms and meanings. I unpack these evolving practices of hiring puhals by discussing the ethnographic findings collected over 2018-2020, in this paper. By doing so, I emphasize on the critical aspect of labour that is essentially becoming a determining factor for the functioning as well as the future of pastoralism for many traditional pastoral communities. While refuting the dominant predictions of its potential end in the near future, I argue that puhal practices remain significant in enabling the continuity and sustenance of Gaddi pastoralism. Inferences drawn from this case further opens up a discursive space for dialogues on hired herding as well as labour across other pastoral contexts in India and elsewhere, where similar situations are unfolding.

A Multispecies Agropastoral Ecology Facing Disembeddedness in Limi, Nepal
Tara Bate (University of Zürich)

A common response to the depletion of biodiversity, one of the key features of the current global ecological crisis, is the conservation of areas still somewhat spared of anthropogenic damage. This endeavour often consists in further separating the non-human from the human realms. Conservation rests on natural-science foundations and the focus is lain on a conception of "nature" which excludes the human. This presentation shows that pastoral practice in the Limi valley of north-western Nepal conceives of the human as enmeshed within a network of interacting beings. This conception is framed by religion (a syncretic mixture of Mahayana Buddhism, Bön religion and Animism), as well as by a broader ecological practice of care which is central to pastoral practice in Limi. I argue that this conception favours a multispecies coexistence within a shared habitat, enabled through pastoral skills. However, in recent years, the progressive obsolescence of pastoralism as the main means of livelihood has led to a certain *disembeddedness* of humans from these multispecies entanglements, with potential cosmological, political and ecological consequences, which I offer to look into.

Room VC 206
Values of Education II

Economic and symbolic values attributed to education are deeply intertwined and future-oriented: individuals, families and states make enormous economic investments in formal education with the belief and hope that it will pay off in some distant future—in the form of economic progress, increased social standing and through the symbolic currency of an educated population. This unwavering faith in education has not only resulted in the dramatic increase in young people's participation in formal education in the Himalayan region, but also a pervasive commercialisation of education. Given all this, families are willing to make substantial financial sacrifices and/or take debts to ensure a better future for their children. Similarly, there is a gradual blurring of boundaries between public and private education, with public schools increasingly charging money for various aspects of education.

Addressing the financial landscape of education in the Himalayas and the socio-cultural and moral meanings surrounding it, this panel opens for an interdisciplinary debate on values, valuations, investments, returns and debts attached to educational processes, institutions and/or systems in different parts of the Himalayan region. What are the values of education—and how do conflicting values of education clash? How do these shape and are shaped by people's vision for their lives? And how are these intertwined with existing and/or new social inequalities?

Chair: *Karen Valentin (Aarhus University)*

Our Land, Our Life: The 'Value' of a Holistic Educational Initiative in Uttarakhand
Mohini Gupta (University of Oxford)

Uttarakhand is a fragile ecological zone located in the central Himalayan region of North India. It has been witnessing devastating forest fires and landslides, aggravated in the last 15 years by worsening land conditions. After the New Education Policy 1986, The Uttarakhand Environment Education Centre (USNPSS, abbreviated from Hindi) was informally appointed by the central government to deliver environment education programmes in this region. Within a year, their textbook 'Our Land, Our Life', tailored to local environment issues, was adopted by and taught as a part of the state school curriculum. By 2001, more than 68,000 students were participating in their programme (Pande, 2001).

How has an educational programme situated at the margins of 'formal' education enabled a sustainable approach to education within the Himalayas? The model implemented by USNPSS is unconventional, as it experiments with methods of play and practical, hands-on learning techniques; and participatory, as it invites the local community to co-create and deliver their learning initiatives. They operate through *balwadis* (pre-primary centres); environment education for Classes 6-10; and working closely with local women's groups. These are offered free of cost as the programme is supported by private charitable trusts from around the world.

By providing high-quality education across social groups, USNPSS has ensured that local communities see the 'value' in mainstream education and encouraged them to participate successfully in formal village schools, instead of migrating to urban centres. Can such innovation occur within formal set-ups of education at all, and can this model be replicated across Himalayan communities?

What is Happening to/in Public Schools during the Post-2015 Transition?

Pratyoush Onta (Martin Chautari), Lokranjan Parajuli (Martin Chautari), Devendra Uprety (Martin Chautari), Rukh Gurung (Martin Chautari)

After the promulgation of the new (2015) Constitution, Nepal formally transited to a secular, federal republic from the erstwhile Hindu, unitary monarchic state. The new constitution divides various powers, responsibilities to the three tiers of governments. School education which was under the jurisdiction of the central government has now come under the jurisdiction of local governments. This paper provides an initial assessment of this transfer of power to the local governments by looking at what is happening in the school education sector post 2015 transition.

Based on several dozen interviews with school teachers, head teachers, local government leaders and other individuals, this paper first analyzes the constitutional and legal provisions that govern the school education sector. It also looks at the roles and strategies of stakeholders such as teachers' confederation, ministry of education (MoE), bureaucracy, and local governments' confederations, and the underlying causes behind them. It also analyzes a number of issues related to school education when schools are operated under the local government.

Despite the opposition mainly by teachers' associations, lack of support from the federal government and bureaucracy, and not much interest of the local leadership, this paper argues, the involvement of local governments in school education has grown significantly. Such involvement has many dimensions and has led to the formation of their own patterns and structures. This article shows that despite many weaknesses Nepal's public education is showing some signs of change, in some cases improvement, after bringing the schools within the ambit of local governments.

Literacy Development in the Himalayas as a Social Change

Mark Condra (Tribhuvan University)

Due to rapid changes in Nepal, the languages of the Himalayan region have an uncertain future. While linguists typically hold literacy development to be the foremost task for language documentation and preservation, there is a lacuna of literature on its relationship with social change. In this article, I argue that literacy development in the Himalayas is a political form of social change that requires community impetus and change agent specialization to allow the benefits of the innovation to diffuse into society. As a technology that contributes to knowledge production, literacy development holds no inherent economic promise, rather, it can pave the way for a multitude of developments. These include the ability for independent knowledge production, contribution to language preservation, heightened prestige of the language, and more effective elementary education in schools. To responsibly introduce change, I argue for an alternative conception of development, which recognizes the community as the prime drivers of the innovation. I define the role of the change agents in providing technical skills, and I conclude with factors to be considered in confirming the innovation-development process.

Room VC 211
The Politics of Labor in the Himalayas and Beyond
Chair: *Verena La Mela (University of Fribourg)*

The Future? A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Dialectics of Caste and Sanitation Workers in Darjeeling and Pokhara
Amit Balmiki (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad)

Caste has not just been an Indian construct and realization of the past but also an unanswered question of the present. It has adopted the transnational lens in the contemporary times extending its influence and penetration across boundaries and one suitable example would be that of caste in Nepal. It may be argued that caste has served to be the prima facie influencing every other aspect of social life in the making at least in India and Nepal.

Generations after generation, both India and Nepal have witnessed the employment of the so called lower castes in the menial jobs (as sanitation workers) based on the code of purity and pollution. Several studies have been conducted over the years to understand the caste composition in these menial jobs and found conclusive evidence that the dalit labor force pre-dominates this sector both in India and Nepal. On the contrary the present trend also suggests that there have been engagements of other castes (non-dalits) as well in the sanitation workforce due to lack of employment opportunities. As such, this paper would try and explore the dynamic and transnational relationship of caste and sanitation workers through a comparative framework in Darjeeling (India) and Pokhara (Nepal) that geographically share a similar landscape in the Himalayan belt. In doing so, it would try to engage with the larger question of the future of these sanitation workers in these sites through smaller interrogations such as: Can sanitation work be de-linked from the caste or from discrimination? What sanitation work does to the sanitation worker's social and cultural life? Is upward mobility of sanitation workers of these spaces possible in future? To seek the answer phenomenological investigation of the narratives from the field would be applied.

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Transforming Caste into Networks for Business Opportunities: A Case Study from the Meat Industry in Nepal
Kanako Nakagawa (Otemon Gakuin University)

This study examines how people belonging to the meat seller caste adapt to government-led modernization policies by making professional networks based on the solidarity of their caste. Animal sacrifices, especially of buffalo, have played a crucial role in the religious rituals of the Newar people, an indigenous group in Kathmandu. In Newar society, Khadgi people have historically engaged in both animal sacrifice and meat- selling as their caste-based role.

In 2016, the government of Nepal announced a ban on buffalo slaughter within the Kathmandu Valley, deeming it "pre-modern" and "unhygienic." The people of the Khadgi caste, who slaughter buffaloes in a traditional manner within their residential areas, were thus expected to move their work to newly built slaughterhouses outside the Kathmandu Valley. Consequently, the Khadgi people have established their own company to distribute "healthy and hygienic meat", transforming their operations to fulfil this governmental policy. This company collaborates with Khadgi communities living in the Tarai Plain along the border with India. Khadgi people have attempted therefore to sustain two coterminous systems: industrial meat processing, such as in factories in the Tarai Plain, and traditional slaughtering in the Kathmandu Valley. In this paper, I will focus on their efforts to balance the production of raw '*rāto māsu*' (red meat) in the Kathmandu Valley and the production of frozen '*seto māsu*' (white meat) in the plains. Thus, I will explain how their caste has been transformed into a basic unit for networking with peers to consolidate business opportunities, whilst conforming with state-led modernization directives.

Heat in the Anthropocene: Living, Laboring, and Dying as Migrant Workers in the Middle East
Nirvan Pradhan (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Migrant workers from the Eastern Himalayas face dangers and risks working in the Middle East. Migrants face physical violence, rape, imprisonment, psychological stress, chronic illness, starvation, denial of basic hygiene amenities, sexual harassment, isolation, torture and untimely deaths (O'Neill, 2001; Bhattarai, 2005; Schliebs, 2009; Modarres, 2010; Puvar, 2015; Stephenson, 2015). This paper asks how *heat* as a thermodynamics category shapes the body, labour and death of migrant workers generating specific experiences, endurances and suffering? Given that workers are constituted in relation to an oppressive outdoor work environment—how do they endure "heat stress" (Kjellstrom *et al.* 2016). This framework of heat suggests using environmental factors as revealers of the social conditions of migrants rendered invisible by discourses but are the lived realities of everyday life of workers. My methodology is grounded in field work conducted in the Eastern Himalaya in 2020 to 2021 and "digital ethnography" (De Seta, 2020).

Focusing on migrant workers' experience with heat, the paper analyzes *heat pressure*—its impacts and manifestations to make three inter-related points. First, heat as a thermodynamics category affecting the workers performance in agriculture and construction sectors. Second, I examine heat pressure in outdoor spaces engendering dissipation of energy precipitating *fatigue* in migrant workers. Third, I follow Mbembe's (2003) lead in focusing on the postmortem biography of the dead—showing subtler levels of classification of deaths reveal the reach of modern necropolitics by the state beyond the moment of death, to occlude the causes of death by heat and its effects.

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Socio-Economic Transformations and Cloth Formation: A Case Study of Dhaka Cloth in the Singalila Borderlands
Yuko Takamichi (Kyoto University)

This paper examines how socio-economic transformation in the Singalila borderlands has contributed to the formation of Dhaka cloth of Nepal. Dhaka is a hand-woven cloth with intricate geometric pattern. Dhaka is woven in various areas of Nepal and eastern Nepal is one of the famous production sites. In particular, Terhathum which is located in hilly area of Eastern Nepal, is well-known as a production center of Dhaka (Dunsmore, 1998: 26). While Dhaka is an important cultural symbol of the nation of Nepal (Rich-Zendel, 2013), there is raising awareness that Dhaka is a traditional cloth of Limbu people who are the majority in the area.

However, it was not that long before that the practice of weaving and wearing Dhaka began in eastern Nepal. It seems that inflow of ready-made yarns from India brought about the expansion of the practice of weaving and wearing Dhaka in eastern Nepal. On the other hand, Dhaka and its skill training have recently entered in Sikkim region. In Sikkim, after the democratization of 1990s, ethnic costumes which were unified among the Nepali people having lived there before became differentiated. Now, Dhaka is used in some of the ethnic costume of Limbus in the area.

In this paper, I will examine how the inflow of ready-made yarns from India was and outflow of fabrics and skill trainings from Nepal have developed and how these flows in the Singalila border area formed people's practices of weaving and wearing Dhaka.

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Room VC 212
Re-Indigenizing Research in the Himalayas
Chair: *Amelia Hall (Naropa University), Anne Parker (Naropa University*

Following the ground-breaking roundtable on Decolonizing Research in the Himalayas at the Himalayan Studies Conference in Boulder, Colorado, this panel seeks to further this discourse toward new conversations in Re-Indigenizing Research in the Himalayas. The papers presented in this panel explore emerging approaches to research in which the researchers and the researched are intertwined in collaborative and emerging learning in the specific context of a relationship with land and living beings in the Himalayas.

Aware of direct or indirect historical impacts of colonization and the marginalization of indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and natural sciences, we explore the work needed to develop genuine relationship. In essence, the researcher needs to "do their work" in the sense of looking closely at underlying values of western educational research while simultaneously taking steps to re-indigenize their own knowledge base. Some of this needed inner work includes examination of one's social locations and engaging in auto-ethnography practice and ancestral repair. This recovery work may not be explicit (i.e. not centered on the topic of research), but implicit in the worldview the researcher is acting from. What is the work? How does this work show up? What new core values for research are emerging? On the basis of this what new methods are being used? We raise questions and invite new inspirations in the evolution of research practices and mutually beneficial conversation moving forward.

Restorative Approaches to Interspecies Relations in the Himalayas
Amelia Hall (Naropa University)

klu'bum are collections of Tibetan texts employed to apologize for disturbance to the aquatic underworld inhabitants of Himalayan cosmology. Ecological stability occurs by making periodic and timely recompenses to them, thus ensuring sustainable interspecies reciprocity. A re-indigenizing of approaches in studying such collections and their accompanying rituals is a paradigm shift whereby beings are understood via their interdependence rather than as discrete entities and ontological systems operating independently. Considerations explored in current research center on the recognition of a marginalized element of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition; supernatural beings and their place within interdependent ecosystems, and as a recuperation of relational approaches that may serve to alleviate this exclusion. These perspectives are offered with the acknowledgment that it stretches the normative boundaries of dominant cultural belief systems and address sustainability concerns in a way mostly disregarded by Euro-American scholarship and conservation efforts. This collaborative work privileges indigenous models of spiritual resources, conservation, and sustainability. It aims to encourage an inclusive dialogue concerning the implications of climate change in this eastern Himalayan region and, more broadly, in a new and uncertain geological era. My role as a collaborator necessitates attending to issues of social location, academic identity, and recovery of a disregarded cultural past and present vis a vis interspecies relations. In such approaches, there are a few common threads to consider: interspecies reciprocity; relationships to land not dominated or entirely shaped by economic profit; communal maintenance; ancestral repair, and responsibility to future generations.

TBA
Avalos, Natalie (University of Colorado Boulder)

Attending to Sacred Place through the Lens of Indigenous Science
Anne Parker (Naropa University)

Himalayan lands are seen through an animist lens where places are revered as alive. These animist underpinnings effect long-term care for the earth and modern-day efforts in environmental protection and innovation, notably in Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Contributing little to causes of climate change, these peoples face its dramatic impacts, and yet they are nonetheless are dedicated to environmental protection and innovation. Sacred sites play an active role in this intimate relationship with land, reinforcing commitment to maintain balance with nature. Their associated pilgrimage practices are a keystone in people's somatic engagement with land as sacred. This case study explores stupas in Bhutan and their role in this relationship. Our research arises from a consciously decolonized collaboration between Bhutanese colleague Tshering Choden and outside colleagues Dominique Susani and myself, thorough a dialogue between our own two indigenous traditions of sacred geometry that specifically focuses on indigenous science perspectives in a way that reveals the active dimensions of stupa architecture. This exploration revealed intentional effects on the human body's energetic field imbedded in stupa design. As markers in the middle of daily life, stupas call us to wake up and realign our lives to our fullest potential, as well as offer places for re-energizing people on the path ahead as all of humanity is facing climate change and other crises that call for our greatest potential and our deepest compassion.

Storytelling on the Environment: An Alternative Approach to Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Community Building
Jenny Bentley (University of Zurich), Minket Lepcha (Filmmaker)

This paper discusses Indigenous storytelling as an approach through which Indigenous youth are provided with a safe common space to reconnect with and revive their ancestral knowledge systems and engage in enhancing and contributing to narratives around conservation in the fragile Himalayan region. It intends to contribute to the (academic) debate on decolonizing research methodologies.

We share the learning experiences drawn from a workshop and mentorship program we organized in the Lepcha community in the Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills (India), supported by the "Himalayan Borderland" project under Professor Frances Garrett (University of Toronto). In 12 interactive online sessions artists, conservationists, academics, and traditional knowledge holders—mainly from the Lepcha community—engaged with 30 Lepcha youth to explore self-reflective ways to collect and express their ancestral environmental narratives that evolve around intertwined conceptions of sacredness, community, and ecosystems. Core aim was for Indigenous youth to reclaim their ancestral heritage, narratives, and knowledge systems in the contemporary world. The workshop facilitators further mentored the young participants, co-creating a knowledge exchange that supported the youth to develop means of expression conducive to them. Thereby, as we emphasize, story telling—the act of telling and listening to one other—can bring forth mutuality, encourage youth to commune, and build a harmonious relationship between self and environment. The paper will be guided by the expressions of the youth themselves and highlight how such an approach can offer an inclusive perspective on data collection and presentation.

Indigenous Knowledge, Gender, and Climate Change in Nepal
Sangita Thebe Limbu (University College London)

There has been a growing recognition of indigenous knowledge (IK) in the global climate change discourse. IK, broadly defined, is portrayed as a valuable resource in climate change detection and adaptation. The conceptual discussions on IK, however, are characterized by ambiguities as there is limited clarity on what constitutes IK. Very few literatures have engaged with the existing conceptual vagueness, and there is a question on whether it is possible to discuss IK without engaging with the contested concept of indigeneity. Meanwhile, the distinction between IK and scientific knowledge has been called into question. Feminist scholars argue that all knowledge systems are gendered, socially differentiated, and embedded in social relations and power struggles. How then do we study IK and its complexities in relation to climate change—theoretically, methodologically, and empirically? I will explore these questions in the context of Nepal located in South Asia. While there is a reluctance to recognize the category of indigenous peoples by national governments across the Indian subcontinent, Nepal is an exception as it became the first and one of the only countries in South Asia to have ratified the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (No. 169) in 2007. Despite the legal frameworks, conventions, and social movements, indigeneity remains a sensitive and politically contested issue in Nepal. Considering these contexts, I will use qualitative multi-methods to explore the interrelations of IK, gender, and climate change based on feminist, decolonial approaches.

Room VC 215
Roundtable: Project Himalayan Art: Developing Resources for Integrating Himalayan Culture into Teaching on Asia
Chair: *Elena Pakhoutova (Rubin Museum of Modern Art), Karl Debreczeny (Rubin Museum of Modern Art)*

Participants: *Kerry Lucinda Brown (Savannah College of Art and Design), Annabella Pitkin (Lehigh University), Andrew Quintman, (Wesleyan University)*

The roundtable's goal is to encourage integration of Himalayan art and culture into liberal arts curricula, expanding their inclusion in Asian Studies courses. The region's prominent role as a crossroads of cultural exchange between South, Central, and East Asia and a diverse transnational space challenges our understanding of geo-political dynamics. The Rubin Museum's new initiative, Project Himalayan Art, seeks to remedy the underrepresentation of Tibetan and Himalayan culture and the lack of introductory resources for teaching about the region by developing three integrated components: a broad-reaching publication, freely accessible online resources, and a traveling exhibition. Using these innovative tools, educators can incorporate Himalayan culture in courses within diverse institutional settings. The project's strategy is to work with faculty to create content for teaching on Asia within a wide range of disciplines, including history, religion, art, and anthropology, offering material to enrich existing curricula. We will explore the Project's pedagogical opportunities and consider how instructors with and without prior experience teaching about Himalayan culture might utilize these tools in their classes.

Project Himalayan Art is informed by a Humanities Advisory Group and an Exhibition Advisory Group, scholars from a range of academic disciplines and area specializations. Curators of the Rubin Museum, along with a few members of the advisory groups will present the project to encourage discussion of the project's implementation with those in attendance to gather valuable feedback and advance its effectiveness.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #6
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15

12:00-15:30

Democracy and the State in the Himalayas
Chair: *Nilanjana Sen (University of Melbourne)*

The Prospects for Indian Style Hindutva in Nepal
Richard Bownas (University of Northern Colorado)

This paper argues that even though the social conditions for Indian style Hindutva religious movements are ripe in urban Nepal, these movements have, so far, failed to crystallize outside of the Terai and in certain online forums. It explores the conditions likely to encourage the success of religious movements such as Hindutva based on existing scholarship and uses Christian conversion as an 'alternative path' taken by many who would otherwise be most susceptible to Hindutva style movements. It then projects various possible futures for a 'Nepali Hindutva' based on changes in social conditions, potential political leadership, comparisons with the rise of Hindutva in India and interviews with activists and leaders in Nepal associated with proto-Hindutva movements. The paper is primarily based on extensive interviews conducted in Nepal from 2019 to 2022, especially with migrants from rural to urban areas in Nepal, who are deemed the group most likely to support Hindutva style movements.

Shrinking Political Spaces of Regional Parties in Assam's Sixth Schedule Areas
Michael Islary (Institute for Social and Economic Change)

The Eastern Himalayas besides being endowed with rare and endemic flora and fauna is also a region where numerous ethnic cultures and people ensemble. The Sixth Schedule Areas in India's Northeast was introduced to provide a political and administrative mechanism to protect the interests of the tribal people in the hill areas. This article highlights the lack of political space and the decaying of regional political parties in Assam's Sixth Schedule Areas after the incursion of national political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress. The article is developed based on the author's lived experience in the region, observation and reference to the secondary sources. In recent years, national political parties such as the BJP and the Congress have horse—traded rival candidates to stay relevant in the tribal council elections primarily meant for development at the local level. People have started questioning the value of lives lost during the statehood movement and furthermore, the significance of the Peace Accords signed. A region that has a dark past and has always been lagging as far as development indicators are concerned, can ill afford to play politics and lock horns with national political parties. The entry of national political parties in the council defeats the very purpose of establishing the ADCs and tribal self-rule.

Digging up the Dirt: Democracy and the Local News Media in a Border Town
Kristen Zipperer (Harvard University)

Since the early 1990s, when a new constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, local news media in Nepal has boomed. Notably, however, studies of media as it relates to the country's democratic transformation remain relatively few. This paper investigates the history and contemporary workings of local news media in Birgunj, a bustling border town in Madhesh Province in the country's southern plains, and considers what its proliferation means for Nepal's political life. Through oral histories, participant observation, media analysis, and interviews, it explores what kind of news is published in Birgunj and why. The paper argues that the rise of local media has made politicians and politics more visible than ever before. This increased visibility, however, has not prompted a public sense of honesty and transparency within the political sphere, but rather, has increased distrust and a perception of the unseen. Attention to the new political visibilities and discourses that local media have opened up provides insight into the public's growing ambivalence around federalism and democracy within Birgunj and Nepal as a whole.

Crafting Indigenous Futures through 'Traditional Democracy:' Tharu Activism in Contemporary Western Nepal
Tatsuro Fujikura (Kyoto University)

The indigenous Tharu activists in western Tarai plains of Nepal fought for a 'semi-autonomous' Tharu state during the post-conflict, transition period from 2006 to 2015. However, the federal system implemented under the new constitution of 2015 did not allow for any ethically-based autonomous state. In the post-2015 context, a number of Tharu activists have turned their attention to the politics at the municipal level, and have been demanding, among other things, formal recognition of *barghar* system, which they claim is a traditional system of self-governance among the Tharus. Due to the armed conflict and the subsequent political instability, no local elections were held in Nepal between 1997 to 2017, and consequently, there were no elected local representatives for a long period of time. During this period, in the areas where the Tharus constitute the majority, it was *barghar*s who managed local affairs, including mobilizing people for local infrastructure maintenance and development, and mediating local disputes. After the local elections in 2017, in several municipalities, Tharu activists have been demanding that the authorities of *barghar* be formerly recognized, and in some cases, successful in having the role of *barghar*s written in municipal codes and regulations. I argue that the Tharu activists are seeking to create and retain a space of autonomy and democracy, through the demand for the formal recognition of *barghar*s, against the liberal and competitive forms of electoral politics and governance.

'Self-Manifestation:' Understanding Young People's Blood Donation Practices and Ideas of Distinction in Small Town Shimla in North India
Nilanjana Sen (University of Melbourne)

Based 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Himalayan town of Shimla, this paper argues that youth in small town India spend time in urban centres reflecting on their agency, especially questions of voice and place. In moving away from the patriarchal systems associated with their rural homes, young women and men imagine their presence in urban university spaces as an opportunity to reflect on the idea of ethical placement of voice. In order to do this, they especially distinguish between 'raising' (*awaz uthana*) and 'keeping' one's voice (*awaz rakhna)*. Tied intimately to ideas of morality— often gendered, youth view their ability to separate 'raising' (*uthana*) and 'keeping' (*rakhna*) their voice as a major aspect of their developing their agency (see also Dyson and Jeffrey 2022; Schafers 2017). The act of keeping one's voice focuses on both socially appropriate as well as strategic delivery of verbal content by accounting for concerns of respectability and moral limitations associated with the place. Alternatively, raising one's voice is imagined to expand the boundaries of acceptable practices with the primary intention of reorienting one's relationship with ideas of an ethical place. In this paper I will show that an attention to the centrality of ideas of place where voice can be 'kept' or 'raised' reflects young people's complex efforts at influencing long term change.

Room VC 115
Disaster, Response, and Reconstruction
Chair: *Milan Shrestha (Arizona State University*

Aftermath: The Long-Term Sustainability of Civic Technology after Disasters
Shreyasha Paudel (University of Toronto), Robert Soden (University of Toronto)

Civic technology groups have been shown to provide critical support to humanitarian agencies, governments, and the public during major disaster events. This was true in the case of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal as well where many grassroots civic technology groups led recovery and reconstruction projects. Many of these groups have been active in various developmental and disaster response work in the years since. In this paper, we explore the trajectory of such civic tech organizations in Nepal during and after the 2015 earthquake and explore the strategies, decisions, and resources required for long-term sustainability of such organizations. Drawing from qualitative interviews with active members of grassroots civic tech groups, we analyze how these groups defined their priorities and gathered resources such as funding, manpower, and knowledge. Our study explores how the presence and absence of donor and media attention in the aftermath of the earthquake enabled different strategies and visions for the sustainability of grassroots civic technology organizations in Nepal and what role such decisions play in the readiness and longer term sustainability of these organizations.

COVID-19 and Technological Interventions in Nepal: The Mobilization of Civic Technologies as a Rapid Response to the Pandemic
Maya Daurio (University of British Columbia)

Civic technology in Nepal, often shortened to civic tech, is an active sector represented by a number of diverse organizations performing innovative work, including using drones to transport medical lab specimens, facilitating open data access, and producing maps for humanitarian purposes. Civic tech may be understood as civic engagement through the use of technology. During the second wave of COVID-19 in Nepal, an informal network of civic tech actors responded to critical needs emerging from a hastily imposed government lockdown and rising caseloads challenging the physical capacity of hospitals to care for patients. This paper is based on five qualitative interviews and secondary research to examine the role of civic technology in Nepal in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These interviews were with representatives of organizations whose work involves open mapping, open data, robotics, drones, and temporary COVID-19 networking efforts. This paper draws on the data collected to better understand how the civic tech sector mobilized nimbleness and navigated both informal relationships and partnerships with the state to identify and respond to rapidly evolving critical infrastructure and coordination gaps.

Landscape(s) of Resilience: Himalayan Youth Mobilization Initiatives During Disasters
Adrian Ashaf Khan (University of Toronto)

During times of disasters, chaos often results in the immediate forced movement of migrants seeking safe refuge without the uncertainty of a return. Depending on the extent of the destruction endured during environmental calamities, rebuilding initiatives of living accommodations, schools, neighbourhoods, heritage sites, government buildings, or in some instances even rebuilding of the national identity itself, can often be complicated by many conflicting factors. Some factors include inadequate coordination efforts among, local, national, and international development projects; uneven distribution of government aid among those in dire need of it; and little to no public engagement from those affected themselves often due to a lack of awareness of how to participate in sustainable rebuilding initiatives.

From data collected through in-depth interviews and multi-sited ethnography in 2017-2019, this presentation begins by tracing initial reactions and forced displacements from the 2015 earthquake contexts of Himalayan youth participants studying in Kathmandu. The paper then considers youth mobilization efforts initiated through social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber; video calling applications like Skype; and coding software such as NVivo. Examining how youth use communication technology to engage the public during rebuilding initiatives helps to raise critical awareness around what resilience looks like from Himalayan youth perspectives and how youth in this study mobilized their efforts during times of crisis. The paper will additionally throughout make parallels to Himalayan participant's lived experiences with intersecting crises (the Civil War from 1996-2006 and recently the COVID-19 Pandemic) from a frame of reference referred to as 'landscape(s) of resilience.'

Volunteering as Empathy-Based Activities during the Nepal 2015 Earthquake
Sanae Ito (Kyoto University)

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss volunteering in Nepal, particularly based on the case of the 2015 earthquake. This presentation used the following definition: volunteering activities are (1) self-motivated, (2) not for financial profits, and (3) have public purpose. Several "volunteering activities" as described in this definition were undertaken in Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake. Among them, this presentation discusses the following three activities. The first is volunteer activities performed by the victims themselves. The second is the volunteer activities performed immediately after the disaster by young individuals in the urban areas. Young individuals, who had never participated in volunteer activities earlier were seen transporting supplies to areas that were particularly hard hit, clearing rubble and debris, and cleaning up trash. The third activity was a fund-raising campaign organized by migrant Nepali workers / students living outside the country. While they were involved in activities targeted to help their relatives and villages, they were also involved in general activities to help "the victims in Nepal."

Among these three activities, the second and third ones (performed by non-victims) were based on the empathy toward "being Nepali" that had the potential to lead to inclusion. In contrast, the sense of "being Nepali" can also lead to the exclusion of those deemed unwilling to cooperate in disaster recovery. This presentation thus discusses the inclusivity and exclusivity aspects of volunteer activities in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

Room VC 206
Roundtable: Youth Deliberation on Post-Federalism and Political Culture in Nepal
Chair: *Thomas O'Neill (Brock University)*

Participants: *Sandhya Acharya (Mahila Pahila), Samrat Katwal (Hands On Institute), Pradip Pariyar (Samata Foundation), Bijaya Poudel (Hands On Institute)*

Most Nepali youth today were born after the people's movement of 1991 ended the absolute authority of the monarchy and established a parliamentary democracy. They were children during the years of the Maoist "People's War" that culminated in a second people's movement in 2006 that established Nepal as a republic. Now, as young adults, they are being called on to engage with new federal democratic institutions that were intended to reform Nepal's centralized, patrimonial political culture. Our project explored deliberative democracy as an alternative political practice that engages young citizens in participatory decision making. In 2018 and 2019, we organized seven deliberative "mini-publics" in Lalitpur, Itahari, Birgunj, and Surkhet in which we asked the following questions:

How do Nepali youth engage with democratic institutions?
How do Nepali youth perceive structures of political authority in Nepal?
What political aspirations motivate youth?

Can deliberative democracy facilitate a consensus on how these aspirations can be realized? In this round table discussion, we will first present a 40-minute documentary video "Chalphal" which resulted from these youth assemblies. "Chalphal" is in Nepali, with English subtitles. In it, Nepali youth debate their priorities for Nepal's new political architecture, and then present these priorities to local, provincial, and federal political leaders. The video contends that structured dialogue and deliberation are effective ways to pursue political outcomes, but also that centralization and patrimonialism are deeper structures that continue to shape Nepal's political culture. At the conclusion of the video, the Nepali activists who collaborated with the principal investigator on the youth assembly program will provide brief responses to the video, after which we will open the discussion to the conference audience.

Room VC 211
Religion, Markets, and Modernity
Chair: *Todd Lewis (College of the Holy Cross)*

Monasteries, Monks, and Markets in Spiti: The Political Economy of Social Change in India's Himalayan Borderlands
Aniket Alam (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad)

There has been much academic focus on the impact of modern markets, institutions, and state structures on Himalayan communities. In this growing literature, there is not much which combines quantitative methods of analysing data gathered over an extensive territory with theoretical debates relating to nation-state, modernity, and markets. This proposed paper bases itself on an extensive survey of 150 families spread over 25 villages of the Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh, India to look at some of these processes at a granular level. This survey gathered data on how religious establishments and practices are dealing with the impact of modern markets and state institutions.

The paper hopes to show the nature of changes in domestic and village economies with the coming of modern markets and institutions, the new patterns of economic and political circulation these are encouraging, and how monasteries and religious practices are engaging with these changes. The survey and other research on which this paper is based is part of a larger study of change and continuity in trans-Himalayan regions of India. This ground-up study will argue that in Spiti this meeting of markets with monastic societies cannot be understood only as a top-down, largely malign, imposition by the post-colonial nation-state, but rather is a story of engagement, resilience, and resistance of the local communities with modernity. Religious institutions have changed to deal with this transformation and are, thus, helping their communities deal with change.

Nepal's Attempts to Regulate the Movement of Children to Monasteries in an Era of Child Rights
Deborah Parkes (University of Ottawa)

Recent Nepali media reports tell of children being brought to monasteries in India and the adults accompanying them intercepted by Nepal border authorities. Anti-trafficking and child-rights organizations have expressed concerns about how some children are recruited for monasteries. Drawing on interviews with child rights activists, the National Child Rights Council (NCRC), and cultural insiders, this paper overviews recent steps by the NCRC and the Nepali government to regulate the movement of children to monasteries (and other faith institutions) outside their home districts. These interventions follow a trend in recent decades of monks or other intermediaries inviting impoverished families in remote communities to send their children to monasteries in Kathmandu or India. The Tamang community from which many of the Nepali children hail has not traditionally sent children to large monasteries nor does it have a tradition of full-time celibate monks (Samuels, 2018). The trend of Tamang and other *Janajati* communities being encouraged to send children to distant monasteries comes alongside a decline in Tibetan-exile-community families sending their own children to monasteries (Samuels, 2018). Recently introduced government requirements include that "no-objection letters" be obtained from the Education Ministry for children to attend monasteries abroad. How state attempts to respect religious practices while ensuring children have a voice and are safe will play out in practice has yet to be seen. Regulating on matters touching on religion is a delicate undertaking, NCRC head Milan Dharel acknowledges.

"The Marriage that Never Happened:" The Reconstitution of Religion in Modernizing Kinnaur
Aman Kant Panta (IIIT Hyderabad), Alam Aniket (IIIT Hyderabad)

Our proposed paper studies changes in the institution of the *Deota* in the Sutlej valley (Kinnaur) of the Western Himalayas over the 20th century. Scholars have argued that the entry of the modern state in the 19th century radically changed political, economic and social conditions in the western Himalayas. The introduction of modern laws, land reforms, and the spread of roads and education have reduced the central position of the Deota. Anthropologists of religion have argued that despite this the Himalayan *Deotas* have continued their political, social, spiritual control on their communities, by redefining new roles for themselves. The *Deotas* have established new practices of worship, instituted new rituals and stopped older ones, and re-established many old hierarchies in new forms. These include construction of new temples, divine carriages, facial symbols, debates over animal sacrifices and vegetarianism, and linkages with the orthodox Hindu (and at times Buddhist) pantheon.

We bring insights from our study of *Kothi Devi* of Kalpa village and of *Dabla Deota* of Kanam village, both of Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh. We will do a comparative study of these two religious institutions over the period of a century, starting with the ethnographic work of Tika Ram Joshi (1911), then Rahul Sanskratyan's travelogue (1948), and our own field work conducted in October 2021, as well as proposed in summer 2022. We hope to make a contribution to the understanding of the reconstitution of religion in the Western Himalayas under the impact of the modernising nation-state.

Lamenting Food: Visions of Cultural Change Among the Brogpa of Ladakh
Aleksandar Bogdanov (Sofia University), Proletina Robova (Sofia University)

For the past two decades, the Buddhist Dards of Ladakh, known as Brogpa, have been experiencing a rapid cultural change rooted in economic and social reforms, military conflict, contemporary Indian nation-building, and tourism politics. This paper examines the community's perceptions of cultural transition, one of its main expressions being the disengagement with traditional food practices. In the past, the community produced, consumed, and shared foods that were perceived through the central notion of *shichu* which roughly translates as "pure" and denotes a quality viewed as resonating with the divine. Today, the specific religious and social order embedded in this concept is conceived as being disrupted by the introduction and normalization of consuming foods once perceived as *chutu* or "polluting", and causing illness and calamity. The sudden abandonment of Brogpa's mythical understanding of reality and its replacement with new identities evokes an emotional response of pain and regret as articulated by many members of the community who witnessed this transition. Their nostalgia sometimes translates into extraordinary imageries of a bleak future. Along with people, voicing the consequences of change are also the local *lha* as embodied in the community's rising number of *lhapa* and *lhamo*. 'Starved' by the scarcity of proper food offerings, deities often address the community to counteract change, contemplating old and new food practices, reaffirming traditional identities, and possibly shaping new ones. The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in the Brogpa villages from 2010 on.

Room VC 212

Roundtable: Decolonizing Himalayan Studies: How, Where, Why, Who, and When?

Chair: *Ritodhi Chakraborty (University of Canterbury)*

Participants: *Mabel Denzin Gergan (Vanderbilt University), Mark Turin (University of British Columbia), Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (University of British Columbia), Shangrila Joshi (Evergreen State College)*

Discussions around decolonizing the academy (1, 2) and Indigenising the post-secondary curriculum (3, 4) have until now mostly focused on Anglo settler-colonial contexts in what is broadly the global North. Thanks to interventions from colleagues who catalysed a series of emergent discussions at the previous HSC in Boulder alongside a few select publications in geography (5, 6), this overdue conversation is now beginning in Himalayan Studies.

Expanding from Paudel and Rankin's proposed decolonizing framework, and emerging out of different academic disciplines, trainings and backgrounds, the presenters and chair in this panel reflect on what it might mean to 'decolonize Himalayan studies' and what it would entail, considering the many layers and aspects of colonialism to unpack and unravel. We also remain mindful of how frameworks of decolonization can be co-opted by regionally oppressive regimes. We ask: At what scale(s) and in what ways should the decolonial project be envisioned and operationalized, and by whom? What might Himalayan studies look like if we centered the embodied experiences of Dalit, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized communities, who experience the nation-state form as an extension of colonial rule (7, 8)? Within the trans-disciplinary space of Himalayan Studies, what do academic partnerships that are *by* and *with* Indigenous scholars rather than projects *on* or *for* Himalayan communities look like? How might we interrogate Whiteness in Himalayan Studies and render its coded assumptions more visible? What kinds of realignments do we need to transform Himalayan Studies—*with intention*—so that it may become more equitable and inclusive?

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Reaching for High Peaks: Mountaineering, Neoliberalism, and Identity
Chair: *Roger Norum (University of Oulu)*

The Sherpa Vocation in Nepal
Gulati Medhavi (Panjab University)

As a high-risk activity, mountain climbing is considered an extremely dangerous job especially when performed on altitudes over 8,000 metres above sea level. The Sherpa vocation which consists of mainly load carrying, fixing ropes and setting of tents for their clients on the high-altitude Himalayan mountains, is one such job fraught with too many hazards and fatalities. However, due to higher monetary incentives in the mountaineering industry and lack of opportunities elsewhere in Nepal, the Sherpa climbers continue to work on the mountains despite preeminent risks. The paper draws upon empirical study of 43 Sherpa climbers conducted in Nepal through 2019 and 2020, and highlights the changes that have taken place in the Nepalese mountain industry. The paper further highlights the metamorphosis of the Sherpa vocation in Nepal after the first 1953 Mount Everest ascent.

Climbing for Credit: Reciprocity, Neoliberalism, and Wage Structures in the Himalayan Mountaineering Industry
Young Hoon Oh (University of California Riverside)

Sherpa climbers have been the subject of numerous literature, including nearly two hundred scholarly works published since the early 1950s. None of them, however, has examined the ways in which their salary is calculated and paid on the mountains and beyond, which are expected to shed a novel light on the distinct monopoly as linked to ethnicity. In this paper, I present a comprehensive outlook of the standardized wage structure practiced in the 2010s for the variety of job positions in ordinary international mountaineering expeditions across Nepal. From participations in nine expeditions and conversations with expedition organizers, climbing guides, low-altitude porters, kitchen staff, and other employees in Himalaya mountaineering expeditions, I report my observations of patterns in the wage practices. Revolving around a complex hierarchy, the practices are oftentimes corrupt and delayed. Moreover, I attempt to theorize about perpetual inequality and Sherpa monopoly, which constitute the wage structures and largely characterize the mountaineering tourism industry in Nepal. I argue that reciprocal relationships, primarily associated with ethnicity and autochthony, both uphold and conceal the inequality, scaffolding the fast industrialization of the tourism sector.

The Whiteness of Mount Everest
Peter Hansen (Worcester Polytechnic Institute)

In 2022, the "Full Circle Everest Expedition" aimed to scale the mountain to become the "first all-black and brown expedition to the highest place on earth." The whiteness of Mount Everest has been a distinctive feature of the peak from its naming in the nineteenth century through the many climbing expeditions in the twentieth century. This presentation reviews this longer history of whiteness on Mount Everest as its summit became a height of white masculinity for climbers from the Global North. More recent controversies over the commercialization of Everest, the increasing prominence of Sherpas and other Nepalis on the mountain, and the growing diversity among climbers from the Global South and the Global North have remain entangled in this history. They demonstrate the limits as well as the possibilities of such projects in shaping potential Himalayan futures.

The Construction of Sherpa Identity in Darjeeling: A Sociological Study of the Sherpas of Lamba Dara Busty

Rinzing Ongmu Sherpa (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

From 1841, Darjeeling emerged as an economic hub where labour came from indigenous groups and through migration from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan for the construction of the summer capital for the British. The building of roads, railways, schools and tea plantations there encouraged cheap labour from these neighbouring countries. It was at this junction that the Sherpas from Northeastern Nepal flocked to Darjeeling in the mid-1850s in search of new job opportunities. The Sherpas were in no time recognized for their abilities in undertaking high-altitude expeditions with ease which led the British to only prefer a Sherpa man as guides or porters during mountaineering expeditions. Slowly their occupation had started defining their identity, to the extent that the word Sherpa became synonymous with being a "high-altitude porter". Given such a backdrop this study aims to shift from a one-sided Eurocentric portrayal of the Sherpas and tires to understanding them through an emic perspective. The study takes the case of the Sherpas of Lamba Dara Busty who are the last group of "climbing Sherpas" left in Darjeeling and are therefore witnessing a transformation that has not been adequately brought forth. Thus, taking these Sherpas the study endeavour to unfold the Sherpa's perception of the self in a space such as Darjeeling to answer the question of what being a Sherpa means in Darjeeling, reflecting their experiences and narratives, which remain embedded behind their romanticised image. Thus, the main aim of the study is to understand how the Sherpas have emerged as an ethnic group in Darjeeling over the years.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #7
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16

09:00-10:30

Room VC 101
Reckoning with New Uncertainties on a Himalayan Scale I

In the Himalayan bioregion, a variety of different state institutions, scientific teams, and policymakers are focused on modeling climate change, climate risks, and geomorphological ebbs and flows, to better predict, control, and govern an uncertain future. However, efforts to reckon with the complexity of this heterogeneous landscape quickly encounter "uncertainty on a Himalayan scale" (Thompson and Warburton 1985; cf. Guthman 1995, Metz 2010) resurfacing classic debates about political ecologies and the evolving horizons of knowledge. Whose models are used to map out future environments and possibilities? How do modeling practices come to shape lived experience, unevenly, for differently positioned peoples? Whose uncertainties matter, when and why?

Critical Himalayan scholarship has shown that better data alone is not enough to reckon with shifting hazard regimes, uneven patterns of vulnerability, and wicked questions of environmental and climate justice. Reckoning with these new risks and uncertainties requires a shift in values and ethical frameworks - it also requires recognizing the value of situated knowledges and models of communities chronically excluded from epistemic processes of disaster risk reduction and climate science (Chakraborty et al 2021; Sherpa 2014; Yeh 2015). This panel focuses on the shifting horizons of environmental knowledge amid rapid change, the anticipatory politics of modeling and forecasting, and the limits of knowledge and the situated politics of uncertainty. Collectively, these papers examine the ways in which re-cognizing existing models of risk and modes of organizing uncertainty might help give shape to alternative visions of environmental futures.

Chair: *Austin Lord (Cornell University)*

Cryospheric Reckonings: Climate Injustice, Epistemological Entanglement, and Responsible Climate Science in the Wake of the Langtang Disaster
Austin Lord (Cornell University)

In the wake of the Langtang Disaster of April 25, 2015, the people of Langtang have worked hard to reorient themselves and rebuild their lives. Over the same period, several different scientific teams have continued their research in the Langtang Valley, an important site for glaciological and climatological research in the Himalayan region, collecting data about the ways climate change is impacting the cryosphere. Both Langtangpas and climate scientists are concerned about the possibility of future disasters, especially as climate change destabilizes the valley making cryospheric hazard regimes more volatile—but they conceptualize and organize these socio-cryospheric uncertainties in very different ways.

In this paper, I examine the ways in which the Langtang Disaster created new spaces for reckoning with these vital uncertainties—engaging with critical debates over epistemological pluralism, climate justice, and moral ecologies in the Himalayan region (Butcher, 2013; Sherpa, 2014; Gagne, 2016; Chakraborty et al 2021). Here, uncertainty emerges not just an epistemological problem to be solved, but a vital space for dialogue across epistemic and ontological difference—a 'relational verb' (Scoones & Stirling, 2020) which creates opportunities for epistemological entanglement and, potentially, a shift toward cognitive justice (Burman, 2017). In the wake of the disaster, scientists have tried to initiate new forms of dialogue and community engagement in Langtang, trending toward a more "response-able" (Barad, 2007) form of climate science. In what ways has the 2015 disaster changed the shape of climate science in the Langtang Valley, and what might we learn from these imperfect reckonings?

Floods, Distributed Agency, and Speculative Futures of the Terai
Dane Carlson (Principia College)

In the plains of Nepal's Terai, floods have been transformed into annual disasters by mismanagement, disaster-centric development, and poorly designed infrastructure. Embankments are emblematic of the continually cascading failures of disaster; they project the possibility that a stable state can exist in a fluid landscape. This illusion is perpetuated by the continued rebuilding of embankments after breaches, often in the same place, or their expansion outward to claim new lands after major floods. This paper addresses two primary questions: First, what are the possible futures of this landscape if they are extrapolated from what exists now? Second, what are the possible futures of this landscape if infrastructures of control are literally and figuratively unbuilt?

Drawing on scholarship in landscape architecture, design studies, and anthropology, this work uses speculative drawing to propose answers to these questions. In response to the first question, the failures of embankment control compound across time. In response to the second, design takes place through collaboration with sediment and water in a densely farmed landscape. This is an ongoing reciprocal exchange: design action influences the movements of sediment and water and responds in turn to their ongoing movements. This speculative proposal is examined through the lenses of ontological and autonomous design. Unbuilding infrastructures of control makes space for distributed and participatory design led by people continually excluded from top-down planning. Designing and making landscapes can thus be acts of asserting sovereignty, healing land relations, or working together across difference in the pluriverse.

Unruly Mountains: Hydropower Assemblages and Geological Surprises in the Indian Himalayas
Saumya Vaishnava (Pennsylvania State University)

Despite a decades long push to develop what is seen as the vast untapped hydropower potential of the Indian Himalayas, hydropower capacity addition has been delayed and become increasingly expensive in India. Policy documents cite "poor" geology as a major reason for these delays. As hydropower in the form of run-of-river projects expand into the Himalayas, their construction activities encounter poor geology more frequently. This paper analyses hydropower development as an assemblage and examines how risk, especially geological risk, is negotiated to allow hydropower development to continue in the Indian Himalayas. We show how the category of "geological surprises" emerges as an institutional response to the problems of run-of-river based hydropower development in a seismically vulnerable landscape. We further show how "geological surprises" act as a boundary object between hydropower policy, project development, infrastructural finance, and hydropower knowledge, allowing for cooperation and negotiation, to allow hydropower development to continue in the geologically complex Himalayas.

Room VC 115
Himalayan Masculinities
Chair: *Ritodhi Chakraborty (University of Canterbury)*

Critical and feminist studies of masculinity from south Asia increasingly theorize with intersectionality to pluralize men and masculinities, registering them as mobile, provisional and ongoing projects [1]. In doing so they highlight the vital dimensions of life-course, spatialities, cultural expressions, and practices [2, 3]. In the Himalayan region most scholarship exploring gender and its many performative and material iterations has foregrounded the precarity and agency of regional women [4,5]. However recent scholarship has investigated the complicated relational lifeworlds of Himalayan men, challenging reductionist tropes of regional men as 'absent migrants' or as 'torchbearers of hegemonic masculinity'. These include the lives of men: at the intersections of ethnic othering and conflicts [6,7]; wrestling with the different dimensions of migration, diaspora and belonging [8,9], and their involvement with caregiving within the family [10]. In these panels, which span the Himalaya from Himachal in the west to Nagaland in the east, we hope to build on such critical, feminist and plural insights, and engage in a conversation about a myriad of masculinities that are transforming through their entanglements with caste, class, capitalism, techno-management, religious nationalism, state building, colonialism and ecological change, to name a few. We reflect on the ways in which various 'vernacular'/ 'regional' masculinities are informed by more hegemonic forms (itself a contested category) and how they are attempting to produce the Himalaya through a certain 'masculine ethos' [11]. Ultimately, we ask: how are Himalayan men embodying certain material and affective emergences and what impact does this have on the reimagining and reproduction of various spaces (households, communities, states)? Are their intergenerational cleavages that highlight transforming relational positions within various intimate and kinship networks? What are the differences and similarities in the different accounts across the region, are their common threads? Does regional masculinity reproduce or encounter the colonial narrative of the Himalaya as a risky, fragile, unruly space?

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State, Science, and Engineering in the Tarai: Hegemonic Masculinity and Race Reworked 'from within' in Nepal, 1880s-2010s

Janwillem Liebrand (Utrecht University)

Feminist scholars from the West conceptualise hegemonic masculinity as a supreme cultural norm in capitalist societies to which all men and women have to position themselves, and they identify state institutions as one of the most significant places of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Western hegemonic masculinity was introduced in Nepal through British imperial expansion in India. In the 19th and early 20th century, British hegemonic norms of masculinity and race were regularly displayed in Nepal during hunting expeditions in the Tarai, organised by the Ranas to host British guests and royalty (Guneratne, 1994; Krauskopff and Meyer, 2000). Such events provided an opportunity for the Ranas to appropriate British imperial norms of masculinity and race, and act as nobility and modern state intermediaries of their country. This changed in the 1950s, when the state of Nepal was inserted in the global capitalist system through development (Tamang, 2002). Science and technology experts, first from the US, and also from India, brought new norms of racialised hegemonic masculinity to Nepal. Since then, projects such as the Rapti Valley Development Project provided a place for elite Nepali men to learn about new gender norms and present themselves as worldly state intermediaries of a nation-in-development.

In tracing hegemonic masculinity and race in Nepal, I focus my analysis on the Tarai, mainly Chitwan District. Historically, the Tarai was a frontier in Nepal, an area vital for the nation but never fully under control of the state due to its proximity to India (Shrestha et al., 1993; Regmi, 1999a; 1999b; Gellner et al., 2008; Toffin, 2008; Gaige, 2009). As a method of analysis, I use photos of state intermediaries in Nepal. These can be aristocrats, science experts, engineers or state Officials. All the photos that I use were authored by state intermediaries themselves, for instance, by posing for the camera for a portrait or selecting an image for public display. I treat the photos as self-portraits and staged performances of masculinity. In analysing the images, I focus on the cultural identities of the intermediaries and the practices through which they established these identities. In the analysis, I pay specific attention to race, because it is so tangible in some of the photos. My goal is to document hegemonic masculinity in Nepal and explore how it is linked to present-day views on development practice and expert-led technology promotion in South Asia.

"Sitting:" Understanding Upper Caste Youth Agency on a University Campus in the Small Town of Shimla in North India
Nilanjana Sen (University of Melbourne)

Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the hill town of Shimla, this paper argues that upper caste young men in small town India spend time in the university reflecting on their agency, especially questions of hard work and physical agility. By taking the library within Himachal Pradesh University as an ethnographic object, I examine the prevalent youth practice of swiftly capturing vacant seats called 'seat capture' and the practice (sometimes also identified as a tactic) of 'sitting'. Sitting, which is a form of self-disciplining, is defined as the number of uninterrupted hours dedicated to 'work' to attain the socially valued goal of a government job. In the hope of fulfilling desired social and familial expectations while residing in an urban centre, upper caste men use their presence in the library as an opportunity to draw a relationship between the locally curated categories of ' sitting' and 'seat capture', which is a major aspect of developing their agency. For example, youth often emphasise controlling their bladder while in the library to avoid losing their seat and consequently risking their credibility in the village and their family as hardworking men. The expression of preparedness (explained using the vernacular aspirational idea of *tayar/tayari*) through the practice of 'sitting' and 'seat capture' therefore becomes a valued means through which upper caste men strive to acquire the status of a good son/sibling/citizen. In this paper I will explain how youth utilised the vernacular categories of 'sitting', 'seat capture' and '*tayari*' to situate themselves ethically on different scales: the university space, village, district, state, nation, and internationally. By reflecting on their own practice of 'sitting', young men create new differentiations between themselves and other marginalised youth based on notions of merit and worthiness. Thus, my analysis in this paper will show how for a section of upper caste youth, their practices of 'sitting' and 'seat capture' also became the basis of a justificatory framework to oppose preferential treatment for those belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categorisation.

Contoured Masculinities: Exploring the Mutual Construction of Gender and Infrastructure on Himalayan Roads
Anu Sabhlok (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research)

Gettin' Drunk and Hanging Out at State Stadium: An Ethnography of Men-of-Middle-Adulthood in Dimapur, Nagaland
Matthew Wilkinson (Australian Government Department of Education)

Craig Jeffrey's (2010) exploration of long-term unemployment among students and young men in Uttar Pradesh uncovered a complex world of activities, relationships and engagements that loosely fall into the term 'Timepass'. Building on the Timepass concept, critical approaches to masculinity in the Himalayas have explored men's experiences of unemployment, disengagement and waiting in contexts that are experiencing rapid change. However, few studies of men and Timepass engage with older men. In this study, I contribute to understanding experiences of marginalization, unemployment and Timepassing of 'men of middle-adulthood' in an emerging urban site, Dimapur, in the state of Nagaland, India.

"Who can save drowning men?" Transforming Relationships with Alcohol, Intergenerational Masculinities, and Place-Making in Uttarakhand
Ritodhi Chakraborty (University of Canterbury)

Room VC 206
Workshop: Flash Ethnography Workshop: Himalayan Conversations
Chair: *Sienna Craig (Dartmouth College), Carole McGranahan (University of Colorado Boulder)*

Participants: *Emily Amburgey (University of British Columbia), Ishani Dasgupta (University of Pennsylvania), Anudeep Dewan (University of British Columbia), Aidan Seale-Feldman (University of Notre Dam), Tenzing Wangdak (UC Irvine)*

During this time when worlds have at once constricted and fragmented, when the practice of fieldwork has involved new complexities, as we struggle with attention and reckon priorities, flash ethnography has emerged as a vital space in which to find focus and make meaning in and through these intense times. As with other "flash" forms (fiction, personal essay), flash ethnography is a distillation of story-as-theory as revealed in and through an affectively rich moment. These pieces are meant to stand alone, but may also find inspiration or forms of beginning by drawing on longer works. Flash ethnography is "accountable to the real, made from the tangled and charged texture of being-in-the-world and attuning ourselves also to the worlds of others" (Stone and McGranahan 2020). The mode of engagement here is meant to be one of appreciative inquiry and curiosity rather than strident critique. It is meant to be a generous and generative space in which stories are allowed to abide with each other, where connections are drawn and resonances heard. We suggest that this mode of writing may have a role to play in articulating the affects and uncertainties of Himalayan futures, viewed from a range of different positionalities across location and experience.

This (double) panel will be structured as a workshop, which requires some pre-conference activity. We are particularly interested in engaging with younger scholars, but hope to also facilitate meaningful and productive conversations among people at different stages of their careers. Each participant will share a 750-word flash ethnography piece prior to our gathering in Toronto. During the panel workshop, each participant will read their piece aloud (approximately 5 minutes), followed by 10 minutes of structured discussion, guided by one of the panel chairs, with opportunites from all participants to identify synergies, find the threads that run through our pieces, and encourage the sharpening and refinement of ideas. The panel workshop will be followed over the next 2 months by additional editorial input from the panel chairs and one other panelist. After revisons are made, these contributions will be submitted as a suite to *HIMALAYA*, together with an introductory flash essay by the panel chairs, as part of an upcoming special issue of the journal.

Trade, Exploration, and Coloniality across Himalayan Frontiers
Chair: *Stefan Lueder (Humboldt University Berlin)*

Travel Writings and the Colonial Representation of 'Others:' Society, Religion, and Customs in Early Western Travel Writings on Ladakh
Fida Hussain (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

The onset of the nineteenth century marked an intense process of western colonialism in British India. Voyages and overland travels became a constitutive part of this colonial structure to explore and collect knowledge about the unknown parts of the wider world, which played an essential role in building their knowledge of these alien societies. The representation of the imperial peripheries through these travel writings served the key purpose of British India to legitimise their ownership over the colonies. The overland journey of the British Indian explorer William Moorcroft to Ladakh in 1820 marked the beginning of a series of attempts by British Indian explorers to venture into the northernmost peripheries of the empire, which further narrowed down the spatial difference between Ladakh and the British headquarters in Kolkata. This paper attempts to understand the early western narratives on Ladakh as per the postcolonial discourse on travel writings, which sees travel writings not an end in itself, rather as a part of the larger colonial project. This centrality of Travel writings to the imperial project of Colonialism was first identified by Edward Said in his foundational work 'Orientalism'.

The early western travel narratives on Ladakh are of great literary value for various reasons, as apart from bringing the ordinary Englishmen in contact with the people and societies of the Himalayan region, these writings also formed the bedrock for the colonial expansion of British India. The huge body of travel writings produced throughout the nineteenth century reflects the larger ambitions of the British imperial project, which includes maps and geographical reports on the region. This also served the purpose to keep vigilance on the gradual expansion of Czarist Russia towards the frontiers of British India, as part of the great Anglo-Russian rivalry of the nineteenth century, also known as 'The Great Game'. Even the most personal and adventurous writings of these travellers are dictated with a comprehensive description of the people, customs, and manners of the people in Ladakh.

Guiding the Way: Local Knowledge and Colonial Representations of Himalayan Frontiers
Suraj Kushwaha (Ashoka University)

This project investigates the relationship between local, indigenous knowledge and European colonial exploration in the Himalaya during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By reading mediated archival sources, I focus on several Indian figures employed by British explorers and cartographers in various capacities. Burdened by a biased archive, my methodology seeks to refuse the colonial vantage point by foregrounding the peripheries—rather than the dominant themes—of these texts. In doing so, the project teases out assumptions implicit in the way relationships between colonizer and colonized are figured in the texts. Drawing on insights from environmental justice, the project engages critically with primary sources and the fields of Colonial History and Postcolonial Studies. Research challenges included limitations of the archive and the scarcity of recorded perspectives by non-colonizer groups. However, creatively reading 'against the grain' yielded interesting insights. In addition to maintaining the presence of an interconnected network of conflict and exchange across the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau, the findings highlight several specific local knowledge systems that mountain peoples operated within to both support and resist European exploration. While not providing a complete account of such cultural systems, my analysis traces the outline of local values and understanding that oscillated between helping European explorers in exchange for a reward and shutting them out based on a political resistance to further incursion. In further examining British vs. non-colonial cartographic knowledge systems, the project illuminates gendered and racialized conceptions of space in the Himalayan frontier.

A Study of the Transportation Routes between the Tibetan Kingdom and *ban 'jag nag po*
Sanggey Tondrup (Tibet University)

Cultural exchanges between the Tibetan kingdom and Central Asia were generally based on specific commodities, such as musk, gold and silver, and less often explored in terms of the geographical location of transport routes and stopping points along the way between the two countries. This paper therefore analyses the transport routes between Tibetan kingdom and Ban 'jag nag po(བན་འཇག་ནག་པོ།) in the Pamir of Central Asia in the eighth and ninth centuries AD through the trajectory of the Tibetan kingdom's military activities in Central Asia, the geographical location of Tibetan stone inscriptions in northern Pakistan, and some records of the Tang monks in Central Asia. thus, can an insight into the cultural exchanges and contacts between Tibetan kingdom and Central Asia.

The Ban 'jag nag po appears in the Old Tibetan Annals (Or.8212.187 line 20) and after studying it, it was found to be located within the Wakhan Corridor in present-day Afghanistan.

Room VC 212
Power, Performance, and Ritual in the Himalayas

This panel brings together for the first time, in an area-studies conference specifically devoted to the Himalayas, the members of the GRITH ([Groupe de recherche interuniversitaire sur le Tibet et l'Himalaya](#)), a five-member academic team that has just emerged to link up scholarship about Tibet and the Himalayas that is being done in Québec. Bringing anthropology, philology, religious studies and history into dialogue, the thread for this panel is to reflect on shifts in 'power' across Tibetan and Himalayan communities. To narrow a topic that has already produced a vast and solid scholarship, the presentations will look at the practice, rather than the ideology, of power, especially in contexts of performance and ritual. Whether considering the level of the nation, region and cultural identity, the local level of the community, sect or interreligious exchanges, and even the level of individual powerholders, the contributions aim to highlight strategic shifts and alliances that illuminate the dynamics and transformations of power, power entities and powerful people across centuries and across Himalayan locales.

Chair: *Chiara Letizia (Université du Québec à Montréal)*

Reading Sovereignty as a Theme in the Life of the 10th Shamarpa
Lara Braitstein (McGill University)

This paper explores the concept of sovereignty—sectarian, regional, and even personal—as it is expressed in the life of the 10th Shamarpa Chodrup Gyatso (zhwa dmar pa chos grub rgya mtsho 1742-92). Chodrup Gyatso was recognized as the 10th incarnation of a lineage of reincarnate Lamas amidst great controversy within his own school of Buddhism, the Karma Kagyu. As the half-brother of the 6th Panchen Lama Lobsang Palden Yeshe (blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes 1738-80)—a tremendously important reincarnate Lama within the more powerful Geluk school—Chodrup Gyatso could not help but be implicated in Kagyu-Geluk tensions. He was gradually implicated in ever more crises, perhaps most dramatically the wars of 1788-92 involving Tibet, Nepal, and China. When he suddenly died in 1792, the recognition and enthronement of further incarnations of the Shamarpas was outlawed, a move that reverberates to the present day. From the level of the individual person, to that of the *tulku* at the center of a monastery and community's life, to the 'rosary' of lives of an incarnate Lama, to the push and pull of nations fighting over territory and power, to the privilege of recording history and narrativizing his story, sovereignty appears as a crucial theme in the 10th Shamarpa's life as it functions in sectarian, regional, and historiographical contexts.

The Tibetan Cult to the Lords of the Earth in Nepal: The Case of the *srid pa'i* Bon and Other Bon Rites Propitiating Stellar and Elemental Deities Known as the *sa bdag*
Marc Des Jardins (Concordia University)

The *sa bdag* are a class of spirits as ubiquitous in the Tibetan cultural sphere as the *klu*, now generally equated with the *nāga*, thanks to Buddhism. One textual source that details myths and rites to these spirits is found in the Bon Canon. The scripture entitled the *Compendium of the Lords of the Earth* (*sa bdag 'bum*, K. 140) is a collage of disparate material that proposes the standards for effective propitiation of these spiritual entities. These *sa bdag* are not to be confused with local spirits of the land or valleys (*yul lha*). Their domains, which influence wealth, health and prosperity in the human world, rest in planets, stars, constellations and the elemental worlds. Although their cult has been appropriated by the Everlasting Bon (g.yung drung bon) school, there are lineages and hereditary lines of ritualists that once permeated the Tibetan world and specialized in the service of these spirits as well as those of the klu, *gnyan*, and *gtod* classes. These priests are known under the various vocables of *Srid pa'i bon*, *Le'u*, *Aya* and so forth. Their presence has been recently documented in Nepal, the Eastern corridors of the Himalayas and other remote neighboring valleys. This paper seeks to scrutinize some of the connections between these ritualists and those portrayed in the sa bdag 'bum material and its ancillary literature.

Gods, Ghosts, and Godlings: Some Implications of the 'Divine Hierarchy' in the Central Himalayas
John Leavitt (Université de Montréal)

It has long been noted that in the Central Himalayan region (which I take to include the current state of Uttarakhand in India and the far western part of Nepal), fairly orthoprax Hinduism coexists with a diversity of practices and stories centered on local and regional gods and spirits. Research in the former kingdom of Kumaon confirms that this complexity is felt to resolve into a concentric patterning in which the higher, benevolent, pan-Hindu gods are concerned with the widest spatiotemporal realm, while malevolent ghosts and demons have the narrowest focus. Between these are regional gods who occupy a chronotope—the Himalayan region itself and the medieval period—and bear characters that allow them to concern themselves with human problems while maintaining a relatively benevolent posture. As a result, they are the favored entities for embodiment in human vehicles. This talk, drawing on my own and others' field research as well as characterizations going back to the early nineteenth century, will map out this patterning and ask to what extent it also typifies other Hindu regions and the Tibetan world.

Power in Performance, Power of Performance: Reflecting on the Evolution of Doing Fieldwork among Tibetan Opera Artists over the Last Three Decades
Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (Université Laval)

In this methodological paper, I set out to think about how ethnography has evolved in the last few decades at the intersection of aesthetics and politics when documenting the Tibetan performing arts. I aim to reflect on over 25 years of intermittent study of Tibetan opera in various locales and political conditions: different regions within Tibet, exile in South Asia and the West; different age groups; and different levels of artistic mastery. Fieldwork has become more constrained by the ever-repressive political conditions in Tibet, as well as the shifting demographic make-up in exile, and, perhaps most significantly, a growing body of young Tibetan intellectuals and who engage critically with Tibetology and non-Tibetan Tibetologists, propelling a decolonization of Tibetan studies and some form of collaborative approach. Fieldwork has become in many ways a minefield: the symbolic stakes of voice, representation, and ownership take varying meanings according to where one speaks from and to whom one speaks. In this tense context, does the aesthetic engagement with local culture, in the form of singing, dancing, and performing, make a noticeable difference in participant observation? How is relatedness constructed through these sensuous encounters, between aesthetics and politics?

Room VC 215
The Promises and Perils of Himalayan Infrastructures I
Chair: *Katharine Rankin (University of Toronto)*

China's Trans-Himalaya Project: A Tibetan Perspective
Tashi Yangzom (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

The Trans-Himalaya project worth 2.75bn of China is not only an ambitious initiative but can prove to be a catalyst in altering its trade and diplomatic relations with India and Nepal being a gateway. The corridor holds grave importance to Tibetans as the starting point of it is the sacred mountain, Nyenchen Thanglha. The mountain holds sentimental and cultural importance to Tibetans and it, thus, becomes pertinent to understand the impact it will have on the people belonging to that region. The paper will analyze different lenses of religious and cultural propagation, regional trade, environment and ecosystem and geo-political relevance in consonance with the corridor. However, the paper will mostly focus on the political and policy point of view rather than ethnography, particularly taking in the case of the recent development in Nepal (extension of the Chinese railway connectivity from Lhasa in Tibet and on to Kathmandu in Nepal via Kyirong in Ngari prefecture) and other developments on the border villages. India has been reluctant and doubtful of China's intention for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Trans-Himalaya Corridor as well as the securitization of defense villages on the Tibet side of the border. Thus, this is an evolving project that will delve into and comprehend the lives of the people across the Himalaya borders apart from the economic and security matters of the countries involved.

Toward the Dust: Life around the Un-dead Infrastructures of the Indo-Nepal Border
Prince Tomar (Tallinn University)

In this newly growing field of anthropology of senses, infrastructure has been felt, smelled, and visualised, among other sensory experiences. But what happens when something hinders such experiences? During my fieldwork at the Raxaul-Birgunj borderland on the Indo-Nepal, I encountered something as unacknowledged as breathing, and yet as visible as people. It has a brute omnipresence that spares nobody. It is behind the accelerating vehicles; on the faces of the people; on the entrances of the shops; on the market wares and covering various kinds of infrastructures in the region. It is dust. Some find the border by following it and some stay away because of it. It is the most border-less entity as well as the most border-full. It connects the infrastructures facilitating the mobility to infrastructures delaying the crossing. The dust here is a part of the quotidian life.

This project is about the dual nature of the infrastructures—mobility-facilitation and mobility-hindrance, in the region through the ever-present dust. Due to the variety of material infrastructures in the region, this article will study those that are either not quite fulfilling their purposes and have become medium to other purposes (hence, un-dead), including dilapidating structures, halted construction work, amid the increasing global trade relations of Nepal. Instead of just experiencing the dust merely through a visual sense, this article studies it through the hindrances it produces to multiple sensory experiences that then mediate the meaning of infrastructures in this borderland. Infrastructures here are not felt, they are not smelled, and are not properly visible, and yet their mere presence is embedded in the lives of the people of the region.

"Riding Public Vehicles is Like Fighting in the Battlefield:" Experiences of Young Women Users of Urban Public Transportation Systems in the Kathmandu Valley
Sujata Thapa-Bhattarai (University of Toronto)

Women's right to safe mobility is essential to ensuring their economic, political, and cultural participation in cities. However, experience of violence and crime by women users of public transportation negatively impact their daily mobility. By utilizing four sets of data: (i) a survey of 105 young women users of public transportation; (ii) in-depth interviews with 20 women users, (iii) interviews with transportation service providers, policy actors, and government officials; and (iv) public documents related to urban transportation (e.g., policy documents, pamphlets, and posters) in Kathmandu Valley, this paper examines both the organization and daily functioning of public transportation in relation to women's experiences of gender-based violence and other vulnerabilities and strategies that young women adopt to address them. While important works on women's safety in South Asian cities have focused on sexual harassment and assaults on public transit vehicles and in public spaces, these studies have, however, failed to do a comprehensive analysis of safety and security from 'whole journey' approach. This paper indicates that factors such as time of travel, household mobility capital, age, income, frequency and reliability of vehicles, as well as transport poverty locations have significant impact on likelihood of victimization. As such unaffordable transport fare continue to push disadvantaged young women to take risks, making themselves vulnerable to violence and insecurities. Findings from this investigation also suggest that prevention of violence and crime on public transport should not only focus on ensuring proper physical infrastructure but also need to address the social characteristics of transport environment.

Spatial Congestion in an Urban Town of Darjeeling: A Sociological Perspective
Rubina Thapa (North Eastern Hill University)

Urban spatial planning has become a field of inquiry among the urban research activity. Smaller towns like Darjeeling, amidst its struggle for recognition of their identity, have harboured people from different communities for many years. As much as this inclusion has contributed to cultural diversity and the heterogeneity of the community, accommodating approximately 727,963 (estimates as per aadhar uidai.gov.in Dec 2022 data) has led to spatial congestion. In addition to problematizing this issue, this paper will attempt to trace the change in the urban settings with the help of photographic comparison of the town before the congestion and the current state of the town, to provide a pictorial depiction of this issue. Furthermore, taking the help of the sociological study of a city by Louis Wirth (1938) in *Urbanism as a way of life,* where he speaks of the urban way of living among a heterogenic group of people sharing cultural, political and socio-economic conditioning provided by the process of urbanisation, this paper will also try to highlight the sociological issues brewed as a result of urbanisation. The paper will also problematize constructing of tall buildings like malls, shopping complexes and hotels in a region said to be located in a seismic zone, thus being an earthquake prone area. Although urbanisation is an inevitable process of development, there are issues overlooked by urban planners that may be perceived as 'beautification' process of the town, but is also leading to a problematic future.

Himalayan Studies Conference

SESSION #8
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16

11:00-12:30

Reckoning with New Uncertainties on a Himalayan Scale II

In the Himalayan bioregion, a variety of different state institutions, scientific teams, and policymakers are focused on modeling climate change, climate risks, and geomorphological ebbs and flows, to better predict, control, and govern an uncertain future. However, efforts to reckon with the complexity of this heterogeneous landscape quickly encounter "uncertainty on a Himalayan scale" (Thompson & Warburton, 1985; cf. Guthman, 1995; Metz, 2010) resurfacing classic debates about political ecologies and the evolving horizons of knowledge. Whose models are used to map out future environments and possibilities? How do modeling practices come to shape lived experience, unevenly, for differently positioned peoples? Whose uncertainties matter, when and why?

Critical Himalayan scholarship has shown that better data alone is not enough to reckon with shifting hazard regimes, uneven patterns of vulnerability, and wicked questions of environmental and climate justice. Reckoning with these new risks and uncertainties requires a shift in values and ethical frameworks - it also requires recognizing the value of situated knowledges and models of communities chronically excluded from epistemic processes of disaster risk reduction and climate science (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Sherpa, 2014; Yeh, 2015). This panel focuses on the shifting horizons of environmental knowledge amid rapid change, the anticipatory politics of modeling and forecasting, and the limits of knowledge and the situated politics of uncertainty. Collectively, these papers examine the ways in which re-cognizing existing models of risk and modes of organizing uncertainty might help give shape to alternative visions of environmental futures.

Chair: *Austin Lord (Cornell University)*

Insurgent Geologies and Sustaining Hope in Uncertain Times
Mabel Gergan (Vanderbilt University)

Akin to charismatic, endangered megafauna, the Himalayan region with its snowy peaks, glaciers, and high-altitude lakes, occupies a central place within apocalyptic forecasts of a ruinous future wherein climatic instability and rampant infrastructural development are set to destabilize regional ecological *and* geopolitical security. Critiques of the climate apocalypse as an *impending* threat, center the experiences of Indigenous communities as 'post-apocalyptic survivors' (Whyte, 2018) who have survived successive waves of colonization and state-building projects including climate mitigation programs. Extending these critiques to the Eastern Himalayan region, this paper analyzes Indigenous Lepcha relations with rocks, hills, mountains, lakes, and rivers as lively and sentient. Lepcha oral history, myths, and prophecies are replete with stories of past geological events and landscape formations such as floods, earthquakes, and accounts of contests between Buddhist gurus and Lepcha ritual specialists, traced in hillocks and mountains. Drawing on the growing literature on geological materiality, territorial politics, and racialization (Clark, 2008; Yusoff, 2018; Quintana-Navarrete, 2020; Marston & Himley, 2021), I suggest these 'insurgent' geological histories (Yusoff, 2018) offer insights into how Indigenous communities through a range of material and political practices that interpret the earth and its signs, maintain hope in uncertain times, and in doing so offer an important critique of the universalizing logics of linear time embedded in narratives of climate crisis and apocalyptic futures.

Glacial Outburst Flood Risks and Societal Predicament
Milan Shrestha (Arizona State University)

A recent report by the UNDP/ICIMOD (Bajracharya et al., 2020) identified over 3,000 glacial lakes in the Nepal Himalaya and the adjoining areas of India and Tibet. Of those, 47 are labeled as "potentially dangerous glacial lakes" (PDGLs) and 20 of those are believed to be "at risk" due to climate change. This report also puts a spotlight back on the Koshi River Basin with 42 PDGLs. While the report is just the latest in three decadal series of glacial lake hazard assessments, the most notable was its push for a replication of the "lake lowering model" from the "success" of Tsho Rolpa and Imja Tsho into other PDGLs. This emergency remediation model relies on controlling the lake hydrology (and downstream communities) through a dam built in terminus moraine and draining the lake water by ~3m to mitigate immediate risks. This push could potentially have enormous socio-economic and political ramifications that are hardly addressed in Himalayan disaster research. More importantly, erecting the dams or other structures in ecologically fragile and culturally significant areas manifests not only the dominance of one set of ideology over others, but also raises several sustainability questions, mainly how both the material and immaterial dimensions of flood risks are framed and the ways "at risk" population perceive and respond to the model. In this paper, I synthesize the results of a multidisciplinary study that examined glacial outburst flood risks as well as contextualized how socio-economic, cultural, and political elements are entangled in those risks.

Rediscovering and Re-connecting the Old Rivulets and Water Bodies of Boudha, Kathmandu Valley
Minket Lepcha (Filmmaker)

Listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site, Boudha Stupa of Kathmandu valley in Nepal hosts pilgrims from across the Himalaya for many centuries. They come to pray, see relatives, and trade. But amidst all of this, Boudha faces a crisis: water. The 1990s saw an explosion of Boudha's agricultural lands converted to commercial real estate. Fields turned into concrete houses. Streams turned into streets. Rivers turned into roads. The transformation meant the disappearance of wetlands and the loss of a sense of connection to old water resources. With poor management of monsoon rain, the garbage and sewage flood the streets every year. Tashi Lama, a 64-year-old Boudha resident exclaims, 'The younger generation cannot comprehend old Boudha!' And, while many observers have traced the history of Boudha stupa and its strong association with the Buddhist religion, few have examined the history of Boudha's water. My work looks at the ancient water bodies of Boudha and their deterioration impacting everyday life through the voices of elders, women, and socially disadvantaged lower caste society. The oral history of the residents around water highlights an interesting perspective to the changing relationship of Boudha Stupa with water. The mapping of old rivulets, forgotten water spaces through photo stories of old and new pictures of Boudha and 19th century old thangka depicts the changing times of the relationship of Boudha with its people and the impact of urban flood on various strata of the society.

Infrastructures of Democracy: The Book Project
Chair: *Katharine Rankin (University of Toronto)*, Discussant: *Mukta Tamang Lama (Tribhuvan University)*

This panel explores key themes emerging from the long-term, Canadian SSHRC-funded research project on Infrastructures of Democracy, which undertakes a relational comparison of road building processes in different regions of Nepal. The project is premised on the claim that road building offers a productive vantage point from which to consider dynamics of state restructuring and political transition in relation to everyday life experience. It is rooted in two conjunctural factors [a] intensive road development, not only in or between major urban areas but also throughout Nepal's rural regions—through processes that enlist government planners, donors, non-governmental and community-based organizations, as well as laborers and citizens making claims for rights to access and use; and [b] an "infrastructure turn" in the social sciences and humanities that furnishes compelling theoretical resources as well as a flourishing of scholarship on road building in Nepal and other regions of the global South. Within the Nepal-focussed scholarship "Infrastructures of Democracy" is distinguished by an emphasis on rural roads, ethnographic methods, and a relational-comparative approach that draws out the variegated nature of political transition and state-society relations.

The panel is comprised of 4 papers. The first (Rankin and Shneiderman) briefly sketches the overarching arguments, relational-comparative approach and collaborative authorship arrangement for a book conveying findings of the research, to be published in Nepal by Martin Chautari. The second (Hamal and Sigdel), third (Kunwar) and fourth (Rai) papers present arguments rooted in the findings of ethnographic research in Mugu, Dolakha and Morang districts respectively. A discussant (Mukta Singh Lama) will prompt the audience with discussion questions in order to generate dialogue.

Roads, Political Imaginaries, and State Building in Nepal
Katharine Rankin (University of Toronto)

This paper introduces the session by situating the subsequent three empirical papers within a conceptual frame and a methodology informing the overall Infrastructures of Democracy research project. It also situates our ethnographic inquiry in relation to scholarship on rural roads across the Himalayas that has consolidated over the last decade, especially in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative. Our project joins up with other scholarship that has been calling for work that shows how the implementation of infrastructure development remains locally determined through situated politics and struggles. Some distinctive features of our work include [a] the emphasis on rural roads characterized by spontaneous construction and poor quality; [b] the emphasis on how publics, political subjectivities, and social aspirations are made with and through roads; [c] and an engagement of planning and development as a normative terrain—a space of critique but also of political possibility.

The introductory comments will highlight how each of the empirical papers animate the themes of the project—with arguments about how road building reveals the labor relations underlying state building processes (Morang/Rai), how administrative privilege manifests and deepens through the modalities of contracting and participatory users' groups (Mugu/Sigdel and Hamal), and how public pressure in the face of suspended infrastructure has a lot to show us about the formation of political subjectivity and the variegated and multi-scalar character of the state (Kunwar/Dolakha). Engagement with Nepali vernacular troubles some conventional analytical frames commonly associated with infrastructure development, such as corruption, which tend to overlook local knowledge and dynamics of power. And the comparative framing underscores how infrastructure and politics articulate one another and the contingency of social relations upon which the promise as well as the failure of infrastructure depends.

Changing Dynamics of Labor Relations and Public Dynamics on Road Building in the Lowlands of Morang District, Nepal
Lagan Rai (Tribhuvan University)

The labor relation between state and people is a vital component of the organization of road building in Nepal. Forced labor was the dominant mode of labor relations for about two centuries   after the beginning of the unification process of modern Nepal to the end of the autocratic Rana regime [1773-1950]. After the advent of democracy in 1950, the government officially banned the existing practice of forced labor but meanwhile sanctioned the state authority to exert compulsory services for public services. The autocratic Panchayat regime which came to power after the coup of 1960, re-defined labor relations between state and people in terms of voluntary public participation or Jana Sahabhagita in Nepali as the foundation of Panchayat's decentralization policy. Consequently, the Panchayat widely implemented compulsory participation as de facto force labor through its local governing bodies to local development including road building.

Subsequently, after the restoration of the democracy in 1990, the governments, planners and donors promoted public participation as a basis for 'participatory democracy' and issued policies to encompass voluntary contribution of local people in local infrastructure building including road building. One the contrary this, a disjuncture between policies and practices of public participation on rural road buildings as elsewhere in Nepal is emerging in the traditional agrarian communities from the low land of Morang district. On this backdrop, this paper critically highlights local people's subjectivity and experience of forced labor and changing dynamics of public participation particularly in rural road building. I argue that public participation on government funded rural road projects in my study area is often contested and negotiated which further seriously raises the issue of 'participatory governance' and sustainability of rural roads. This phenomenon is shaped by multiple factors like experiences of the past forced labor relations, subjectivities of planning, political patronages, expansion of labor market and democratic values among others.

Road Development and Dodges of Contracting Practices in Dolakha, Nepal
Shyam Kunwar (Martin Chautari)

In this paper I examine the road development and contracting practices in central Nepal, particularly focusing on the Lamosanghu-Jiri (L-J) road. This is a "first hill road project," led by the Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SATA, later it became Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)) in the mid-1980s as part of the Integrated Hill Development Project (IHDP) which was promoted and executed by Swiss development agency on the behalf of both Government of Nepal and Switzerland. At that time, the Swiss were experimenting with a new "labor intensive and environment friendly" approach to road construction in fragile mountainous landscapes. Three decades later, the L-J road is being upgraded by the Department of Roads, Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, using heavy machinery and with little apparent regard for either the environment or the public.

The L-J road thus provides a key historical perspective on the materialization of strategic hill roads in Nepal. The paper first provides some context for the transition from labor-intensive to machine-driven road building at a time when environmental awareness and green road modalities have strengthened in relation to climate change. The environmental costs of 'dozer' development, combined with the enormous inconveniences incurred by an inefficient, time-consuming contracting system, have resulted in a series of protests, public meetings, investigative news reports designed to exert pressure on stakeholders of road development to complete their work faster and at a higher standard. On this basis, and second, the paper argues that public pressure appears to be a more effective force for efficiency than market logics.

Finally, the paper considers how road upgrading in Dolakha unfolds in practice as a reflection on the process versus outcome of infrastructure development. It argues that while the process may have promising elements of democratic engagement, like public knowledge sharing and negotiation between stakeholders of development and local publics, outcomes remain undesirable from a justice perspective concerned with access to public services and opportunity to gain employment or other experience with this key sector of development practice. The upgrading project remains incomplete Six years after its inception. Political patronage continues to guard against meaningful scrutiny of the contracting system. And institutional stakeholders continue to promote their own interests with little regard for cooperation and compromise. The paper concludes with some thoughts on distrust of but also hope for planning in Nepal.

Road Imaginaries and Road Building Modalities in Nepal: An Ethnographic Exploration of Everyday Administration in Mugu District
Tulasi Sigdel (Nepal Administrative Staff College), Pushpa Hamal (Independent Researcher)

Road connectivity to Mugu reflects both the Nepali state's policy of connecting all districts with the Strategic Road Network and with local people's aspiration for overcoming remoteness. The inauguration programme marking the 'break-through' of the Karnali Highway/Mugu section in 2012 at Gamgadi marked an unprecedented celebration with the presence of the Prime Minister, thousands of people from the district and wider national-level media coverage applauding the event as historically important. The inauguration invited national government and donors to channel their resources for district-wide road building. Mugu prepared a District Transport Master Plan-2013 (DTMP) and it has been executing extensive local road projects ever since.

This paper examines the road imaginaries and politics of road building in Mugu by engaging ethnographic evidence from both 'contract out and users' group approach', the two widely used modalities in Nepal. The government and donor agencies have been advocating contract out system for competitiveness, cost-effective and timely completion in difficult terrains, and users' group approach for mobilizing local people, creating opportunities for income generation, local employment and sustainability. While acknowledging political and economic opportunities opened by road building in Mugu for a wide base of residents—opportunities that we also address in our Chapter for the IOD book—here we focus on the dynamics of patronage through a careful exploration of the practices of reaching consensus (kura milaune or milemato) and doing paper work (kagaj milaune). In so doing the paper reflects on how state administration might serve as an instrument for consolidating administrative privilege, which helps to unpack the cultural politics surrounding road building and to assess how opportunities are distributed in longstanding patterns of uneven

Roundtable: HIMALAYA: The Future Role of the ANHS Journal as a Medium for Knowledge Production
Chair: *Stefan Lueder (Humboldt University Berlin)*

Participants: *Mona Bhan (Syracruse University), David Citrin (University of Washington), Sienna Craig (Dartmouth College), Ishani Dasgupta (University of Pennsylvania), Michael Heneise (Arctic University of Norway), Jeevan Sharma (University of Edinburgh), Mark Turin (University of British Columbia)*

HIMALAYA—The Journal of the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies—celebrates 50 years of publishing in 2022. What began as a simple newsletter for the members of the Nepal Studies Association in 1972 has grown into the flagship publication of today's ANHS that covers a great variety of important aspects across disciplines and national boundaries of the Himalayan region.

But being such an integral part of knowledge production editors must address a myriad of questions. They include rather obvious academic and editorial ones, like assessing the quality of a submission and if they are within the scope and focus of the journal. Beyond those, in their crucial role as gatekeepers, editors are also confronted with far more complex questions about publication ethics, privacy and copyrights, representation as well as the more pragmatic problems of developing and maintaining an effective production and distribution process and financing a journal committed to the open access movement.

In this roundtable, we want to bring together four former editors with the current editorial team of HIMALAYA, reflect upon past experiences, the present challenges and discuss the future of the journal in an open forum. Instead of maintaining distance, we want to actively engage with the audiences of the journal, openly share and debate our thoughts, ideas, and criticism.

Himalayan Histories from Below
Chair: *Verena La Mela (University of Fribourg)*

Re-analyzing the Nepali State: An Adivasi Janajati Perspective from Eastern Nepal
Abhijit Dihidar (Goreswar College)

As the Gorkhas carried out their territorial expansion in the eighteenth century, a large number of territories belonging to erstwhile powerful kingdoms along with their subjects came under its jurisdiction. One of these newly included territories of the Gorkhali Empire was the easternmost districts of present day Nepal which was earlier under the jurisdiction of the Koch-Kamata kingdoms, headquartered at Cooch Behar (West Bengal). The Koch Kamata kingdom reached its zenith of territorial expansion in the sixteenth century and included a large part of Northeast India, undivided Bengal, Assam and Bihar. The Rajbanshis who claim to be the original descendants of eastern Nepal owes their origin and lineage to the Koch Kamata kingdom. As frontiers turned into concrete borders, the Rajbanshis began their new lives as inhabitants of the Gorkhali Empire. The paper will study the Rajbanshi community's perceptions towards the Gorkhali Empire and its rulers. It will discuss the strategies adopted by the Rajabanshis to preserve its cultural identity and linguistic distinctness. It will also analyze the policies adopted by the Gorkhali rulers in eastern Nepal and its impact on this borderland community.

"Glorious History of Bishwakarma Caste:" Explicating Historically Neglected People of Nepal
Tek Biswokarma (Independent Scholar)

Former Prime Minister of Nepal KP Sharma Oli dissolved the parliament on 20 December 2020 because of the conflict within his party Communist Party of Nepal. The move of KP Oli was unconstitutional and led to political regression. Right after the desolation of the public intellectuals of Nepal, academics, writers, activists, and concession people of Nepal started a civil movement on the Name of "Brihat Nagarik Andolan (BNA)". The triggering factor of the movement was the regressive action of the prime-minister, however, the movement analyzed and identified the areas where such regressions have made multidimensional impacts. To clear the pathway of the movement, a team was formed to prepare a Declaration of BNA which was released at Tudhikhel on 19 February 2021. In the declaration, agendas like; struggling against the political regression, ensuring the rights of women and gender and sexual minorities, ending caste system as well as challenge the making the state responsible for ensuring human centric and natural friendly development. It was found that for the first time such civil movement like this owed the agenda of nature friendly development. Based on the declaration, the BNA had initiated different activities in favor of human centric and nature or environment friendly development activities. Now, the movement seems passive, however, it has an experience of working in this field. So, this paper will be focused on how the civil society movement has been or need to be engaged in the human and natural friendly development activities.

The presentation covers the following agendas: One, to identify how the civil society movements have been raised the agenda of human centric and nature friendly development in Nepal?; Two, how and why the Brihat Nagarik Andolan (BNA) take this agenda as an import issue and written in the declaration. What is the political meaning of the declaration; Three, the role and responsibilities of the BNA in accelerating the agenda will be analyzed; Four, the key challenges of the movement like BNA in engaging in such marriage ceremony; Five, a pathway along with the needed key strategies also will be presented.

Cultural Safety under the Shadows of Dominant Hindu Traditions in the Himalayan Foot Hills
Drona Rasali (University of British Columbia)

The 21st Century calls for the cultural safety and humility to reclaim the human dignity of all people around the world in equitable terms. Especially in healthcare settings, it has now been the norm in several countries including Canada that care providers ensure cultural safety for their Indigenous clients when they are in contact. Generally, everyone should feel culturally safe with dignity when interacting with each other in everyday life, being free from any fear of discrimination or hate based on descent (race, caste or clan). In the foot hills of Himalayas, Hindu traditions are regarded as a dominant culture in which the people of traditionally dominant castes take their superiority for granted, with the mindset of total disregard to the dignity of the people of historically marginalized and oppressed (Dalit) castes without any remorse. They assume cultural righteousness of their traditions on the bases of mythological stories rather than existential facts of history. Many of these traditions, today, cause unacceptable violation of cultural safety for historically marginalized people including Dalits. The purpose of my presentation is to revisit the dichotomy between Hindu mythology and history (Mukhiya, 2014) to visualize evidence-based understandings of the past traditions to help shape the contemporary and future prospects for cultural safety among people in the society. In my presentation, I will explore some examples of Hindu mythological stories (Williams, 2003) that put the historical existential facts under the shadows and are against the worldview that caste is merely based on man-made ideology, not divine.

"From Gallis and Nanis to the Allies of Halin:" The Footsteps of the Global Newah Movement
Daya Shakya (World Newah Organization)

Being born in small neighborhood of *Naradevi Tole,* (Origin: *Nyeta Twaa*), Kathmandu, I got opportunity to be educated in and outside of the homeland. After completing the conservative middle school with settings of memorization that continues to the whole year for up grading to next level and then to the foreign land I geared up and became an activist from the taste of century old suffocation gained from oppression and suppression etc. A goal of this presentation is to discuss inner suffocation and expression of systematic ignorance that was never realized by the experts (*Pandits*) of the underlying education system that produces only '*Rattan*-das' instead of rational thinker. After being exposed into international circle I observed a remarkable moment of writing 'WE ARE SORRY' in Australian Sky with fighter jet exhaustive smoke lines. It was an eye awakening moment for me to mark here. Though I never been to Australia the moment was noted by the local Oregonian Newspaper in Portland Oregon USA. Since then the sense of understanding the HOPE never left me behind but chased me all the time.

Inspired by many incidences came across through one after another I was able to influence people with whom I grew up and moved forward till now. Periodically, the settings successfully came into existence for a Sister City movement. Nepaa Paasaa Pucha in America to local organizations, Nepali Association of Oregon (NAO), national organization like Newah Organization of America (NOA) and its many chapters in USA, and moving forward to extended version of umbrella organization like World Newah Organization (WNO) a global entity to discuss the Newah issue among the wide range of under privileged and deprived groups. Is it really a good place to discuss such type of arrogance or dissatisfaction in this global gathering of peace making scholars? We might be divided to accept or reject it, but one must come forward to express the reason of dissatisfaction and grievances and then search for solution. From all these ups and downs in my life a discussion will be focused on importance of Newah civilization in global perspectives keeping the door open for study of success stories benefited by *googling* the Newah related subject matters for future generation. Finally, this paper will also throw light on challenges of movement and steps to fight against the indication of endangered languages listed by world bodies along with announcing a global appeal to save the identity of the prestigious civilization that is going to extinct in next few generations to come.

Explorations of Identity and Politics in Literature and Poetry
Chair: *Pushpa Acharya*

Buddhist Values and Practices as "Everyday Nationalism:" A Case Study of Vegetarianism, Non-Sectarianism, and Pilgrimage in Shabkar's (1781-1851) Autobiography
Rachel Pang (Davidson College)

The nation-state is one of the most common frameworks from which the Tibet issue is viewed. This is of no surprise given the plight of the Tibetan diaspora and the fact that the nation-state is the standard mode of international organization. And yet, before the idea of the nation-state, Tibetans had different ways of understanding Tibet and its relationship with the rest of the world. Timothy Brook and others have characterized this model as "The Tibetan Buddhist World" that encompassed culturally Tibetan Buddhist societies in the early modern era.

In this paper, I explore the indigenous and historically marginalized perspective from which some Tibetans viewed their home on the cusp of its modernity through a close reading of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangrol's (1781-1851) autobiography. Shabkar's autobiography reveals an alternative conception of identity, community, and territory rendered invisible by contemporary state-centric definitions of nation. One of the ways in which Shabkar portrays Tibet as a Buddhist imagined community is through the unity of Tibet and its neighbours through shared Buddhist values and practices. I demonstrate how Shabkar's promotion of vegetarianism, non-sectarianism, and pilgrimage can be interpreted as a way of producing and maintaining a shared identity using Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss's framework of "everyday nationalism." Shabkar imagined a present and future where Buddhism served as the major coalescing force for societies on the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas. I also explore the implications of Shabkar's point of view in the context of the future Tibetan nation-in-exile a century later.

En-gendering *gling sgrung:* Representation of Women and Social Mobility in the Gesar Epic
Kunkyab Pasang (Sarah College for Higher Tibetan Studies)

The Gesar of Ling (Tib: *gling*) is to Tibet what the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are to India and the Iliad and the Odyssey to Greece. Since the translation of Gesar epic, it has broadened its audience beyond the Tibetosphere and it received a more rigorous scholarly attention from the mid-nineteenth Century. Gesar scholar Schmidt (1839) has asserted that the epic is of Tibetan origin, yet subsequent scholarship has demonstrated versions of this epic which were also recorded and recounted in the Himalayas. This includes Baltistan, Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and other Tibeto-Burmese speaking peoples in the Himalayas (Harvilahti, 1996).

The numerous tellings of Gesar Epic went through variations while being transmitted across different languages, societies, geographical regions, religions and historical periods. A similar observation is also noted by A.K. Ramnujan (1987) in the tellings of Ramayana. A recent comprehensive publication on the Gesar epic (Kapstein & Ramble, 2022) has further deepened scholarship on Gesar studies. However, the author of this paper is yet to come across a focused study on Gesar through a gendered lens. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining the place and role of ten women represented in the Gesar epic. It will chart the trajectory of social mobility and place of women in the three significant episodes of the Gesar epic—Gesar's Birth and Early Years (Tib: *'khrungs gling me tog ra ba*); Horse Race and Gesar's Coronation (Tib: *rta rgyugs rgyal 'jog*); and Gesar and his Purgatory (Tib: *dmyal gling*).

Local Environments and Transnational Modernities in the Auto/biographies of Adzom Drukpa
Learned Foote (Rice University)

My paper examines the auto/biographical writings of Adzom Drukpa (1842-1924), and the texts' depiction of geography, environmental care, and transnational social networks. Centered in Kham, these narratives describe a migration some 1700 kilometers from Qinghai Lake to Litang. They include personal testimony about significant events in 19th century Tibetan history, such as the rise of the warlord Gonpo Namgyel (1799-1866), who took Adzom Drukpa captive. Adzom fled home over the Nyak river, escaping the Tibetan army who entered the area to subdue the errant warlord and the region—a military action that as Yudru Tsomu shows in her groundbreaking work *The Rise of Gönpo Namgyel in Kham* shaped power relations into the 20th century. The 19th-20th centuries in eastern Tibet were eras of increasing militarization and hardening of borders. Though Adzom Drukpa lived far from political power centers in Lhasa or Beijing, the borderlands locations he inhabited were crucial sites of conflict. However, Adzom Drukpa—a nomad living in a yak hair tent for much of his life—also gives accounts of collaborative projects based in transnational networks involving both Buddhist and Bön traditions. Students and teachers came from central Tibet, Kham, Amdo, China, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, and India. Environmental care is demonstrated in a story in which Adzom Drukpa visits a village suffering from famine, and engages with local guardian spirits to find a solution (ceasing unethical hunting practices). These auto/biographies provide a compelling account of how Tibetan Buddhists responded to various crises in transnational modernities.

Cultural Memories of the 6th Dalai Lama in Contemporary Tawang
Jamphel Soepa (Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro Institute)

Tawang inhabits an ambiguous geographical space in the post-colonial world order. Since the early 1950s, the region was formally made part of the modern Indian nation-states, counter-claimed by modern China as part of "China's southern Tibet." Yet as I will show in this paper, despite the colonial erasure of Tibet from the political map of the modern world, many in the region today see Tibet as one of the primary historical-political entities through which they make sense of their place in the world. The cultural memories of the sixth Dalai Lama play an important role in this process. Through my six months of fieldwork in the otherwise restricted region of India, I will show how the emerging literary groups, both lay, and monastics, formed around the figure of the sixth Dalai Lama, play an important role in re-membering Tawang as part of the broader cultural and political imagery of Tibet.

Room 215
The Promises and Perils of Himalayan Infrastructures II
Chair: *Sujata Thapa-Bhattarai (University of Toronto)*

The Promise of Roads: An Exploration of the Political Economy of Infrastructures along India's Northwestern Borders
Priya Bose (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi)

Infrastructures, especially roads, emerge with a promise to foster a network of new connections, mobilities and, alter the patterns of migration. However, infrastructural developments in the form of roads and highways, building of dams on rivers in the border regions lead to encroachments into the delicate ecology of the Himalayan borderlands leading to massive alterations in the natural environment, culture, identity, and ecology of the region. The Ladakhi borders have been opened for 'development' projects like roads, hydro-electric power projects, tourism etc. Due to its strategic significance, the roads that are built in these areas are meant for the movement of the military, arms, and ammunitions. The aim is to see how infrastructures impinge on the natural resources upon which local lives are dependent upon and, how interventions of state in the form of construction of roads, highways re-configure ways of thinking and acting of borderlanders. Primarily, this research intends to unfold the politics of roads and highways construction in Ladakh with special reference to Kargil and how people relate to such state infrastructures affectively and how with construction of modern infrastructures in the form of roads, dams, etc., has affected the local imaginaries of space in Kargil.

Check Dams, Resource Management, and Socioeconomic Development in the Shivalik Hills of India
Elizabeth Chacko (George Washington University), Rabir Kang (Kennesaw State University)

In this paper we analyze the impacts of check dams on socio-economic landscapes of the Shivalik Hills in India within the larger context of development in mountainous areas. The Shivaliks, a mountain range of the outer Himalayas averaging 5000 - 6500 feet in elevation, are characterized by relatively low population densities, greater proportions of socially marginalized groups such as Dalits (formerly untouchable castes) friable soils, water scarcity, periodic severe flooding, poor agricultural productivity and low levels of economic development. We focus on five check dams constructed in the 1980s in the Punjab-Haryana Shivaliks with the intent to regulate water flow, assist with reforestation efforts, and uplift local rural economies. Through field-based research conducted over two years complemented by secondary data, we answer the following research questions: (1) How have check dams influenced economic development in villages in the vicinity of the dams? (2) How have the dams affected social dynamics and the social upliftment of marginalized populations? (3) What are the reciprocal interactions between populations and the natural environments in areas with check dams? Our findings indicate that check dams played a vital role in developing village economies in the early decades following their construction. They have also assisted in improving ecological sustainability in the surrounding areas. However, lack of funds and concerted efforts to maintain the dams have led to reduced access to irrigation water, increasing economic disparities and widening social gaps in the villages they serve.

Roads, Futures, and Environmental Precarity in the Eastern Himalayas
Suchismita Das (Ahmedabad University)

This paper is a preliminary interrogation of a conundrum. Sikkim—a small Himalayan Indian state, bordering Tibet and Nepal—seeks to overcome its environmental precarity through large infrastructure constructions. Citizens of the mountains who repeatedly experience landslides and other environmental disasters that isolate them from the rest of the country hope that new wider roads will improve connectivity and thus emergency response. The historic ecological vulnerability of the Himalayas is exacerbated by climate change. Unseasonably heavy rains are causing more frequent and severe landslides and therefore greater disruption of infrastructure. However, road constructions, perceived as an adaptive strategy, can itself cause fresh geographic instability in the mountains, precipitating further landslides and environmental vulnerability. How do citizens and state-actors of Sikkim negotiate this conundrum: where roads are both the panacea for and site of environmental precarity?

Roads in Sikkim are not only central to a developmentalist imaginary, but also to a concern for national security. Thus, even as existing roads become sites of disasters, and civil society and environmentalists increasingly criticize grand road projects for destabilizing the Himalayan geology, new road construction and widening projects are being constantly sanctioned in the Himalayan borderlands. Penny Harvey writes that infrastructure projects are future-oriented and "future-positive (2018: 82), with the future being the time/space for potentiality and improvement (80). In talking to citizens, politicians and engineers, this paper asks: How does climate change—as a phenomenon that makes futures precarious—affect this modernist imaginary among those planning, executing and experiencing road construction in Sikkim?

The Promises and Perils of Highland Infrastructures: A Comparative Perspective of the Eastern and Western Himalayas
Archana Pathak (Indian Institute of Technology Mandi)

The modernist project of state-led infrastructural development in the name of progress and development has made its inroads across the Himalayan region in recent years. It has increased the presence of state in places which were relatively isolated due to their spatiality. Despite being aspirational, the projects of creating infrastructure have led to uprooting of people from their lands, deprived them of their livelihoods and transformed their identities. This paper focusses on two such projects namely, the proposed Balh airport project in the state of Himachal Pradesh which has evoked huge protests in recent time, and the already constructed Pakyong airport in the state of Sikkim. Through a comparative study of these mega infrastructure projects, the paper addresses the everyday processes which includes the change and transformation and formation of social memory forged through resistance and struggle. Though different in several aspects, both the projects saw huge opposition by the locals of the regions as these projects added to their vulnerability in many ways. By comparing these two cases, the paper assesses how the Himalayan infrastructure with its integrative potential has had a differential impact on the people of the region and how they are negotiating with the state and the larger political processes that surround infrastructural development in these regions.