The Border Came Between Us: Securing Development, Surveillance and Securitization, and Refugee Memory and Placemaking in Nepal

by

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Abstract

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The dissertation focuses on Chinese economic development and geopolitical influence in Nepal, with particular emphasis on how increased Chinese influence disrupts everyday lives of Tibetan refugees. While Nepali state administrators see the need to move away from Indian dominance in the Nepali economy and trade, this occurs in tandem with seeking and receiving economic development from China. I argue that in sustaining Nepal's interests in *securing* Chinese development, the Nepali state agrees to secure Tibetan refugees by following the One China Policy, among other geopolitical expectations including greater surveillance and policing of exiled Tibetans in Nepal. In doing so, I discuss how Tibetans, and increasingly Himalayan Indigenous peoples, are brought into the security apparatus based on ethnic and caste hierarchies that are foundational to the discursive construction of the Nepali nation based on Hindu cosmologies and hierarchies that privilege Bahun-Chhetri populations while politically marginalizing Indigenous peoples.

Through ethnographic fieldwork, I study how sovereignty is felt in the everyday. Tibetans in Nepal experience extensive surveillance and rigid security measures that condition Tibetan subjectivities through restrictions on religious festivities and commemorations of Tibetan political events. The Nepali state uses visual markers to identify and categorize the seemingly illegible forms of Tibetan-ness into neatly understandable and legible categories through forms of surveillance and policing. Tibetan refugees make do in these securitized and surveilled spaces through forms of placemaking that counter, navigate, and ignore securitization by reimagining

their presents and futures alongside Himalayan Indigenous communities. However, while previously Tibetan and Himalayan Indigenous communities shared a form of solidarity with one another, in recent times there have been many calls from within the community for place-based politics of indigeneity that mark Himalayan Indigenous identities as distinctly non-Tibetan identities. To negotiate with these politics in flux, Tibetan refugees carve out and sustain a territory for themselves through memory and placemaking.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

During the early weeks of fieldwork, I wanted to focus on how everyday practices of Tibetan nationalism and place making in Kathmandu revealed the messy intricacies of Chinese extra-territorial politics of development in Nepal. I was left confused with my own research goals, and I could make very little sense of the world around me in Kathmandu. This was a city that I grew up in but felt distant the more I tried to grasp it. I understood Kathmandu particularly from my lived experiences during my teenage years in the city, which was conditioned by state discourses on development and modernity. Talks of development were not uncommon and it was, as I remember, everywhere – in school textbooks and road-side signage narratives of infrastructure and community development were plenty. This changed during the Nepali Civil War from 1996 to 2006, a time of heightened turmoil when these *development talks* especially in spaces outside of urban centers failed to materialize. During the decade long war, these talks were mostly about the lack of development or a misplaced sense of place in the state's narrative of modernity and development trajectories based on ethnicity and caste identities.

This is how I perceived of Kathmandu – as the center of state power and development projects that defined what the rest of the state should look like. A decade later in 2018, when I was walking around and talking to people in Kathmandu, a sense of strangeness engulfed the air. Drawing on Cindi Katz's (2014) discussion of the "strange familiar", I was familiar with the sort of development talk that was grounded in skepticism towards the state's inability to meet the development needs of the people. However, after the 2015 earthquakes, the state administration was restructured and local elections instilled hope in the people, and different communities at varied scales from neighborhood associations to municipalities were all thinking of ways to

employ development funds. This sort of thinking about development with hope for the future was strange for me to witness among the public.

While walking in Boudha in early 2018, I stumbled upon a local Tibetan eatery[1] for a late-afternoon lunch. The restaurant had four tables, with two long wooden benches on each side. On the left were three elderly men, each with his own *tongba*[2], an alcoholic beverage made from fermented whole grain millet. On the right section of the eatery were three young high school boys in their uniforms along with a middle-aged man who had already been quite drunk by the time I entered the eatery. I walked up to the kitchen and sat next to the cook. I ordered chowmein and *dudh chiya* (milk tea). This cup of tea would be the first of hundreds that I would drink with Tibetans in Nepal over the next few months.

An hour into scribbling notes from the day into my notebook, the younger customers at the eatery started dispersing. The elders also started walking outside declaring they were headed towards the evening kora in Boudha. I ordered another cup of tea. While my tea boiled, Tenzin the cook, who also happened to be the owner prepared his own tongba. After two long, spirited tongba sips, he placed the tea in front of me. He said that the lazy part of the day had now started when no one visits his shop. He was glad that I provided him company to pass the time.

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[1] Although many of these eateries are also run by Himalayan Indigenous peoples, they are commonly known as Tibetan restaurants in Kathmandu.

[2] Attributed to the Yakthung people of eastern Nepal, Darjeeling, and Sikkim, tongba is a beverage found in many Himalayan and Tibetan eateries.

I shared that I was learning colloquial Tibetan with Tsering Dorjee, a prominent local teacher and community leader in the Jawalakhel Tibetan settlement. I was hoping that he would recognize the name, but he showed minimal interest in either Tsering Dorjee or the Jawalakhel settlement.

Tenzin: I am not sure about that. I have never been to Jawalakhel. We came from Taplejung from a village called Phale, and we live in Boudha now.
Author: where exactly is Phale?
Tenzin: It falls on the Kanchenjunga trail. Have you heard of Ghunsa? [I nodded] Oh yes, our village is very close to that village, you have to go through our village to get there. Our village is refugee village, and they are Ghunsali, or sometimes people call them Walung. But Walung itself is two days away from our villages. That's it, here in Boudha we are mostly with our people from Ghunsa and Walung.
Author: Okay, and have you gone back recently?
Tenzin: Aaah, I am too old. The path[3] is difficult for someone like me to go too often. I came to Boudha five years ago to open this shop and have not returned yet. Our people all live around this area. Some villagers come here during the time of winter and then return for the rest of the year. I am here all year.

In between sips, we conversed on all things local and global on how both of our families are spread across oceans and lands. *Tenzin noted, "You see my son went to America last month and*

[3] It is common to refer to a journey as बाटो in Nepali, which translates to path, road, or route.

now he is there. Let's see what happens, maybe I can go there too. You see, I am a [Tibetan] refugee so it is not so simple for me".

He narrated small snippets of his life as a yak herder, the smell of mountain air, the sound of the river, and the proximity to the village monastery. Even in these short vignettes of his life, it was evident that his affective belonging to a place lied closely to Phale and that for him placemaking lied at the centrality of meaning making in the world. Tenzin's words elucidated how a sense of place requires deep engagement with time through which one knows a place not only in the present but also through engagement with the past of the place. Tenzin continued,

> *Phale is a beautiful place. It is the village that we grew up in. There is a nice, beautiful river that flows below it and there is constant movement of people going up and down the trail. But it is very hard to make a living there for people my age. I used to be a yak herder, which is hard to do when you get old. Then again, it does not help that we are refugees.*

While we were bonding on details on our respective villages, I was struck by the word or the category of *refugee* which placed his presence in a different political register than my own, since I have the privilege of formal Nepali citizenship. This feeling lingered for many nights and days. I thought about this contradiction of place and belonging - what is the experience of belonging to a place when you are categorized as a refugee? And how do people hold multiple belongings to place? Tenzin spoke of his village so beautifully, yet he remains a refugee in that village. Only in later conversations, he spoke about his ancestral village on the other side of the border in Tibet.

For him, Phale was and is home – among other places. Conversations with Tenzin from that day and multiple more conversations over the next few weeks considerably shaped the way I approached and planned fieldwork. I was curious to learn more about this contradiction of refugee belonging, which led me to conduct research in the communities of Phale, Ghunsa, and Walung in northeastern Nepal. His collective identity as more closely related to Indigenous Himalayan populations of Walung and Ghunsa rather than Tibetan refugees at large guided me to examine how everyday lives of Tibetan refugees are varied and are situated through a multifocal sense of place.

Tibetans in exile, and Chinese interests in Nepal

During the 1959 Tibetan Uprising in Lhasa, fears of the Dalai Lama's capture by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) was intensifying, which led the Dalai Lama to flee from Tibet into India. Many Tibetans followed suit and fled in the subsequent years and settled throughout South Asia in India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The first generation of Tibetan refugees arrived in Nepal in the late 1950s settling in villages across the border in northern Nepal and in Kathmandu and Pokhara. At the same time, in the early 1960s, Chushi Gangdrug, an organization of Tibetan resistance fighters, through the assistance of US Central Intelligence Agency, had set up a base in Mustang of northern Nepal, among other places, as a launching point for guerrilla warfare against troops of the PLA in Tibet (see McGranahan 2010). Nepal allowed Chushi Gangdrug to operate from its territory until the 1970s, when Nepal – under Chinese pressures and to maintain good foreign relations with its northern neighbor – forced the rebels to withdraw. King Birendra provided 200 to 300 honorary citizenships in 1974 for Chushi Gangdrug rebels who disarmed and about 4000 refugee identity booklets or Refugee Certificates

(RC) to other exiled Tibetans. But honorary citizenship was not granted to all Tibetan refugees.

Nepal recognized and registered Tibetans crossing into Nepal through the Nepal-China borders as refugees until 1989. After December 31, 1989, Nepal stopped registering and allowing new Tibetan refugees to settle in Nepal permanently. Through an informal “Gentleman’s Agreement” between Nepal and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Nepal agreed to allow safe passage of Tibetans through Nepal to India (Richardson 2014). After the mid-1990s, Nepal gradually stopped issuing RCs to children born of refugee parents who had entered Nepal before 1990.

In 1995, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) led Nepal government started providing refugee booklets again but they immediately halted the process when not even one-fourth of the refugees received the booklet. The same year, the Nepali police deported about 300 Tibetans to China. Many speculated that this was because of the CPN-UML being in power in Kathmandu that wanted to increase ties with China. Yet some people, including Tibetans, argued that these deportations were performed to assert Nepali control over its northern borders (Frechette 2004). Returning to Kathmandu from my village in Kavre in the early 2000s, I remember bus searches by the police in Bhaktapur, 100km south of the Nepal/China border. The bus searches along the highway were to apprehend Tibetans who had entered Nepal through the Kodari border. The police would racially profile people who “looked” Tibetan (which nearly every time included Himalayan Indigenous peoples), question them, and if found to be Tibetan would take them back to Kodari and hand them to the Chinese border authorities. Although a Treaty of Extradition did not exist between Nepal and China, Nepal was

actively enforcing an unofficial policy on extradition for newly arriving Tibetans, negating the promise of the “Gentlemen's Agreement” that allowed safe passage to India.

New restrictions were placed on Tibetan assembly and mobilities after events that took place in the 2000s: 1) the end of a decade long Nepali civil war, 2) the end of the Nepali monarchy, which Tibetans had political leveraged for refuge since the 1959, and 3) the securitization of Tibetans in Chinese controlled Tibet after 2008. Today, the geopolitical landscape for Tibetans in Nepal has significantly changed. Chinese interests in Nepal have shifted the Nepali government’s political, economic, and social management of Tibetan refugees. In so doing, Chinese infrastructure development has marginalized Tibetan refugees by placing them in between the flows of Chinese development capital and Nepal’s state making ambitions (Murton et al. 2016). Tibetan’s in-betweenness places them in continually precarious geopolitical positions and places within Nepal. Due to China’s extra-territorial influence, Tibetans within Nepal experience extensive surveillance and rigid security measures that condition Tibetan subjectivities – through restrictions on religious festivities and commemorations of Tibetan political events, and the barring of refugee certificates and legal paths to citizenship for Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

China has multiple geopolitical and economic interests in Nepal. First, Chinese investments in infrastructure and foreign direct investments have increased by a tremendous amount in the past decade[4] creating new spaces and markets for Chinese investments. Second, China has provided

[4] For a discussion on Chinese infrastructural investments and foreign direct investments in Nepal, see Murton et al. (2016) and Giri (2019).

extensive funding and influence focused on securing the Nepal/China border. Third, the Embassy of China in Kathmandu has managed and funded programs in Kathmandu and Nepal, which aims to construct a particular desire for Chinese development among Nepali people.

China's increased influence in Nepal has occurred by way of several recent development interventions: post-earthquake reconstruction efforts as a form of humanitarian aid (Murton et al. 2016); Chinese state investment in Nepal's infrastructure development as an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative; and China's focus on aid in the northern Nepali districts predominantly inhabited by Himalayan Indigenous communities and Tibetans that have produced new forms of capital and commodity mobilities (Giri 2019; Harris 2013).

Chinese influence in Nepal further intensified after the April 25 and May 12 earthquakes of 2015. After the earthquakes, China promised monetary support of $480 million to Nepal (Giri 2015). At that time, this was China's largest humanitarian aid effort. On March 23, 2016, during a diplomatic trip to China, K. P. Oli, then Nepali Prime Minister, made public a statement on Nepal-China cooperation in Beijing (Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and Nepal 2016). In September 2019, the Chinese Embassy in Nepal issued four press releases of the Chinese Foreign Minister meeting four Nepali political leaders, each of whom stated their allegiance to the One-China policy. Through this allegiance, Nepal vowed to open its borders for Chinese trade and investment to flow in through several boundaries and corridors. Later that month, the ruling Nepal Communist Party organized a two-day training symposium on *Xi Jinping Thought* to educate its senior leaders on Chinese principles of governance, security, and society.

A month later, Xi Jinping, the President of the PRC, was in Kathmandu on October 12-13, 2019. With Xi Jinping's visit, discussions on finalizing the extradition treaty again re-surfaced in Nepali politics. Nepal and China signed a treaty on *Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters* that paved a path towards an extradition treaty, from which Clause 9 is below:

> Both sides expressed satisfaction with the signing of the Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Nepal on Boundary Management System, which will improve the level of boundary management and cooperation for both sides. They were also satisfied with signing the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and expressed hope for an early conclusion of the Treaty on Extradition. The two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation between the law enforcement agencies on information exchanges, capacity building and training. In the next 3 years, China will offer 100 training opportunities to the Nepali law enforcement officers each year. With a view to promoting cooperation in security sector, the two sides will continue to strengthen cooperation in the exchange visits of the security personnel, joint exercises and training, disaster prevention and reduction and personnel training.[5]

Clause 3 of the Joint Statement declared both states' commitments to "respect each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity". The statement further validated Nepal's commitment to One-China Policy and the restriction that the Nepali state places on any "anti-

[5] Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and Nepal. Issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China on October 13, 2019

China or separatist activities" within its territories. Clause 9 extends the Nepal/China commitment to exchange security information and training, and to formulate the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and the Treaty on Extradition. However, till date, Nepal has not agreed to sign such a Treaty.

These political developments create political anxieties for exile Tibetans in Nepal. Tibetans in Nepal are now again adapting and navigating geopolitical ruptures in the region. The Nepali state has adjusted to meet the demands of its changing geopolitical landscape. Geopolitical aims and imaginations of sovereignty are realized, actualized, and supported through the deployment of the discourse of fear and the ever-present threats to national integrity (Duffield 2010; Hyndman 2005; Mbembe 2003). If states deploy territorial power to control the population within its territory, territoriality is exacerbated for immigrants and refugees who do not have citizenship in that state (Paasi 2007). Chinese security exceptionalism legitimizes the intensification of military security by claiming an imagined geography of threats from both within and beyond its borders. China's growing and outsized influence in the region has had a significant impact on Nepal's territorial power, which has translated into increased pressure and structurally violent management of minorities and refugees within its borders.

Such securitized state sovereignty when manifested in forms of extraterritoriality in Nepal places Tibetan refugees in acute conditions of political liminality and impossibilities, where they continue to endure the sorrows of migration long after they have fled Tibet. Two reports – by the Berkeley-based Tibet Justice Center (Sloane and Brundige 2002) and Human Rights Watch (Richardson 2014) explicated the foundations of Tibetan refugees' political status in Nepal from

the start of the twenty first century. These reports highlight the increasing Chinese influence in dictating Nepali security narratives and policing to control pro-Tibetan activities in Nepal. Additionally, as I will examine further, China's geopolitical interests in curtailing Tibetan nationalism and the Nepali state's adherence to China has considerably disrupted the everyday lives of Tibetan refugees and Indigenous Himalayan communities (identified by the state as having Tibetan origins).

Tibetan Identities in exile

In exile, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also known as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, based in Dharamshala, India, plays a major role in the production of Tibetan identities. McConnell (2009) unbundles the linkages between mutual recognition, legitimacy, and sovereignty to focus on how the CTA, a non-state entity, claims authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty by articulating how the exile government is a continuation of the pre-1951 government that was in place in Lhasa before the Chinese invasion. Tibetan nationalism is realized through school textbooks, public performances, and distribution of Tibetan newsletters to its multiple communities in exile in India and Nepal (Diehl 2002; McConnell 2009). The CTA employs a series of state-like technologies including the *Tibetan Demographic Survey* that constitutes records and statistics of the exile Tibetan population. Religious and regional differences and identities are negated to promote a strategically essentialized Tibetan national identity.

Prior to the Chinese invasion, rather than thinking through a common Tibetan national identity, Tibetans identified mostly through their affiliations to religion and region (Yeh 2007). However,

throughout history, a relatively coherent Tibetan identity and culture was pronounced through long distance trade, "a sense of shared history", "a common literary language" and "folkloric notions such as Tibetans as eaters of *tsampa*[6]" (Kapstein 1998 in Yeh 2007, 650; Anand 2007). While the PRC constructed a narrative of Tibetan emancipation, the CTA constructed a homogeneous Tibetan identity that negates religious and regional differences even if, time and again, Tibetans in exile engage in conversations about their regional differences (McConnell 2009; Yeh 2002). CTA narratives of what it means to be a Tibetan in the diaspora shape contemporary political struggles over the identity of Tibetans in exile that are situated in place along varied cultural landscapes in South Asia and beyond.

In China, Tibetan resistance or transgressions against the Chinese state is read not only in terms of ethnic unrest but as a rupture to the "fictive history" of a shared identity that all citizens and members of the PRC share (McGranahan 1996). While Tibetan histories focus on the historical independence of Tibet as a separate state from PRC, Chinese history places Tibet historically within the sovereign realm of China. After its invasion of Tibet, Chinese state literature has largely framed Tibetan histories by emphasizing the national unity and emancipation of Tibet from feudalism. These state-mandated narratives are distinctly present in contemporary popular literature such as in the *Himalaya Story* magazine, which I discuss later in the dissertation.

Historicizing Nepal's relations to its neighbors

Drawing on the work of Baburam Acharya, Shakya (2013, 61) notes that historical relationships between Nepal and Tibet were "politically strategic and ethnically neutral" as Buddhist Newa

[6] A staple food made of barley flour eaten by Tibetans and Himalayan peoples

traders and state officials of the kingdoms of the Nepa valley (currently Kathmandu valley) and Tibet shared long histories of exchange of commodities and religious and philosophical lifeways. Later, Nepal and Tibet engaged in three wars because of the new Bahun-Chhetri led "unified" Nepal's desires for territorial expansion and economic control over Tibet.

Since the seventeenth century, Kerung and Kuti were border towns and whichever state controlled these two towns had a monopoly on the lucrative trans-Himalayan trade. Initially the Kathmandu Valley kings controlled the two Tibetan towns, and after Nepal's *unification*, the towns came under the control of the Gorkha kings. However, disputes between Tibet and Nepal were persistent as both states saw that the control of these trade towns ensured variegated sovereignty over the flows and networks of trade and economic materialities (Ong 1999). After territorial expansion and consolidation of multiple sovereignties into one political state in 1768, the newly formed Gorkha-ruled Kingdom of Nepal inherited the trade disputes between the previously Malla-ruled Kathmandu Valley and Tibet. On the eastern frontier, plans for further territorial expansion influenced Nepal to attack Sikkim in 1775, where Tibetans came to the aid of the Kingdom of Sikkim. Nepal and Sikkim signed a treaty in the presence of Tibetan representatives – Shalu Khenpo and Dapon Padstal – in Walung to come to terms with the boundaries of Nepal and Sikkim. Nepal was not happy. In addition, three main situations exacerbated the political conflict between Nepal and Tibet. First, the Kingdom of Nepal had started to mint non-alloyed coins creating economic turmoil in Tibet. As Tibet was using silver coins minted in the Kathmandu valley for monetary circulation since the mid seventeenth century, Malla rulers of Kathmandu saw it profitable to mint debased coins by mixing copper into silver (Uprety 1998). Tibetans were then quite rightfully angered by the circulation of both

pure silver coins and alloyed debased coins in the market. Second, the Kingdom of Nepal planned to monopolize Trans-Himalayan trade centering Nepal as a key transit location in and across the Himalaya. Third, and quite pertinent for this dissertation, is Nepal's decision to provide political asylum to Mipam Chödrub Gyatso, the tenth Shamarpa, and subsequent denial of the request for his extradition to Tibet.

In the early 1780s, the tenth Shamarpa, a reincarnate lineage holder in the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, escaped from Tibet into Nepal after he was unsuccessful in inheriting the wealth following the death of his stepbrother, the sixth Panchen Lama (Norbu and Turnball 1968; Uprety 1998). Regent Bahadur Shah of the Kingdom of Nepal granted the Shamarpa political asylum in Nepal, which contributed to tensions in Nepal-Tibet relations culminating in two wars from 1788-89 and 1791-92. During the second Nepal-Tibet war, Tibet requested assistance from the Qing empire, whose soldiers made it as far as Nuwakot, a mere twenty-six miles north-west of Kathmandu (Uprety 1998).

Among other things, Nepal's denial to extradite the Shamarpa was key to negotiating a peace treaty with the Qing empire. But, as the Shamarpa died during the war years, the treaty notes that the Nepali state return the remains of the Shamarpa to Tibet. The two Nepal-Tibet wars ended with the Treaty of 1792, also known as the Treaty of Kerung, which states in Article 1 that "both Nepal and Tibet will accept the suzerainty of the Qing emperor" (see Uprety 1996). These events led to further the political influence of the Qing empire in Tibetan affairs. Nepal however retained its sovereignty by agreeing to present tributes to the Qing dynasty every five years.

From 1846 to 1951, Nepal was ruled by the Ranas, who over the years grew political and social affinity towards the British[7]. The Nepali state at that time referred to the Qing emperor as the *Shree Paanch Chinese Emperor (*श्री ५ चिन बादशाहा). *Shree Paanch* refers to the honorific title of "Shree" that is repeated five times. The title of *Shree Paanch* in Nepal was only used to refer to the Shah Kings as a form of piety and honor. Even the Rana rulers who had taken political power from the Shah dynasty continued referring to the Shah monarchy as *Shree Paanch* while attributing the regnal title of *Shree Teen* (here, the honorific title of *"Shree"* is repeated only three times) for themselves. Interestingly, in Nepali communications with the Qing empire, Nepal attributed the title of *Shree Paanch Chinese Emperor* acknowledging the Qing empire and the ranking of the Qing emperor as equal to that of the Shah kings.

Since Tibet was under the administrative control of the Qing empire from a distant power center far removed from Tibet, the new Rana rulers saw it apt to invade Tibet in April 1855 to reclaim Nepal's economic influence in the region. Citing boundary disputes in Kuti and the mistreatment of Newa traders from Kathmandu in Lhasa, Nepal invaded. But, by the end of the year, Nepali forces were unable to sustain war efforts as their war capital was emptying because of the surmounting costs of territorial expansions. In March 1856, the Kingdom of Nepal and Ganden Podrang (the Tibetan government), signed the Treaty of Thapathali in Kathmandu ending the 1855-56 Tibet-Nepal war. Per the Treaty, Tibetans agreed to provide periodic payments to Nepal and withdraw custom duties on Newa traders in Tibet. In return, Nepal withdrew its troops from Kuti, Kerung, and Jhonga. Moreover, the treaty stated that "both parties, paying respect as

[7] For discussion on Rana relations with the British Empire, see Mulmi (2017).

always before to the Chinese Emperor, shall live together as brothers" and that "both Gurkha and Tibetans shall pay respect to the Chinese Emperor" (in Mishra 1991, 285).

Article 8 of the Treaty further notes: "Should a Nepali subject commit a murder and escape into Tibet, the Tibetans shall hand him over to the Gurkhas; and should a Tibetan subject commit a murder and escape into Nepal, the Gurkha Government shall hand him over to the Tibetans" (Mishra, 1991). This marked the beginning of extradition between the Nepal and Tibet.
At the end of the 19th century, Nepal lost its trade hegemony in the trans-Himalaya. As a result of the British military campaign along the Sikkim-Tibet border, a new route from Kalimpong to Tibet through Sikkim was established. This route was later extended to Gyantse along the Chumbi valley (Uprety 1998, 153). From 1908-1913, during the Sino-Tibetan conflict, Nepal was on the side of the Tibetans for territorial "self-preservation and her desire to hold on to the extra-territorial rights" (Uprety 1998, 10). The Republic of China asked Nepal to join the *Union of the Five Races of China* in 1913 which Nepal declined, emphasizing "her independence and separate existence" (Uprety 1998, 177). So, although the Chinese attributed feudatory status to Nepal, Nepal did not consult, and at times went against Chinese directives (Uprety 1998, 179-180). These political actions contradicted with Chinese claims of suzerainty over Nepal, especially since the British had defended Nepal's calls for sovereignty and rejected Chinese claims of suzerainty in Nepal.

A few decades later in 1951, the PLA marched into and invaded Tibet leading to the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. As discussed earlier, because of this, thousands of Tibetan refugees arrived in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. All earlier treaties between Nepal and Tibet were annulled

when the “Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and His Majesty's Government of Nepal on the Question of the Boundary Between the Two Countries” was ratified in 1960, through which Nepal recognized that Tibet was now under the sovereign jurisdiction of China. Since then, there have been no wars between Nepal and China.

After the Chinese Cultural Revolution, it became evident that Tibet was of strategic importance to the PRC. The rapprochement of China-US relations in 1972 proved to be unfavorable for the Tibetans. Chushi Gangdrug, an organization of Tibetan guerrilla fighters, were stationed in Mustang and other sites in Nepal. Their support from the CIA was slowly ending as the agency started to cut down on funding and logistical support[8]. BP Koirala, the Nepali Foreign Minister in 1960, had even mentioned that Nepal would allow PLA troops to come into Nepali territory to curtail and fight Tibetan rebel fighters (Shakya 1999, 507 n.37). Later, King Mahendra, after the collapse of the Congress-led government, responded to pressures from the Chinese state and tried curtailing the rebels in Mustang. The state “dispatched a three-man commission to investigate” asking the Tibetans to surrender their weapons (Shakya 1999, 359). One could make an argument that Nepali support for Chinese territorial claims at the cost of Tibetan subjugation started during this period and has continued since then.

In February 1970, Prince Birendra went on an official visit to China, where China assured their support for “Nepal’s struggle against foreign interference” (Shakya 1999). These words have been used time and again in each joint agreement between Nepal and China since then. Around the same time, Chinese aid to Nepal increased. China funded and built a major ring-road in

[8] See McGranahan (2010) on discussions of Chushi Gangdrug and the CIA.

Kathmandu and aided in building a trolly-bus service linking Kathmandu to Bhaktapur. King Birendra sent Dor Bahadur Bista to Lhasa in the role of *Royal Nepalese Consul General*. It is assumed that this decision was made after Birendra's visit to China in 1970 (see Shakya 1999). The Nepali state forced Chushi Gangdrug to stop armed activities in Mustang in the mid-1970s. Tibetan refugees remained in Pokhara, Kathmandu and in Himalayan settlements in Nepal. While the Chinese state kept increasing its development aid, the Nepali state sustained its promise and adherence to One China Policy. To *secure development*, Nepal then saw it necessary to control movement along its northern borders and securitize the Tibetan exile population in Nepal.

Inter-state border dynamics between Nepal and Tibet (and China) is however better understood with a parallel understanding of Nepali and Indian border politics. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between the Government of India and Government of Nepal formalized the state territorial borders between Nepal and post-colonial India. As per the treaty, Nepal and India share an "open border" that enables Nepal to trade with India and the rest of the world. However, it is pertinent to note of two events of Indian blockades at the open border, both of which were arguably to ensure Nepal remained dependent on India for economy, trade, and geopolitics. Nar Bahadur Budhathoki, then Minister of Commerce and Supplies, notes that the first blockade of 1989, coincidentally after a large earthquake like the ones is 2015, was an Indian act of "political selfishness" to pressure Nepal in accepting India's terms for renewing the transit treaty, especially since India was angered by Nepal's arms purchases from China (Bhattarai 2015; Crossette 1989; Shakya 2020). Regionally, these geopolitical moves were central to Congress-led India in the late 1980s to establish itself as the center for political power in South Asia. In

2015, in response to Nepal's proclamation of a new constitution, India placed another blockade at the Nepal/India border citing grievances against clauses in the constitution (Shakya 2020).

These economic and political pressures from India created a discursive political landscape fueled by anti-India sentiments in Nepal. This is quite divergent from the amicable and placid relationship that Nepal has with China in recent years. These macro-geopolitical events markedly created new political desires within Nepal, especially so after the devastating earthquakes of 2015. The predominantly Bahun-Chhetri led Nepali state has been a supporter of the discourse that Chinese colonial integration of Tibet is rather a form of emancipation of Tibetans from feudalism. Contemporary border relations are contingent on these historical contexts that have defined the macro-scale politics of "friendship" between China and Nepal. Rhetorically, this friendship levels the playing field of vertical hierarchies of "elder brother - younger brother" kinship relationship on which India-Nepal relationship is conceptualized by politicians in India. But as Nepal increases its ties with China, the everyday politics at the borderlands are met with new spatial practices of governance and securitization. These territorial anxieties co-constitute and rupture geographies of home for people at the borderlands.

Thesis Questions and Research Overview

Drawing on these historical contexts, the political puzzle for Nepal lies at the intersection of geopolitics, security, and development. While Nepali state administrators see the need to move away from Indian dominance in the Nepali economy and trade that has lasted for many decades, this occurs in tandem with seeking and receiving economic development from China. The suppression of Tibetan refugees, who China considers a territorial threat, become central to

Nepal's future of securing Chinese development. Tibetan political and social activities are surveilled and curtailed in the backdrop of increased securitization because of Nepal's desire for integration into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has revealed new modes of Chinese geopolitical and geoeconomic influence in Nepal. In doing so, I discuss how not only Tibetans, but Himalayan Indigenous peoples are brought into the security apparatus based on ethnic and caste hierarchies, which are foundational to the discursive construction of the Nepali nation. Further, Nepal, to secure Foreign Direct Investments and development funds from China, has become a proxy for extra-territorial acts of sovereignty and territorial influence.

Through ethnographic fieldwork, I explore how Tibetan refugees engage with Himalayan Indigenous communities - with a particular focus on Phale Tibetans and Ghunsali and Walungnga Indigenous peoples in northeastern Nepal. In doing so, I explore how state sovereignty is felt in the everyday. The scholarly value of this dissertation lies in thinking with Tibetan refugees in concert with Himalayan Indigenous peoples in Nepal because of their histories of trade, familial ties, and solidarities, which are eroding because of state-formation, nation-building, and the securitization of the border. Being attentive to these dynamics that shift scales from the local to the national, I focus on the surveillance apparatus and China geopolitical and geo-economic influence in Nepal while paying attention to the local dynamics of social and political change in communities at the northeastern Nepal borderlands. Thinking through these complications of identity and refugee status, and the geo-economic and geopolitical processes and logics of surveillance, I primarily ask: **How do Tibetan refugees and Indigenous Himalayan populations navigate social worlds in Nepal in the backdrop of Chinese influence and Nepali state practices of surveillance, security, and control?**

Research Methodologies/Methods

Research sites

CTA administers 45 Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Out of the 13 settlements located within Nepal, for this dissertation I conducted research in three settlements: Boudha, Jawalakhel, and Phale. Boudha and Jawalakhel have CTA offices within the settlement itself. The CTA has placed the administration of the Phale Tibetan settlement, officially known as the Walung Sampheling Tibetan Settlement, under the larger aegis of the ཤར་ཝ་ར་ shar-wa-ra (shar for Sharkhumbu, wa for Walung, and ra for Rasuwa) Settlement Officer, who is based at the Gaden Khangsar (Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office) in Kathmandu. *shar-wa-ra* is a collective office that encompasses multiple villages in each of the three regions of Sharkhumbu, Walung, and Rasuwa. As Phale Tibetans settled in Walung when they initially came to Nepal, CTA still calls the settlement Walung even though the refugees have mostly moved to the village of Phale, just south of Ghunsa.

An interesting impasse this creates is the limited spatial access that these villages have to the CTA. This is especially the case for Phale Tibetans since no road connects Phale to the Nepali grid and for the Settlement Officer to reach the Phale settlement, it takes him[9] approximately five days from Kathmandu. The settlements in Sharkhumbu and Rasuwa have better access to the Nepali road grid. As per the CTA's website, the Phale settlement lies in "one of the most remote regions of Nepal". Even then, although these settlement regions lie on a similar latitudinal axis, all mountain roads in Nepal follow a longitudinal north-south direction which implies that to get

[9] The settlement officer position of shar-wa-ra, similar to other Tibetan settlements elsewhere, has always been held by a male Tibetan officer.

from one of these settlements to the other, one must travel due south, traverse latitudinally in the southern plains, and then finally make their way north again. Jampa Dhondhup, the sha-wa-ra settlement officer told me that his trips to these three settlements (Figure 1.1) take him about two months to complete.

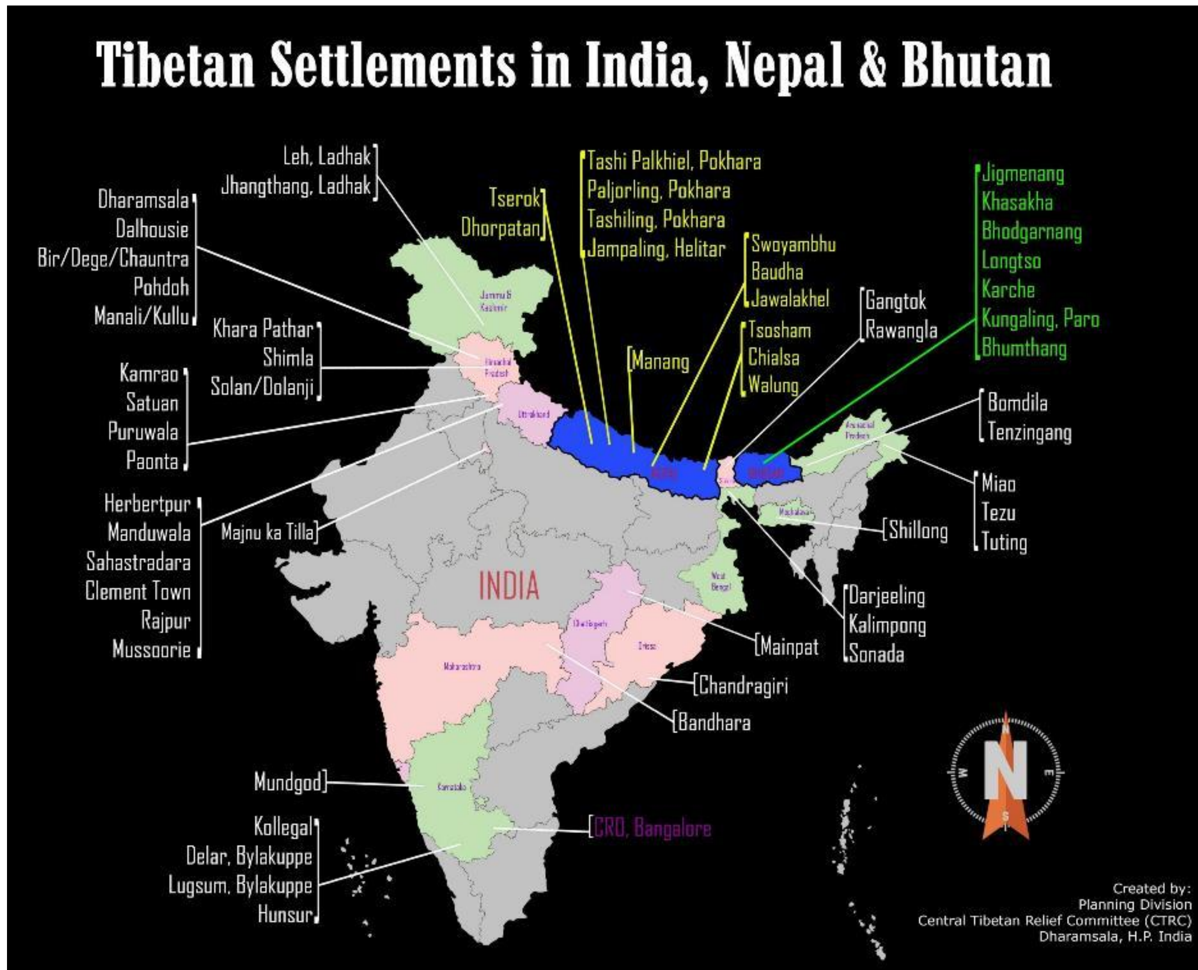

Figure 1.1 Tibetan Settlements in South Asia (Source: Central Tibetan Relief Committee)

I bring this discussion on proximity and location not only to highlight that these settlements are located at an incredibly long journey from one another but to note the disparate ways in which Tibetan refugees in each of these locations engage with the Indigenous communities in Rasuwa, Sharkhumbu, and Walung. The specificities of place and identity in these locations diverges from the homogenous identity formations maintained by the CTA. To maintain their Tibetan

identity in exile, research participants felt the need to change, adapt, and rearticulate themselves along with the changes they see happening around them. The paradox here is that to sustain their identity in disparate diasporic communities, they must also always change (Diehl 2002). This formative framing of exile Tibetan identities at the borderlands led me to research with Tibetan refugees in and from Phale in addition to Tibetans in Boudha and Jawalakhel.

Boudha

In Kathmandu, the name to the neighborhood of Boudha comes from Boudhanath, a large stupa - 40 meters in height and 100 meters in diameter - that Buddhists believe houses the relics of a Buddha of a previous eon, Kāṣyapa. People from Himalayan, Tibetan, Tamang, and Newa communities live in and share a deep connection to Boudha through continual forms of belonging, place making through daily praxis of everyday mobilities, circumambulation, and religious practices (Forbes 1989; McGranahan 2010; Moran 2004). For centuries, Boudha has been a place of refuge for traders participating in the long and arduous journey across the Himalaya between Kathmandu and Lhasa in Tibet. After the end of Nepal's dominance in the trans-Himalayan trade, these trade routes no longer provided the same ease of mobility as before. However, Boudha, since the late 1950s, has been a refuge for Tibetans, who were exiled and displaced from their homeland by China's territorial expansion and violent inclusion of Tibet into Chinese territory. Boudha, as a *space of refuge*, offers Tibetans the opportunity to circumambulate the Boudha stupa and converse with friends and family over butter tea, momos, coffee, or dal bhaat. While all this is seemingly familiar to travelers and residents, Boudha has become a place of heightened security, which intensified in three phases: once in 2008 in response to increased Tibetan protests in Boudha; second after Tibetan self-immolations in 2011

and 2013; and third after the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal that geologically and geopolitically shifted the political, economic, and physical ground.

Boudha lies at the interconnected spatial peripheries of Chinese and Nepali geopolitics and geo-economics, underscoring the significance of Chinese influence in Nepal, and the counter geopolitics of Tibetans - through memory, and place making. Peter Moran (2004) notes that Boudha is a transnational space because of mobility, diffusion of culture, the presence of a diverse Tibetan population, and the Western fetishization of Buddhist practices. Here, the Tibetan refugee population is diverse based on disparate identities, notions of nationalism, the condition of refuge, belonging to different sects of Tibetan Buddhism with divergent histories, and counter memories (Anand 2000; McGranahan 2010; Yeh 2007). Concurrently, Boudha is transnational because China's power permeates across the border to control Tibetan refugees in Nepal through a practice of extra-territorial sovereignty viz-a-viz Nepali policing. To pay attention to these "articulated moments" (Massey 1994), Boudha is one of my primary research sites.

Jawalakhel

My second research site in the Kathmandu valley is in Jawalakhel, a Tibetan refugee settlement located administratively within the Lalitpur district (Patan). Here, the Swiss government had provided funds so that the Nepali government can acquire land for the Tibetan settlement (Frechette 2004). Through the assistance from the Swiss Red Cross and the Swiss Agency for Technical Assistance, the Jawalakhel Handicraft Centre was set-up in 1960 so that refugees in the settlement can be employed in the carpet industry for self-sustenance of the community

(Gurung 2011). Contrary to Boudha, which is a UNESCO Heritage Site and receives pilgrims, tourists, and locals in the thousands every day, Jawalakhel is comparatively quieter. There is an occasional tourist bus that visits the refugee handicraft office and shop. But the settlement and small monastery itself lies across from the refugee handicraft shop, where the people are mostly locals – Tibetans and Nepali people who live in and around the settlement.

The Jawalakhel settlement is also known as the Ekantakuna settlement. As my research participant, Tsering Dorjee, puts it, "*the Nepali government gave this land in Ekantakuna to the Tibetans because it was what the name implies.*" Ekantakuna means solitary corner in Nepali. If the settlement in the 1960s lied at the "solitary corner" of the urban Patan, in contemporary times, Jawalakhel is very much within the city proper of Patan and is no longer solitary but diverse, vibrant, and densely populated. The settlement lies along the always-busy Ring Road (which the Chinese built) and close to Nepal government's office that tests for and issues drivers' licenses (documents Tibetans are not eligible to receive if they do not have a RC card).

Phale (and the northeast borderlands)

My third research site is Phale and neighboring villages of Ghunsa and Walung in the Taplejung district at the Nepal-China borderlands (Figure 1.2). Putting a name to a place or a region is commonsensical, but the practice of naming itself is inescapably political. Naming of a village or a region or a community carries the weight of historical social relations. Government officials know of this region as *uppallo* or *mathillo* Taplejung (an administrative district in Nepal) meaning Upper Taplejung - similar to the naming of Upper Mustang or Upper Dolpo. Conservationists, trekkers, and mountain climbers call it the Kanchenjunga region owing the

name to the Kanchenjunga Mountain, its biospheres and ecological landscapes, and the trekking route that traverses through multiple villages in the region. Explorers and scholars who have travelled in this region have called the entire region *Walung*. This is where the practice of naming gets complicated and contested.

Figure 1.2 Phale and the neighboring villages in northeastern Nepal. Map by author

As I discuss in Chapter 5, because of the political significance of the village of Walung (Olangchung Gola in Nepali) in trade and diplomacy with the Nepali and Tibetan states, the region was historically known as Walung. But again, this is a history that is textual and codified. By paying attention to local histories, I came to a different understanding of this place. Many of these local histories are not written but are spoken about by local villagers in multiple instances when I bring up the topic of a Walung region. For people along numerous villagers who live along the Ghunsa river, this region is not Walung. They are outspoken about the necessity to distinguish places and name them differently. For them, their villages are not in Walung but are distinctly Ghunsa, Phale, Gyabla, Lelep, and so on.

As crop-based agriculture is limited in this region, historically, villagers engaged in yak herding and trade in and across the Nepal/Tibet (and later the Nepal/China) border (Saxer 2016). Walung was an important node on the trans-Himalayan trade. Cross-border trade took Walung and Ghunsa people to places near and far – Ri'og and Shigatse in Tibet, Topkegola, Fungling, Biratnagar, and Kathmandu in Nepal, and Siliguri, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong in India.[10] Some households were large trading houses that managed logistics of stuff that moved from Kalimpong to Lhasa, while many households had tradesmen involved in small-scale commodity operations along the Himalaya.

These two regions along the Yangma river and the Ghunsa river however have disparate presents and have imagined very different futures for their communities. Ghunsa and Phale lie on the trekking route to Kanchenjunga Base Camp (KBC). So, in addition to yak herding, carpet

[10] Here, I draw on conversations with Nyima Drojee Bhutia.

weaving, and growing potatoes, these two communities rely on the flow of tourists, trekkers, and mountaineers that live in the village for a day or two to acclimatize for higher altitudes. The village of Walung is quite distant from the KBC trekking route and sees very little tourism compared to the Ghunsa river settlements. So, trade with the Tibetan town of Ri'og is still the key form of economic activity in Walung. In addition, some villagers in both sections of the region (divided by a high pass) practice yak herding and carpet weaving, both of which provide lucrative gains if sold in Tibet.

Phale villagers, as Ghunsali and Walung people do, spend three to four months in Boudha to escape the harsh winters of the Himalaya. Because of this, during winter months, more than any other season, Boudha is a site of confluence of multiple Himalayan Indigenous peoples as most northern Himalayan peoples descend into Kathmandu and largely settle around Boudha neighborhoods. Phale Tibetans, Ghunsali, and Walungnga are a significant part of this mobility.

On the first visit to Phale in the spring of 2018, it was surrounded by bushes of juniper and rhododendron trees that bloomed hues of red and yellow. Below the village ran the Ghunsa river, that engender fantasies of energy and capital for the infrastructure hegemons of Nepal. The Tibetan refugees who came from Ri'og from the Tingkye district in Tibet started a refugee settlement here in the 1960s. They share kinship relations with Ghunsali and Walung Indigenous peoples who live predominantly in the respective villages of Ghunsa and Walung. Communities in the region strategically reinterpret and engage with ideas of remoteness, as I discuss later, to continue entrepreneurial activities tied to tourism and trade.

While I felt *in place* in Phale, I felt *out of place* in Ghunsa. In Ghunsa, my presence was questioned many times by the Kanchanjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) staff and village leaders. The biggest concern lied on the fact that I was staying in Phale and not in Ghunsa. This was out of the norm for most tourists since when trekkers traverse this region on their way to the Kanchenjunga Basecamp, they tend to have lunch in Phale and walk an hour north to stay in Ghunsa for the night. In contrast, I had arrived in Phale, ate lunch in the village, and continued to stay there for many days without making my way north towards Ghunsa. Initially, this confused a lot of people, since the guesthouse owners expected me to walk an hour north and stay in one of their rooms. As I started to make day visits to Ghunsa, I started making connections, built trust, and answered questions on their confusions of my extended presence in Phale rather than in Ghunsa. While I was able to visit Walung only once, I interviewed several Walungnga people in Phale, Ghunsa, Boudha, and New York.

Timeline and Research Participants

I conducted research in Nepal in the summer months of 2016 and 2017. This was followed by ethnographic research in 2018, when I spent ten months in Nepal. During two trips, for eight weeks, I stayed with a family in Phale and travelled frequently to the neighboring village of Ghunsa. I spent a significant amount of time in the Kathmandu valley in Boudha and in Jawalakhel. I returned for two months in 2019 to conduct follow-up research with my participants in Boudha and Jawalakhel.

Sixty Tibetans in Kathmandu valley - in Boudha and Jawalakhel - were participants in interviews and unstructured focus groups. During research visits in Phale, I became close to, and spoke

with, members of eleven households – guest house operators, herdsmen, traders, teachers, and monks. In the village of Ghunsa, research participants included teachers, health care workers, border security officials, KCAP staff members, village leaders, tourism entrepreneurs, and the Ghunsali youth. Along these routes, I spoke to many Limbu and Rai men from villages along the Ghunsa and Tamor rivers south of the Ghunsa valley in Tapethok and Lelep.

In the Kathmandu valley and in Phungling[11], my conversations with government and security officials were largely semi-structured and unstructured. Semi-structured interviews became the most effective ways to communicate with locals and government officials about their everyday lives and to collect a diverse set of individual and collective experiences on various geopolitical, social and economic issues (Dunn 2016; Fontana and Frey 1994). Nepali government and security officials that I interviewed included administrators and officers at the Boudha Police Station, Shree Boudhanath Area Development Committee, Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, District Administration Office in Taplejung, Phaktanglung Gaunpalika (trans. rural municipality), and Lelep-6 ward office. In addition, I regularly talked to and interviewed Tibetan Settlement Officers at settlements in Boudha and Jawalakhel and in the *Gaden Khangsar* Tibetan office. The following section outlines my methodological approach drawing on this scholarship.

[11]Phungling is the administrative headquarters of Taplejung district. Phale, Ghunsa, Walung, and the other villages that I talk about in this dissertation lie north of Phungling, within the administrative jurisdiction of Phaktanglung *Gaunpalika* (rural municipality) in the Taplejung district.

Methodological Inquires: On Power and Presence

My research is grounded in visual methodologies and is sustained by ethnographic sensibilities to understand the everyday political and social life of my interlocutors. The theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation lie at the interface of Critical Political Geography and post-structural understandings of development, state-making, and bordering. Drawing on Feminist Political Geographers, I examine how everyday interactions, events, and practices reveal the messiness and contradictions of macro-scale geopolitics.

Critical Political Geographers contend that power, politics, and events are multi-scalar, spatial, and that mundane acts of power produce and situate individual experiences, identities, and subjectivities (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Fluri 2015; Mountz 2010; Smith 2012). This research seeks to counter disembodied theorizations of geopolitics by ethnographically fleshing out the complexities and nuances of experiencing sovereign power in everyday life (Fluri 2011; Mountz 2010). To counter disembodied theorizations, Smith et al. (2016) call for investigating the multiple ways in which territory manifests and is experienced in various embodied and material ways. These theorizations underlie the methodological and theoretical explorations of this dissertation. Elyachar (2003) notes that ethnography should be both strategic and tactical to be able to realize and decipher the spaces where the state or sovereign power appears the fuzziest and where social and political categories are blurred. In participating in such research, my fieldwork is attuned to state calculations and categorizations that govern the lives of individuals and communities. My research centers around the discursive boundaries between citizens and refugees in asking why some populations are rendered invisible and illegible by the state.

To understand the situated practices of Tibetans in Nepal, I employ feminist methodologies that produce situated, partial, and embodied knowledges (England 2015; Sharp 2007). Embodied feminist scholarship creates the possibility for counter-narratives and resistances to discourses and narratives entrenched in the cultures of hegemony. Feminist methodologies create alternative possibilities to engage with Tibetan refugees in Nepal as it interprets politics, events, and processes "spatially, relationally, and at multiple scales" (Fluri 2015, 236). In doing so, I engaged in participant observation as this method provides an opening to the rich details of everyday lives of people and the ways in which they attach meanings to places and the world around them (Laurier 2003; Watson and Till 2010).

Many casual conversations turned into unstructured focus groups. Many such instances occurred in the villages when a small group conversation turned into dedicated and thematic conversations similar to formalized focus groups. These small group discussions enabled the interchanges of knowledge between participants in their understanding of how meanings and representations are produced and reproduced in a particular context and time (Secor 2010). In addition to these conversations, I employed visual methodologies to further observe and ask research participants to reflect upon everyday life within their communities.

During fieldwork, I used photography as a visual method and a visual marker to sustain conversations. I made photographs in Boudha and Jawalakhel of monasteries, people doing *kora*, tea shops, souvenir stores, surveillance cameras, police in uniform, posters on the wall, restaurants, kyidug ceremonies. In Phale, I took numerous photographs of everyday rituals of life – farming in the green house, yaks, villagers at ease and at work, festivals, commemorations,

weddings, late night parties. Photography was not only a source of visual record keeping, but it served as a tool for visual ways of knowing about the world to "incorporate the role of the senses and emotions in social life" (MacDougall 1998, 61).

My field notebook has a quote by Gillian Rose in which she writes that the social production of photography constitutes "the social and/or political identities that are mobilized in its making" (Rose 2016, 30). I understood her words to mean that representations that I captured through my camera carried meanings through a form of socially constructed visuality. The camera and the resulting images are not objective but rather produces subjective lived realities, human and non-human histories, and spatial relations. Visual images themselves are embedded with power relations that form a link between the real and the imaginary (Rose 2016). As such, by creating potentials for alternative *ways of seeing*, visual methodologies link imagined histories and memories with future possibilities.

Quite importantly, Rose (2016) notes that the multiplicities of visuality engender differential affects and effects for the viewer. The visual experiences for the audience are constructed through the affective - sensory, experiential, and perceptual - as well as through social contexts and discourses that condition the ways of seeing (Rose 2016). In that sense, photographs, and films - especially the ones that I shot in Phale and later showed to Phale Tibetans in Boudha - produced affects when I integrated them as forms of elicitation within interviews and informal focus groups. Photo-elicitation became a crucial component through which to make the project transparent and collaborative.

MacDougall (2005) argues that “in many respects filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking” (7). Traditionally, it is common to privilege texts over images as a method of description and analysis. “Thick descriptions” become acceptable methods for representing societies, while films (and other visual images) are considered to be “thin descriptions” (Taylor 1996). The crux of the reason for choosing photography and film as visual methods comes out of this prioritizing of one way of knowing (textual) against another (visual). This is how I approached the use of visual methods in the field—filming, photographing, showing, talking, and feeling words—rather than putting my own thoughts and theories into guiding questions.

My adherence to visual methods comes from my practice and understanding as a photographer that life is always more than textual. Visual data not only acts as a medium through which to record everyday lives, it also becomes a way in which I and my research participants share and comment on their/our everyday life. I have curated a selection of photographs from the field, which are included in an addendum.

Finally, I gathered secondary data from news media, trade agreements, policy documents, and magazines to analyze the changes in China’s economic role in Nepal and the ways in which Nepali politicians and security authorities engage in dialogues on the Chinese influence. As it became increasingly difficult to talk to security and government officials on matters related to Chinese influence in Nepal, I foregrounded the analysis of secondary documents and online videos to code and understand how Nepali politicians think through Nepal’s desire for development, an example of which I discuss in the section on the *Khatag* ban in Chapter 4.

I transcribed interviews and focus groups to code data using MAXQDA. While many interviews and conversations were in Nepali, I sought assistance for Tibetan translations into Nepali. As coding is a "transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (Saldaña 2015), I coded data to identity patterns, themes, and processes. I conducted discourse analysis to engage with meanings in relation to the political, economic, and social contexts in which the narratives, visuals, and statements are produced. In doing so, I remained attentive not only to visibilities in narratives but invisibilities and silences that are rendered as unspeakable *non-events* (McGranahan 2010; Rose 2016). In Chapter 4, I discuss one of such moments of "non-event" in detail when community members were forced to commemorate and pray for Passang Dhondup, who died after burning himself as a form of protest in India.

My use of discourse analysis placed emphasis on *difference* and on the ways in which power relations (re)produce Tibetan subjectivities (Craine and Gardner 2016). The Nepali Prime Minister, officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Nepali Army have publicly endorsed the *One China Policy* that restricts any anti-China activities in Nepal. Discourse analysis enabled me to critically engage with historical and social contexts in which these unofficial statements and protocols are produced and repeatedly enforced.

Structure of the dissertation

In Chapter 2, I discuss how the placing of Himalayan Indigenous peoples and Tibetans in the hegemonic ethnic and caste hierarchy situates them as *othered* nationalities and in the lower hierarchies of the social and political contract in Nepal, where pro-Hindu Bahun-Chhetri hold political power. I discuss how a particular discourse for the need to *secure* Chinese development

is socially constructed in Nepal. In Chapter 3, I illustrate how Nepal's discourse on *securing development* from China leads to the *securing* and securitization of Tibetan refugees in Nepal through forms of surveillance. In doing so, the Nepali state seeks to code illegible visual markers of Tibetan-ness into neat categories of legibility.

In Chapter 4, I underscore the multiple ways in which Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous peoples make do in the backdrop of othering, securitization, and surveillance of their bodies, places, and memories. Tibetans in exile make do in a life of securitized and protracted exile through *objects of flight*, community building, and everyday tactics. Finally, Chapter 5 traces the relationships between exile Tibetans in Phale and Indigenous Ghunsa and Walung peoples in northeastern Nepal to tease out how intimate and kinship relations create possibilities and ruptures in the imagination of borderland and mobile lives in the present and in the future.

Chapter 2. Securing Development

It was the third cup of Americano that day during the monsoon of 2017. I had been waiting for almost two hours in a new coffee joint in Kathmandu. Inside a well-lit café, books of modern fiction adorned the exposed brick walls. As the weather ritual goes for many weeks during the monsoon in the valley, the afternoon sun slowly moved behind the rain clouds. I was waiting to meet a government official to discuss Chinese investments in Nepal. He was a mid-senior level official from the Ministry of Home Affairs, who had previously worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I thought he was well placed to answer my preliminary questions on the relationship between security and development. But a distant cousin, who had helped set-up the meeting between me and the official, requested that I not ask any political questions. Since I am trained in identifying and understanding the politics of everyday life, I found it difficult to separate political from the apolitical. After another fifteen minutes, a tall figure with a white shirt and a black coat walked inside. Maybe it was the coffee, but my anxiety had built up considerably at that moment since he was the first official I was interviewing for the research. I stood, said Namaste, and asked if he was the official. Although his role in the government is public, he only agreed to talk if I kept his words confidential. After we introduced ourselves, I explained what research plans. He was silent and attentive to what I was saying. However, he declined to comment on my questions about Tibetan protests within Nepal or his Ministry's roles in securitizing Tibetans. Rather, he found it odd that an "educated" person like me could not put two and two together in terms of Nepal's needs for development. He said:

> *"As you already know, or should know, Nepal is poor. On top of that, we are still struggling after the earthquake. The blockades from India in 2015 was an alarm for*

Nepal to seriously start making connections with China. But, as in the past, for China to take Nepal seriously and increase its funding, Nepal must show China that it is worth spending time and money here. So, for Nepal to get hold of capital from China, our government must do what China wants us to do, right? We must protect these interests, that is the least they can ask and the least that we can do".

Other officials would later emphasize the need for development funds through China. Discussions of development are not new to discussions in Nepal. Children read about state narratives of development in their textbooks and elders talk about it in teashops. But what struck me during this conversation was the dual nature of development. First, development is something that Nepal needs to obtain. And second, Nepal must protect development interests from risks and threats to continue capital flow. I term these dual and relational ways in which the state official talked about development as *securing development* as it involves the multiple meanings and processes that ensure that development and development processes are secured and securitized.

It is commonly argued that Chinese development aid in Nepal is desired by the Nepali state for two main reasons. First, it is to counter Nepal's geopolitical and economic dependence on India. Second, it is to access capital and import goods from China - and in the long run balance trade deficits through increased exports to China along with the desire to associate Nepal into the economic sphere of China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, caught within these desires for development are people in liminal or marginal spaces within Nepali hierarchies and national politics. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous communities, who not only are within the territorial realm of Nepal but share place-based

histories of belonging, trade, and familial relationships with Tibetans north of the border in places that are currently under the administration of Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in China. I begin by historicizing the sociopolitical hierarchy in Nepal through which the state categorized its population, the repercussions of which condition public discourse and political life. Based on these hierarchies, although Tibetans in exile are refugees and Himalayan Indigenous peoples are citizens, the Nepali state culturally positions and perceives the two politically divergent groups as homogenous. This is similar to how the state perceives of Madhesi citizens in southern Nepal as culturally tied to India rather than Nepal. I discuss the political consequences on these forms of othering in Chapter 5 in examining the gendered and patriarchal notion of citizenship in Nepal.

In this chapter, I outline how current Nepal-China geoeconomic and geopolitical dynamics are a continuation of the history of *securing development*. I examine how these dynamics have an impact on the everyday experiences of Tibetan refugees. I discuss how the placing of Himalayan Indigenous peoples and Tibetans into rigid and narrow ethnic categorizations and caste hierarchy have served to other these groups and further marginalize them from political influences, which remain largely controlled by dominant Nepali ethnicities and high-caste Hindus. This hierarchy for nation-building has marginalized ethnic communities since the beginning of the modern Nepali state, because of which state development plans are desired and achieved through continual marginalization of Himalayan Indigenous peoples and Tibetans in Nepal. I then expand on the effects of China's geocultural power in Nepal through print media, radio, TV, and heritage preservation through which a new discourse of development is constructed to appease Nepali state desires for development.

Muluki Ain, Ethnicity, and the Nation

During the consolidation of the modern state of Nepal in the 19th century, Gorkha rulers claimed sovereignty by "exercising proprietary authority upon their possessions (*muluk*), and ritual authority within the realm (*desa*)" of Nepal (Burghart 1984, 103). Within these possessions and realms were countries (*desa*) and "the king's tenants or subjects were natives who claimed certain rights to their land and way of life on the basis of ancestral authority" (ibid., 103). The Gorkha rulers were the *malik* (landlord) of the *muluk*, which was categorized by tenure hierarchies. The structures of tenure encompassed *rajya* (royal), *jagir* (military), *nankar* (civil administrators), *raikar* (tenants that cultivated in the land), *rakam* (for royal artisans and servants), *guthi*[12] (held by religious associations), and *birta* (awarded by the king individually to "nobles, Brahmins, ascetics, war widows") lands. This tenure system was however only ascribed to the land and not to the people/subjects of the royals. As Burghart (1984) notes, a subject could hold multiple tenurial statuses through which different rights and duties were claimed through the land. This context is crucial in understanding six episodes that Burghart lists as key in the construction of Nepal as a nation-state:

1. Before demarcating the national border in 1816, Gorkhali kings defined their borders through tenurial possessions in which taxes were collected from tenant farmers through *local big men*. The Shah and later the Rana aristocracy used local elites (*mukhiya*) to collect taxes from local villagers and to check and control any peasant movements.

[12] I discuss one such Guthi, the Boudha Ghyang Guthi, in Chapter 3.

2. The Kings and Rana ministers emphasized Nepal as the true *Hindustan* - unsullied by Mughal influence and the "cow-eating Firangis"[13]. In addition, the *1866 regulations on religious endowments* laid out that territory as possessions (*muluk*) was synonymous with territory as the realm (desa) consolidating the notions of territory, nation, and sovereignty as one unified concept. Envoys coming from foreign *realms* had to be purified to enter Nepal. Burghart notes how Nepali envoys returning from Tibet went through three days of purification in Nuwakot (west of the Kathmandu valley). I understand this as a performative enactment through which territory was re-ascribed on the body of the subject, or rather a way in which the body was re-territorialized in the (royal) realm. Burghart would probably argue that contemporary ethnic politics of Nepal *remember* these territorial forms of governance and works toward countering the history of state-led domination of local affairs.
3. If earlier the country was understood through both topography (*hyuda* - mountains, *pahad* - hills, *madhes* - plains) and ethnicity throughout the 19th century, starting in the mid-19th century ethnicity became conceptualized as *jat*. I understand this shift from classifying peoples rather than territories is a starting point for Gorkhali biopolitics in Nepal. In the 1854 Legal Code (Muluki Ain), for example, Newa-speaking peoples were referred collectively as members of Newa jat rather than a Nepal desa (realm or country). If before, different desa enjoyed their own forms of social and political systems, the 1854 Muluki Ain enforced a singular hierarchical system throughout its territory that ensured Indigenous histories and knowledge practices were suppressed.

[13] In Persian, Firangi denotes European or White. "Cow-eating Firangis" refers to the British who had colonized much of South Asia at the time.

4. The state designated Nepali as the official language of the state resulting in epistemological and linguistic violence on speakers of distinct Indigenous languages.
5. If before 1950, the Shahs and the Ranas received all revenue that was left after expenditure for governmental enactments, the revolutions of 1950-1951 gave way to a fiscal policy that denoted that the royal family will only receive a stipend from the state and that surplus income remains with the state.
6. King Mahendra argued that *jan bhavana* (a collective emotion to the desa) was engendered through the Nepali people's *desako anuvawa* (experience of the country). Mahendra noted that the post-1950s parliamentary democracy lacked this jan bhavana and *Nepalipan* (or Nepali-ness). Counter to that the political parties, Nepali royalty and the Panchayat were deeply imbued with *Nepalipan*. Nepalipan became the quality of being a Nepali, which was mapped onto the bodies of peoples within the territory of the Kingdom of Nepal thus instating the idea of the nation.

These *episodes* in the formation of the Nepali nation provide the foundation for academic inquiries into contemporary political discourses about ethnicity, state power, and nationalism. The 1854 Muluki Ain remains a powerful codebook through which the Nepali state marginalized and neglected ethnic groups. In this hierarchy, all the castes and ethnicities in Nepal are categorized based on "purity" (Hofer 1979). The *chokho jat* or pure ethnicities consisted of three hierarchies within which Brahmins, Chhetris, and some Hindu Newa groups are the purest of the castes, marked by their status as *Tagadhari* or the wearers of the holy thread. This caste group remains the predominant population that holds significant power and leadership in spheres of politics, military, civil service, education, and the media. As such, this group defines the

terminology of Nepali nationalism. In doing so, state led Hinduization effaces ethnic identities to form a Nepali identity forged through Brahmin and Chhetri based Hindu ideologies. In the hierarchy of the Muluki Ain, all other groups are secondary to this primary category. Most of the ethnic groups of Nepal are relegated to the lower margins of social hierarchy of purity, as they were marked either as “non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers” or “enslavable alcohol-drinkers” (Thapa and Sijapati 2004). This category further classifies populations under two subcategories of impurity: first, a group that is bodily *touchable* but from whom water is unacceptable (includes foreigners and Muslims); and second, the Dalit, a group that is both bodily untouchable and from whom water is unacceptable. So, if a Dalit person were to touch water, food, or other items of religious significance, people from the upper caste will deem the item polluted and no longer fit for their use, rendering the *touched* item as waste.

In the context of this dissertation, the Walungnga and Ghunsali, along with Phale Tibetans and Tibetan exiles in general regardless of citizenship were historically considered as a category that translates as “enslavable alcohol-drinkers". To enter the Kathmandu valley, they would have had to undergo purification rituals, based on Burghart’s arguments on the formation of Nepal. While these forms of social mobility policing based on caste hierarchies are not as well pronounced as earlier, these have precedents in contemporary engagements of Indigenous peoples with the Nepali state. Many senior security officials and higher-ranking regional administrators, including the official who I introduced earlier in the chapter, are Brahmin and Chhetri from the “purest” upper echelons of the hierarchy who control state politics in Nepal. On the contrary, Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous peoples rarely hold, or are provided the opportunity to hold, political and military office and face the top-down enactments of state and policing practices. In recent

decades, Indigenous and ethnic communities have mobilized against these forms of social and political marginalization.

Paudel (2016) notes that since the 1960s, two different modes of janajati (ethnic) mobilization have taken shape. The first is initiated by the local *mukhiya* to sustain and increase their political access in national politics.[14] The second constitutes uprisings and resistance against state and non-state sustained feudal oppressions of ethnic peasantry that permeate throughout Nepali society. It is important to put these into historic perspective. While Nepal saw a brief stint at democratization in 1951 after the abolishment of the Rana regime, King Mahendra dissolved the democratic government in 1960 to establish a Panchayat rule through which he consolidated power and placed the territorial realm (*muluk*) back in the sovereign power of the Shah regime. Considering these major shifts in political power in the 1960s, the local elites mobilized to maintain their access to national politics. The *mukhiya* of the previous Shah and Rana regime were now the mukhiya of the new Panchayat regime. These hierarchical political relations were present in much of Nepal including the northern Himalayan spaces.

In the later part of the 1980s and early 1990s, the end of the Panchayat paved the way for a multi-party democracy in Nepal albeit with the Shah king still as the symbolic and military head of the state. Paudel (2016) argues that, during this time, ethnic elite politics was mobilized in three ways. First, development was introduced as a framework to think of ethnic groups as collectively backward peoples who should be pulled into the realm of modernity. This is similar to arguments by scholars (Pigg 1992; Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997) on the discourse of *bikas* that

[14] In the Walung region, the mukhiya were known as *gowa*.

renders village-life as *abikasi* (undeveloped) from which people must come out of by seeking *bikas* (development). Second, ethnic elites mobilized to legitimize their claim for power in national politics. Third, ethnic elites sought cultural preservation by maintaining a distinct ethnic identity.

Despite the move toward democratic governance in the 1990s, *janajati* representation in government and civil services was low and ethnic consolidations continued among Nepal's "landed aristocrats" who were mostly Brahmins and Chhetris. Since the Hindu Brahmin-Chhetri caste group holds significant power in politics and state governance, this group constituted most writers of the new constitution. The 1990 constitution then reified Nepal as a Hindu state, ignoring the multiple and diverse practices and expressions of religion in Nepal. Additionally, the state negated diverse linguistic traditions by identifying Nepali as the sole national language. Further, the then Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) stressed the introduction of Sanskrit in schools, which exacerbated the politics of exclusion for non-Hindu and non-Brahmin groups in Nepal. The Maoist were able to capitalize on ethnic and caste hierarchies to gain support from a large base of ethnic and marginalized peoples during the Maoist insurgency. Because of the historical and contemporary ways in which the Nepali state tried to sustain a Brahmin-Chhetri led Hindu realm, the Maoist route was one of political possibilities through which the people - who were marginalized and neglected by the state and relegated to a life of poverty, casteism, and discrimination - imagined alternative political futures.

Several economic factors lay the foundation for grievances against the Nepali state in the early 1990s after the People's Movement. Economic problems in Nepal were rampant in the 1990s,

and efforts to improve this situation remained slow, due to intensified corruption in the bureaucratic order, nepotism, and bribery. The economy worsened in the later years so much that the post-democracy standard of living worsened in comparison to the Panchayat era. This form of politics at the center (Kathmandu and other regional urban areas) constructed an economic order of uneven development and distribution that catered to the elites at the cost of economic marginalization of the peoples and spaces at the peripheries (Thapa and Sijapati 2004). Poverty and neglect of marginalized groups led to increased support for the Maoist political movement from janajati communities. It is then of no surprise that Maoist rebellion in Nepal was initiated, and maintained its stronghold, in Rolpa and Rukum - districts in which the rich-poor divide was the starkest. Thapa and Sijapati (2004, 64) note how Maoists "were effective in capturing the public's imagination" by targeting and disrupting the symbols of inequalities and poverty, such as local politicians, land revenue offices, banks, and police stations.

During the early years of the Maoist insurgency, Sharma (1997) dismissed ethnic and Indigenous politics to claim rights within the state of Nepal as an act of fiction which dilutes the formation of the state, He noted that if janajati peoples "try to *invent* something *artificially* so late in the day" they are unable to do it without destroying "the idea of the state" (emphasis added by author, 489). Two decades later, and after the Maoist insurgency ended and the Maoist rebel leaders came into political power in Nepal, Paudel (2016) notes that the politics of indigeneity in Nepal became a form of regressive politics, represented through neoliberal projects of inclusive development and good governance that reified property rights and entrepreneurship and supported elitist identity politics. In making such arguments, both scholars - including others who espouse a nationalist understanding of the state - do not hold the Nepali state suspect and

forget that Nepal was discursively constructed by the Shah and the Rana rulers through political practices that favored a handful of people while relegating many as mere subjects under the social hierarchies of the Muluki Ain.

Sharma (1997, 492) is skeptical of ethnic politics because he argues that the Tamang, Magar, Rai, Newar, and the Limbu people "have lived and worked more like economic competitors in a common framework" with the Hindu Brahmin-Chhetri communities. Janajati peoples in Nepal would find this statement problematic because it negates the histories of political and social marginalization that janajati groups faced. For example, Campbell (2011) illustrates that the Tamang have long been the weight bearers of Nepal's development. It is only in the imagination of nationalist and urban intellectuals like Sharma that Hindu coexistence with other ethnic groups are romanticized. The following interaction at a teashop in Boudha illustrates this further.

It was the summer of 2018. I had just returned from my first research trip to Phale and Ghunsa. While in the kora in Boudha, I met Pasang from Ghunsa who insisted that I join him for some snacks at a teashop across the main road in Boudha owned by a Phale Tibetan family. Upon entering, I noticed that on one side were Ghunsali and Tibetans who I already knew. On the other were Tamang porters who had stopped for some mid-day rest and food. Nyima, a Ghunsali male, who lives in Ghunsa for the trekking season and then travels extensively throughout Nepal and India for the off-season, is planning on sending his son to the United States.

Nyima: Now, I plan on sending Tenzin (his son) to America. We have decided that he will marry Tashi's (a Tibetan male, who is seated across from us) niece who is in New York.

Tashi: yes, yes. I think this would be a good match. That way, Tenzin can work and not waste time in Kathmandu or in the village [Ghunsa].

On hearing this, Dhondup (Ghunsali male), who is much younger than Nyima or Tashi, and probably the same age as Nyima's son Tenzin, has an annoyed look in his face.

Dhondup: We are not wasting time by choice. You know this well. We can hardly find a good job here in the city. All good government jobs go to Bahun-Chhetri people. We have no choice but to wait around. We have been going to the village during tourist season anyways.

Tashi: yes, yes. I did not mean to say that. You are right, it is difficult. And if you are Tibetan, then it is even worse.

Nyima: You might be right, but what difference is there? We have citizenship documents but what use is it? Our children are still less likely to get good government jobs in Nepal. We – even if we are Tibetans or Ghunsali or Walungnga - we are not Nepali enough for the state. [Nyima then looks towards the table towards the porters]. We are only fit for labor jobs and that is it. [The Tamang porters shake their head].

Dhondup: yes, yes. That is why we always need to be together - brothers and sisters from our villages. We have to work together to find solutions for these problems together.

The conversation illustrates that the nationalist discourse of janajati people living together as "economic competitors" with the Hindu majority is untrue at best. Many janajati youth live in the time-space of *waiting* (Jeffrey and Young 2012) due to the lack of social and political mobility that is conditioned by caste and ethnic hierarchies in Kathmandu and other urban centers. To counter such categorizations and marginalization by the Nepali state, ethnic relations have been

produced through "interaction, interdependence, and mobility" (Levine 1987, 71). Ethnicity is a process that is perpetually in flux and ethnic consciousness is produced in relation to social situatedness, state modernization, and language politics (Guneratne 1998).

In thinking about the ways in which ethnic groups reconstruct their identities to situate along national and international scales, Shneiderman (2015) argues that ethnic communities like the Thangmi strategically place themselves and make political claims through multiple nation-states, especially since they were not included as an ethnic group in the Muluki Ain. This was viewed as advantageous to Thangmi elders because they could "misrepresent themselves as members of better-known ethnic groups in encounters with the authority" (Shneiderman 2010, 14) because Thangmi origin stories illustrate their place-based histories of marginalization and deceit by other ethnic groups that are higher in the codified hierarchy of the Muluki Ain. To counter their marginalization, the Thangmi participate in a politics of belonging, which is an embodied "process of articulation [that] emerge through the experience of circular migration" (Shneiderman 2010, 106) that transcends the boundaries of Nepal, India, and the TAR.

Another example to highlight the social situatedness and ethnic fluidity is through a discussion of the Tamang ethnicity. It was only in 1932 that Tamang as an ethnic group was constructed to collectively negotiate with the Nepali state even though the members of the group were very diverse and spoke multiple Tibeto-Burman dialects and languages (Levine 1987; Ramble 1997). Tamang distinction from a Bhotiya identity was produced as a response to several political situations at that time. To move away from the identity of Bhotiya, that signifies that people migrated from *Bhod* (Tibet), the Tamang collectively constructed a new ethnic identity to situate

politically with modern Nepal. While the Muluki Ain (1854) was being codified, Tibet and Nepal did not have favorable diplomatic relations. Political tensions were heightened during the 1850s leading to a war between Nepal and Tibet in 1855. Tamang as a collective ethnicity was therefore constructed to position themselves higher in the caste hierarchy in comparison to their former category as Bhotiya (Tibetan) "who are held in contempt for eating beef and whose political loyalties were doubted" (Levine 1987, 73). To say that ethnicity is always at flux is again made clearer as many Tamang people, who I spoke to during my trip to Rasuwa in 2015, have claimed Tibetan identity to tap into the economic resources available through the Nepal/China border corridor in the northern Rasuwa district in Nepal.[15]

I outlined the historical ways in which the Nepali state through the Muluki Ain had codified peoples within its territory based on Hindu notions of purity. Janajati politics and everyday life are conditioned by these hierarchies and have precedents in present times in terms of social and political mobility. Brahmin-Chhetri political leaders and administration officers perceive Tibetans along with Himalayan Indigenous peoples as beef-eaters, foreigners, and historically a caste group that is impure and politically questionable. To think about the statements made by the ministry official from earlier in the chapter in conjunction with the discussion on ethnicity, it is then not so difficult for the Nepali state to suppress Tibetan political action for *securing development* as Tibetans and other Himalayan Indigenous peoples have always been considered as existing in the lower hierarchies of the social-political contract.

[15] Phurwa Dhondup Gurung and Nyima Dorjee Bhotia (2019) present an excellent photo essay that visualizes the transformations in Rasuwa through infrastructure development and road building.

In the summer of 2018, I interviewed a member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), a meeting that I was able to schedule through the father of a dear friend. To escape the humid heat of summer monsoon, we sat inside an air-conditioned coffee shop in an upscale Patan neighborhood frequented by expats and politicians. Asking that I not disclose his identity, the male, Brahmin politician spoke about the new political landscapes in Nepal.

> *Tibetans receive money from so many places. So, why are you researching about their conditions in Nepal? You must be well aware that they are quite well off. So, why risk the country's development [from China] by taking the side of Tibetans? They have gained profits from industries and tourism in our land already. We have done so much for them already without leaving space for complaint. We cannot tolerate obstructions anymore. I think we should no longer busy ourselves with Tibetans when talking about Nepali development or progress. We have received this golden opportunity for a renewed friendship and understanding with China. We have so much to gain as a nation, to develop. We must think of our future now.*

The NCP member, from his privileged caste and political position, viewed Tibetans as both outside and inside the realm of Nepali politics. Tibetans are outsiders because they are refugees in Nepal and do not hold the same rights and powers as citizens. But again, Tibetans are inside the political realm as Nepal sees it necessary to control Tibetan activities to secure its development futures. His position on Tibetans is common among his NCP colleagues and other governmental agencies. While we spoke, he received numerous phone calls requesting his help with land disputes, to expedite driving license examinations, for admissions in an elite school,

and the mundane political needs of many of his friends and family who use his political power as a means through which to navigate the bureaucratic and social everyday landscape. After his last phone call and with an abrupt sip of tea, he started getting ready and stood up. He said quite hurriedly, "*is this enough?*" and started to walk towards the door. With frustration, he spoke, "*I am still quite surprised why you are working on this issue for your thesis*". Rather, he emphasized that I should work towards the common cause of developing Nepal and the people within it rather than talking about divisive politics while studying in America. At the door, he exclaimed, "*we have really no other way*". I understood these words to mean that the only way through which Nepal can secure Chinese development funds is by appeasing to Chinese demands for Nepal to control Tibetan activities within its territories. In doing so, as I illustrate later in Chapter 3, the Nepali state at times conflates between Tibetan refugees and Himalayan Indigenous peoples during acts of surveillance and securitization reinforcing historical categories of ethnic marginalization. In the next section, I discuss the distinct ways in which Nepali desires for development are fueled and sustained by Chinese *geocultural power* that operates to provide, and increase the desires, for development within Nepal.

Geocultural Power

Most Nepali citizens included in this study view the Chinese state as competent. Competency is so fundamental that when the Kathmandu Post, a leading English-language daily in Nepal, published an article in February 2020 that criticized the Chinese state for being incompetent due to its lack of transparency in reactions to the COVID-19 virus, the Chinese Embassy released public criticism against the newspaper. Although it is highly uncommon for a foreign mission to criticize national newspapers, many Nepali, including some of my non-Tibetan research

participants, responded on social media with sympathies towards the Chinese state and blamed the Kathmandu Post for the insensitive message - especially since the article included a photo of Mao Zedong wearing a surgical mask (Figure 2.1). This exemplifies *geocultural power,* which I view as a method for the Nepali state to secure development from China. In this section, I outline the various ways in which the Chinese state, through the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu, have wielded geocultural power to create and sustain particular imaginations and narratives of China, Tibet, humanitarian aid, and heritage preservation.

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THE KATHMANDU POST

OPINION

China's secrecy has made coronavirus crisis much worse

China's authoritarian system needs to step up its game confronting unexpected crises that require a rapid response.

IVO DAALDER

For eight years, China's President Xi Jinping has trumpeted his country's increasingly authoritarian system as a grand model for other developing countries to follow. No doubt, China has seen an extraordinary period of economic growth, which has benefited hundreds of millions in China and around the world. But authoritarianism has also come at great cost, as the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus underscores.

In two months, the virus has spread throughout China and beyond. More than 80,000 people have been reported infected, and nearly 1,400 have died as a consequence of the disease. These numbers are likely to vastly understate the true extent of its spread and impact. The numbers inside China are bound to be much higher, and the lack of reports from Africa, the Middle East and South America are more likely due to faltering health care systems rather than its absence altogether.

We may never know if the spread of the new virus could have been prevented by earlier, concerted action. But the fact that China chose secrecy and inaction turned the possibility of an epidemic into a reality.

The first instance of a new pneumonia-like disease in Wuhan, an industrial city of 11 million people, emerged in early December. By the end of the month, doctors in Wuhan noticed an increased number of sick people with symptoms similar to the SARS outbreak that had killed nearly 800 people in 2002-03. The patients were quarantined, and the Wuhan health commission issued a public notice stressing no cause for alarm. The infections were traced to a live-animal food market, which was shut down January 1, and the genetic sequence of a new coronavirus was identified two days later.

Official communications stressed that there was no reason to believe the disease could be spread among humans, and the authorities cracked down hard on any medical warnings that appeared on social media. In one notable case, a WeChat post by Dr Li Wenliang to colleagues that patients at his hospital had been quarantined with SARS-like symptoms, was dismissed as "illegal acts of fabricating, spreading rumours, and disrupting social order". (Dr Li later contracted the disease and died.)

Chinese authorities waited for a month after the first case to notify the World Health Organisation about the new coronavirus, thus delaying concerted efforts to understand the virus, its transmissibility and lethality among infectious disease specialists around the world. Even so, from January 2 to January 18, China did not report any new cases and continued to downplay its severity. As the number of hospitalisations mounted in Wuhan, officials went ahead with a New Year banquet for 40,000 people.

Only when new cases were reported outside Hubei province on January 20 did the Chinese authorities decide to act. Within days, Hubei province, home to 50 million people, was quarantined, with no travel allowed.

But it was too late. The disease had spread around the country and the world. Within Wuhan, reports of new cases and deaths grew exponentially—from just 100 infected patients and deaths in single digits in mid-January to tens of thousands of reported cases and hundreds of death a few weeks later. Yet, even though Chinese authorities finally acknowledged the severity of the situation, Beijing did not allow a WHO investigating team to enter China until this week and still declines offers by the United States and other countries to send all the experts needed to help combat the disease.

Authoritarian political systems don't do well when confronting unexpected crises, especially those like infectious diseases that require a rapid local response. They disempower officials at the lower rungs. The firmer the control at the top, the less likely the initiative from the bottom. Dangers go unreported and those who speak out, like Dr Li, are quickly punished as a clear sign to others to stay in line.

But when it comes to infectious diseases, top down approaches fail. In fact, they make things worse, by delaying actions that could otherwise prevent the spread of the disease. Only if people are empowered to take the initiative can quick action be taken.

When the first coronavirus patient in the United States presented himself in Snohomish County, Washington, Hollianne Bruce didn't wait for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to confirm the disease. The epidemiologist assigned to the county immediately traced everyone the patient had been in contact with and urged them to remain in isolation for 14 days to prevent the disease from spreading. So far, it hasn't.

Authoritarians are good at ducking responsibility and shifting blame. And no doubt Xi Jinping will survive this latest crisis and remain fully in charge of the country. But people inside and out of China will have noticed that secrecy and control can be deadly and will begin to question whether the system is in fact as effective as China's leaders make it out to be.

This article was previously published in The Korea Herald, a part of the Asia News Network.

Figure 2.1 The Kathmandu Post article on China's incompetence and lack of transparency

"Himalaya Story"

I first started examining the Himalaya Story magazines in 2018. Published in English, the goals of the magazine were to introduce readers in Kathmandu, Pokhara, and other urban areas of Nepal to stories, visual materials, and historical narratives that illustrate Chinese benevolence

and development in Tibet. It is published by Nepal Tianli Publication and Culture Company Pvt. Ltd, a publication house based in Kathmandu that specializes in magazines, books, pamphlets, and other Chinese-based reading materials. Some of my Tibetan interlocutors note that the Publication company itself is supported, funded, and directed by the Cultural Division of the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. They launched ten franchise bookstores and partnered with several bookstores in the Kathmandu valley to distribute the *Himalaya Story* magazine in addition to books and audiovisual materials on "Chinese culture and China's development experience" ("Nepal bookstores join the "Chinese Literary World" chain of bookstores" 2018). Interestingly, the articles in this magazine are not attributed to any specific author. This complicates the idea not only of authorship but also of knowledge production and the ethics behind the dissemination of knowledge in the public sphere.

Himalaya Story works on the imperative that development is speculative investment. It necessitates the creation of a social culture of development and consumerism. A photograph in the magazine shows a middle-aged Tibetan man wiping his new SUV - a *khatag* is wrapped around the side-mirror - which was made possible after his mother was *emancipated* by the Chinese state from feudalism (Himalayan Story 2019, 22). The goal of *Himalaya Story* through these visual stories is to produce a particular desire for Chinese development in the already saturated hopes for *development* among the Nepali people.

In 2018, I noticed that the Himalaya Story magazine was available in many bookstores in the Kathmandu valley. In one bookstore that I frequently visited in Patan, the magazine was placed centrally along a shelf next to the check-out counter. I was browsing for new books on Nepali

literature and noticed that the set-up had changed. If previously there were books on contemporary Nepali fiction on the top shelf, books were reshuffled and a whole new set of books were present (Figure 2.2). These were books mostly published by the same publisher, Nepal Tianli Publication, along with China Intercontinental Press on topics including the Dalai Lama's Reincarnation, histories of the Silk Road, "Hong Kong: A True Account", Chinese translation of Thoreau's Walden. Except for the Walden translation, the books retold Chinese and Tibetan histories in particular ways that reified Chinese histories of benevolence and imperial importance in the region. Since this was a reputed bookstore with excellent titles on critiques of Nepali society and politics, I was puzzled why the store owner had placed the books in this place of prominence.

Fig 2.2 Books at a Patan bookstore

I asked the bookstore owner, "*Dai*[16]*, where did all these books come from?*". He said "*Some folks from this publisher [pointing to the Himalaya Story magazine stacked next to the check-out counter] came last week with these books and said if I wanted them. They also helped clean out the bookshelf and placed all the books there as you see it".*

Tenzin, who goes by TJ, a Tibetan who grew up in the Jawalakhel Tibetan settlement and splits time yearly between Toronto and Kathmandu, had joined me during this trip. He saw that I had a few issues of the Himalaya Story in hand when we walked out. He commented,

> *Right now, this magazine is printed in English. I saw that there are other books that they have released in Nepali, but they do not have glossy photos like this magazine. But this is Nepal, and as you know, even if the magazine is in English, it will not take too long for non-English speaking people to receive the information from the magazine through conversations. This is a country of conversations.*

Himalaya Story along with the other books from the publisher in English, Nepali, Tibetan, and Mandarin Chinese aim to retell the histories through Chinese state-mandated narratives. While the current target audience of Himalaya Story is English-speaking, middle-class Nepali people and expats, it is not unlikely for these narratives to reach non-English speaking Nepali peoples through everyday conversations and speeches that politicians might give based on these sources.

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[16] *Dai* means older brother in Nepali and is used as a form of respect to speak or refer to someone who is either older or assumed to be older than oneself.

This bi-monthly is free and easily accessible in tourist-zones of the Kathmandu valley. Discourse analysis of the magazine shows that it aims to valorize China's importance as an historic actor in the region by illustrating 1) Chinese narratives of the historic Silk Road; and most importantly, 2) China's "emancipation" of Tibetans from an era of darkness to modernity and economic well-being. The magazine periodically includes short articles that emphasize the beautification and preservation of Tibet ranging from non-commercial afforestation projects to "taming pirates" of the digital world referring to cyber security. The following excerpts from the magazine highlight the linkages in history between Nepal and "China's Tibet" to speak to the discourse of development in Nepal.

> *Many Nepalese have the fondness for going to Tibet, the reason for which is that, Nepal has enjoyed a history of "tea for horse" trade with China's Tibet, and at present, Nepalese usually breathe the air of development of China through the changes of Tibet since the Reform and the Opening up of China in 1979.* (Himalayan Story 2016, 1)

> *Tibet, a place once filled with darkness and oppression, has undergone a great democratic reform and become a holy land with freedom and happiness. Here, stories happen every moment on various persons, some beautiful, some sorrowful, some breathtaking, and meanwhile compelling.* (Himalayan Story 2017a, 1)

> *It is believed that people who witness a true Tibet can feel new developments and new changes happening in Tibet in these decades. Behind these achievements are endless efforts of the Tibetan people to build a better homeland.* (Himalayan Story 2017b, 1)

> *Those who had endured the darkness will particularly cherish the brightness. These words are from the remarks of Chairman of Tibet Autonomous Region of China in a televised speech on the eve of Tibet's Serfs' Emancipation Day, which refer to cruel abuse of serfs and extreme backwardness of Tibet under the feudal serf system.* (Himalayan Story 2018, 1)

By presenting the above excerpts, I argue that the Chinese state-mandated narratives in the magazine become a node through which the Chinese Embassy desires to create a new form of meaning making in the urban milieu of Nepali people. This is exemplified repeatedly by illustrating China's benevolence that brought Tibetans from darkness to modernity. What these excerpts also achieve is to show citizens that Nepal could see similar developments to that of Tibet. Escobar (1995) draws on Foucauldian discourse to conceptualize how, in mainstream development, particular ways of seeing, being, and thinking about the world are normalized while others are rendered impossible. Through this magazine, Chinese development in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of China is hailed as a model of progress and modernity. The photographs in the magazine subsequently reify China as a desirable partner and capable provider of similar development in Nepal.

For example, one article cites numerous western scholars to validate the argument that China has successfully developed Tibet. These magazine narratives perpetuate common tropes about the so-called "true Tibet" that "has long been shrouded in mystery and myth" (Himalayan Story 2016, 9). I present a few excerpts from these "western scholars" below:

Many facts mirror and confirm that Old Tibet, a society of serfdom, was a poor ignorant feudal society ridden with problems such as violence, insults, sexual discrimination, he [Albert Ettinger] said. (Himalayan Story, 2016, 9)

The myth brew illusions that have been skillfully peddled for political purposes around the world by the Dalai Lama, the biggest serf owner in Old Tibet, who has thus instilled lies into people's concepts, especially Westerners' concepts about Tibet. (Himalayan Story 2016, 9)

By presenting excerpts of Chinese state-mandated narratives through the voice of western scholars, the magazine challenges numerous volumes of western scholarship that contradicts Chinese narratives of development and emancipation of the Tibetan people. This discourse also validates Chinese state-mandated *truths* by employing a few white western voices, which meet the existing epistemologies of their intended audiences. The presumed readers of this magazine have largely been educated to understand that white western ways of knowing are both appropriate and trustworthy.

In thinking through *geocultural power*, the focus in several editions has been on providing vignettes of Silk Road histories[17] and Nepal's historical connections to China through Araniko's visits to China and Hiuen-Tsian's visits to Nepal. In doing so, it emphasizes the historical connections between the two states as partners and notes the importance of Nepal to continue

[17] Highlights of Silk Road histories include that of Dunhuang, Jiuquan, the greater Hexi Corridor, Xi'an, Mianshan

such partnerships through China's BRI operations and development in Nepal. Here, geocultural power operates to instill the need to secure development as a form of continuation of history. Moving beyond the analytics of soft power, *geocultural power* makes it possible to understand how heritage, history, infrastructure, and diplomacy are reworked so that "China is able to insert itself at the center, both culturally and geographically" (Winter 2019, 182). In Nepal, through research on secondary materials, I found that geocultural power is exemplified and sustained through multiple modes of retelling of Chinese and Tibetan pasts, infrastructure development, and heritage preservation in Nepal

In addition to the discussion on Himalaya Story, geocultural power extends through various mediums in Nepal, such as the China Radio International (CRI), PRC's state-owned international radio service[18], which has an overseas bureau in Kathmandu. It is one of thirty-two such overseas radio bureaus of CRI. Funded by the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu, CRI-Nepal produces programs - on Nepali, Chinese, and Tibetan cultures - entirely in Nepali. According to their website, there are thirteen Chinese nationals and three Nepali specialists working at the radio. The radio calls itself "हिमालय पार गर्ने मितेरी पुल" - a friendship bridge that crosses the Himalaya.

CRI operations in Nepal are linked to Kathmandu's Confucius Institute (CI), an education unit under PRC's Ministry of Education. While on the surface CIs goals are to teach and transfer Mandarin language and Chinese culture, it so happens that CIs around the world are sites from where anti-Chinese sentiments are closely monitored and pro-Chinese narratives are widely

[18] CRI is owned by China Media Group, which is operated through the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

distributed. CI started Mandarin classes in Kathmandu as early as 2010 (China Daily 2010, also see Lal 2019). In addition, the Chinese Embassy in Nepal provides Mandarin language teachers to multiple schools in Kathmandu at no cost to the schools. The schools in return have made Mandarin Chinese mandatory in their curriculum (Lal 2019; Rimal 2019), which is illegal as per rules set by the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Science and Technology. Irrespective of these breaches of legality, the Chinese Embassy can sustain the schools' interests in Mandarin Chinese by offering free resources. On September 9, 2019, the Ministry of Information and Communications of Nepal and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China signed a memorandum of understanding on "Volunteer Chinese Teachers' Program in Nepal". The memorandum does not describe the details of what the program entails. Upon further inspection, I find that the volunteer program is affiliated with Hanban, short for Confucius Institute Headquarters "to help the world solve the problem of a lack of Chinese language teachers".

The Chinese Embassy in Nepal also funds Nepal-China Mutual Cooperation Society, founded in June of 1987. Prem Sagar Poudel, chairman of the Society, also holds office as the chairperson for Danphe TV, a television channel that runs pro-China interviews and programs. Through these institutional and media affiliations, Poudel disseminates pro-China discourse in Nepali media. After Tibetan protests heightened in 2008, in addition to the increased securitization of the Nepal-China border, the Chinese Embassy increased funding to Nepali popular media. On March 26, 2010, media personnel in Kathmandu celebrated the 2nd *Serfs Emancipation Day of Tibet*, an annual Chinese celebration that was legislated in 2009 at the Ninth Regional People's Congress in Lhasa. During the opening ceremony, Shankar Pokharel, then Minister of Information and

Communications of Nepal, placed Chinese development in Tibet at a pedestal and noted that Nepal should follow Tibet's model of "accelerated development". Pokharel's words were interestingly similar to the discourse of Chinese development of Tibet that were prevalent in articles and presentations in Himalaya Story, Daphne TV, and CRI.

The narrative of the need for development surfaces and resurfaces quite often in the media. In an interview, Puspa Raj Pradhan, chief editor of People's Review Weekly, opines that Nepal must receive aid and support by accessing Chinese capital production (चीनलाई नेपालमा अब रोकेर रोकिन्न, 2018). He notes that Tibetan political activities taking place in Nepal are the main hindrance towards achieving development goals with the support of China. He notes that anti-Chinese activities - Tibetan dissensus - is a western construct that Nepal needs to control to gain Chinese trust in the Nepali state and market. For Pradhan, Chinese economic influence cannot, and should not, be curtailed. Pradhan is not alone when he says that linkages and engagements with the Chinese state and economic markets are Nepal's only way to counter western imperial influence. This narrative is common among politicians and government officials, especially those with ties to the Nepal Communist Party.

Further, Chinese geocultural power is realized in Nepal's efforts to secure development through *China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation*, *China Aid*, and the Chinese Embassy. Through the various projects of China Aid, Nepali social consciousness towards the Chinese state has become increasingly favorable. The re-construction of Durbar High School (Figure 2.3) is one example of these development interventions.

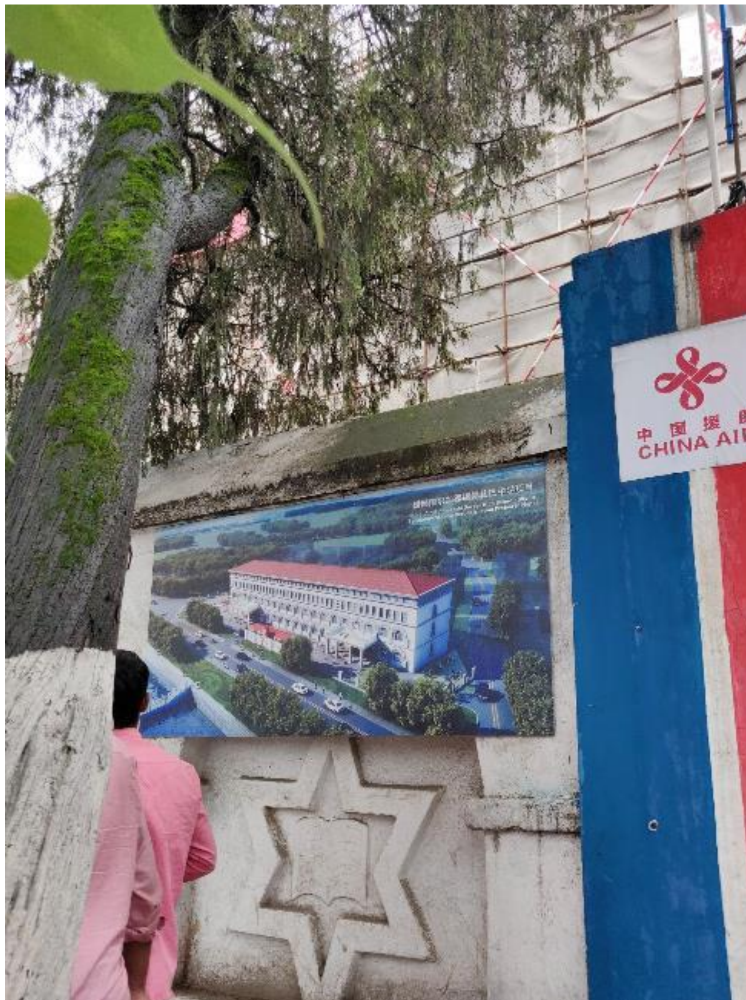

Figure 2.3 Durbar High School Construction Site in 2019

Durbar High School - founded in 1854 and Nepal's first "modern" school - was severely damaged by the 2015 earthquakes. China Aid took on the project to rebuild the school with an emphasis on reviving the building's "traditionally unique features". The new design is that of a building in the 19th century vernacular-imperial style set on a pristine space with greenery on all sides obliterating the maze of row houses in historic Kathmandu district that starts immediately behind the premises of the school building. This ode to history worth $800,000 USD at the heart of the city is a reminder to Kathmandu residents of what Chinese aid can achieve ("Reconstruction of Durbar High School" 2018). Similarly, after the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal,

the Boudha stupa was heavily damaged. Locals gathered funds to reconstruct the stupa, rather than wait for the Nepali state to do so. While it was widely advertised that reconstruction funds were collected from local networks, the various Chinese agencies including the Chinese Embassy provided large amounts of funds for the reconstruction of the stupa (Figure 2.4).

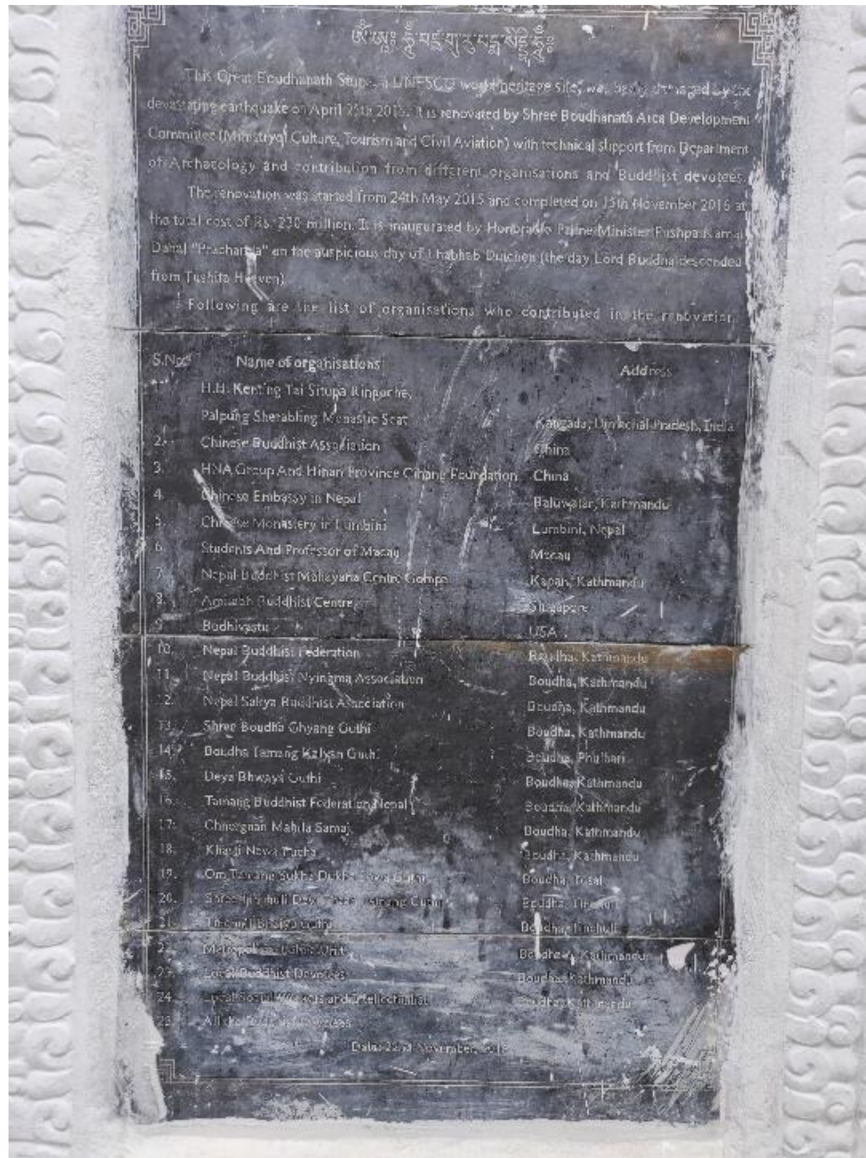

Figure 2.4 Contributions for the renovation of Boudha after the 2015 earthquakes

A sentence in the *Himalaya Story* highlights: “In old Tibet, there were no modern schools, hospitals, and highways”. China’s focus on infrastructural development in Kathmandu, parallel Chinese gifts of development in Tibet (Yeh 2013) through the renovation of Boudha, reconstruction of modern schools like the Durbar High School, renovation of the Civil Service Hospital, and the construction and expansion of the Kathmandu Ring Road.

Through this section, I highlight the ways in which a particular discourse of Chinese benevolence is constructed, published through media, and is being made available through various Chinese agencies in Nepal. When Nepali politicians and some NCP-affiliated media personnel speak at public events organized by the Chinese Embassy or other associations affiliated with Nepal-China foreign relations, their remarks follow closely with that of these publications. As my interviews that I note earlier in the chapter illustrate, while Nepali state officials look towards Chinese development of Tibet as a model for development in Nepal, they also see the Tibetan population within Nepal as a threat that needs to be secured to ensure that Chinese development continues to flow into Nepal.

Securitizing development

China’s assistance to Nepal operates as a set of situated development practices that embroiled in both geopolitics and geoeconomics. Having said that, as other scholars have argued, Chinese forms of development are not homogenous (González-Vicente 2011). Rather, state, state-affiliated, and non-state actors within China constitute multitudes of development aims and practices within China. Outside of China’s borders, Chinese development is met with an apparatus of actors including aid receiving states, local governments, and local communities who

negotiate Chinese development at multiple scales. In this section, I discuss Chinese development practices to form a framework for situating the geopolitics of Chinese development and its development-security nexus in Nepal. To understand China's geopolitical influence through its geo-economic practices of providing economic development in Nepal, I focus on localized political practices, decentralized power relations, diverse knowledges, embodied practices, alternative ways of being, and embedded memories that are situated in place. However, these practices are acutely conditioned and at times altered or disrupted by state territoriality.

State territory is the "site, medium, and outcome of statecraft" produced through hegemonic power relations (Brenner and Elden 2009 in Ballvé 2012, 603). Ballvé (2012) examines the everyday forms of state formation by illustrating how multiple power hegemonies perform statecraft through the production of overlapping territory. Thinking through territorialization, Bryan (2015) contends that the expansion of US military humanitarianism is parallel to the ways in which the US national security interests are couched in terms of helping the vulnerable from imminent threats. Problems of poverty are now transformed into issues and risks of vulnerability that need security interventions (Weizman 2012 in Bryan 2015). Along similar lines, Essex (2013) contends that the workings of USAID are aligned to US foreign policy directives, aims, and objectives. In doing so, Essex notes how USAID constructs a discursive Third World as a space that needs continuous support through development and military intervention.

In Tibet, Chinese development projects reify Chinese state power and state space (Yeh, 2013). The narratives of Chinese development lie at its benevolence for Tibetan well-being, represented as a "gift of development" for which Tibetans should eternally be grateful for. In this "gift of

development", the state reifies its established position at the top of the hierarchy and the giving of the gift becomes a point in which the donor's status transforms from "that of the dominant to the generous" (Yeh 2013, 15). Murton et al. (2016) draws on the concept of "gifting" to think through Chinese hydropower investments in Rasuwa, in the central Nepali Himalayas. Chinese investments in hydropower development have reinforced Nepali state territorializing practices to make use of new economic and political relations at the borders. Further, Chinese politics of development in Nepal represented as "gift of development" brings forth its geopolitical anxieties over the Tibetan refugee populations in Nepal.

It is important to note that a significant amount of scholarship on China's global development and investment has primarily focused on the "China threat" (Yeh 2016, 276). González-Vicente (2011) notes that the common contemporary understanding of the Chinese state in the world political order is of a state that engenders anxieties for the West. He equates this to a contemporary form of orientalist practice that is conditioned by the production of imaginative geographies. Rather he notes that the multiple stakeholders of the Chinese state outside China in international spaces operate through heterogenous practices, aims, and strategies. Several authors in a *Eurasian Geography and Economics* special issue (Jackson and Dear 2016; Murton et al. 2016; Yeh 2016) note that Chinese investment and capital in Laos, Nepal, and other countries did not materialize as an extension of Chinese sovereignty and territoriality but rather it engendered constructions and reifications of nation-building practices in these spaces by the host states themselves.

In the early 2000s, Beijing launched its “Going Out” strategy which encouraged Chinese businesses to invest in foreign spaces (González-Vicente 2011). The Going Out campaign looked outwards for foreign direct investment by 2014 (Yeh and Wharton 2016). In doing so, China emphasizes “mutual benefit” and its discourse of non-interference in the politics of host countries. Yeh (2016) notes that this process blurs the distinction between small-d development - uneven practices engendered through capitalist expansion - and big-D Development - projects, interventions, and the “rule of experts” (Mitchell 2002). What this also blurs are process of geoeconomics and geopolitics. Essex’s (2013) analysis of economic development is pertinent here as he investigates the ways in which geopolitics and geoeconomics diverge or converge at different times to engender discursive practices that shape how state-making practices are performed and enacted. However, as Yeh (2016) suggests, there is an impossibility in distinguishing between geopolitics and geoeconomics.

Hyndman (2007) contends that geopolitical aims have long been realized, actualized, and supported by deploying a discourse of fear and the ever-present threats to national integrity. For example, in 2008, Tibetans and Himalayan people in Kathmandu protested against China’s presence and control over Tibet (Barnett 2006). In response, the Nepali police arrested and beat many protestors. Nepal’s commitment to the One-China Policy that necessitates support of Chinese “territorial integrity” in return of China’s humanitarian assistance, led the Nepali police to arrest upwards to 300 protesters. Ironically, Nepal’s Armed Police Force - established in 2001 to perform counterinsurgency during the Nepali Maoist insurgency years - were responding to calls from the Chinese state to curb Tibetan protesters in Kathmandu.

In Nepal, APF's *Border Security Department*, which has received Chinese aid for capacity building and military training, were stationed in "eighteen APF border Security Companies along the Indo-Nepal international border - Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Sarlahi,Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur" (Sapkota 2009). This modality of border security changed after Chinese investments in the APF. APF began securitizing the borders to the north with China's TAR. In 2017 China solely completed construction of the National Armed Police Force Academy in Nepal. Further, Chinese military and police grants in Nepal have reached approximately 136 million USD to date, as illustrated in Figure 2.5. Many other sources of security aid from the Chinese state remain hidden from public. As is the case with the politicians, Nepali high-ranking Army and APF officials speak of their support to One-China Policy in public speeches and ceremonies that provides verbal assurance to the Chinese Embassy that the security agencies in Nepal will do the best they can to curtail Tibetan activities within Nepal.

Description	Funding Amount (USD)
Military Assistance (2018) *Ishwor Pokhrel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Nepal, visits China for the 8th Beijing Xiangshan Forum*	21,000,000
Military Assistance (2017) *Chang Wanquan, State Councilor and Minister of National Defense of the PRC, visits Nepal*	32,300,000
Military Assistance for border security (2014) *Gaurav Shumsher JB Rana, Chief of Army Staff of the Nepal Army, visits China*	8,000,000
"Donation of security equipment" #87238511105 (2013)	4,241,228
Nepal National Armed Police Academy #872383506255 (2013)	32,624,831
Tatopani Frontier Inspection Station Project #87238115535 (2012)	13,718,628
Enhance the capacity of Police Forces of Nepal #872381431810 (2011)	939,246
"Non-lethal" Military Aid (2011) *General Chen Bingde, Chief of PLA General Staff Department, visits Nepal*	19,800,000
Military Assistance (2009) *Maj. Gen. Jia Xiaoning, Deputy Chief of the Foreign Affairs Office at China's Ministry of National Defense, visits Nepal*	3,948,280
Military Assistance (2008)	2,600,000
Military Assistance (2007)	1,300,000
Anti-Aircraft Guns (1992) - DECLINED BY NEPAL (Ranade 2010)	~~70,000,000~~
Known Total Spending	136,230,985

Figure 2.5 *Chinese aid in Nepali military and police*

The northern border and the APF

In a News24 Television report about a presumptive case of COVID-19 in Humla in western Nepal, the news reporter narrated how a Nepali national, who had been working in Tibet, had

fled Tibet to return to Nepal crossing a high mountain pass.[19] Later, the reporter noted how the Chinese police came to Hilsa in Nepal in search of the young man. This was presented as a notable but not unusual practice, despite Chinese police crossing the border into Nepal (which is a legal violation of Nepali sovereignty). Hypervisible, unannounced border crossings by the Chinese police into Nepali territory has become not so uncommon in the northern Nepali borderlands. Through social media posts of Himalayan Indigenous peoples, it is evident that there are more cases than officially reported of Chinese police crossing the northern Nepali border into locations in Mustang, Rasuwa, and Taplejung districts. Nepali citizens and residents are however forbidden from traveling close to or visually documenting the border without prior documentation and approval from the Chinese border police.

Nepal has become increasingly engulfed in Chinese projects that necessitate a new security apparatus in Nepal, which has received very little to no critical attention. The building of the Armed Police Force (APF) Academy in 2017 through 32.5 million USD of Chinese funding did not see any criticism in Nepal, especially since APF's ethos reads: *"Any Task, Any Time, Any Place" to shed dew and blood to achieve its motto "Peace, Security, Commitment".* This motto begs the question: security for whom and through what means? In recent years, to solidify Nepali sovereignty in mountain spaces, the Nepali state deploys its paramilitary Armed Police Force to counter "terrorism and illegal border crossings". The APF uses this discourse of securitization to shape border management and in doing so territorialize these spaces further into the realms of the state. If the police and army are subject to civilian pressure, APF is extraordinary. Its history - as a paramilitary force - begins during the era of Maoist rebellion when the mainstream political

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5f63zY2aCo

leaders at the time created the force that could act with impunity. The irony is that if APF was engendered during the Maoist security dilemma, the Chinese state has shown immense interest in supporting the APF. In addition to military funding, in recent years, the Chinese state has invested in the training of APF border personnel by multiple conducting joint combat drills. There are additional ongoing talks of Chinese funding to establish a defense university in Nepal to create security linkages for both the Nepali and Chinese governments to avert risks and threats to each state territory.

At the northern border, the main function of the APF is to monitor the informal flow of Tibetans from Tibet into Nepal. APF soldiers regularly train with, and are trained by, the Chinese in its border control objectives. While the APF receive formal training, many events happen informally at the borders. My interlocutors note that local leaders on the Nepali side - from Humla to the west to Taplejung in the east - are welcomed by the Chinese and Tibetan officials in TAR to elaborate meals and immaculate hospitality. In the central Nepal borderlands of Rasuwa, a previous local leader of Timure spoke to one of such events from 2013. A team of Nepali delegates, including the local leader, administrative officials from the district, and the APF chief stationed in Rasuwa, were invited to the Chinese side of the border for a lavish banquet. After the meal and cultural ceremonies, they sat alongside Chinese state security delegates and discussed protocols and guidelines on securitizing the border to control Tibetan movement into Nepal through the Rasuwa border.

In northern Nepal, the Chinese state has built roads up to the border along historic trading routes – and at times extending a few kilometers south of the border. Most of these roads fail to link

south to join with the Nepali road grid. In such scenarios, Chinese border police play an interesting role in traversing into Nepali territory. Research participants note, and videos on Facebook groups of Himalayan communities show, how Chinese border police have repeatedly crossed into areas that are beyond their sovereign territory. In one instance, similar to the one in Rasuwa that I discuss above, Chinese border police traveled into Nepali territory in Mustang to escort local leaders to the Chinese side for elaborate dinners. This is clearly a case where they had prearranged such form of travel with the Nepali side. In another instance, a case that speaks to unannounced, illegal extradition, the Chinese border police crossed into the Nepali side to extradite a Tibetan woman who had married a Nepali man from Walung, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

While not common, these instances of unauthorized cross-border movements by the Chinese police have created new anxieties for the Tibetan population. Phale Tibetans are fearful that their mobility in and out of Tibet will change once the APF are stationed in Walung. These new practices of border control created anxieties among Tibetan and some Walung communities. Pasang, a Walungnga man in his mid-30s (interviewed in 2019), who frequently crosses the border into Ri'og in Tibet, claims:

> *It will be terrible if APF comes to Walung. I have heard that they do not care about local practices and our ways of doing things. They will come with their own agenda, and we will be grinded because of it. We work very well with the local police right now when we need to go to Tibet. We do not need the APF, but nothing that we say or do can stop them from coming to Walung.*

Not only Walung village members, but community members from Ghunsa and Phale speak of these changing border security procedures with discontent. Norbu, a Phale Tibetan male notes:

> *We have been doing everything locally until now. Even the local police that is stationed in Ghunsa are easy to work with. They co-operate with us and help us during festivals. But I heard from my friends from Rasuwa that APF are difficult to work with. It seems like they will be stationed here in our villages, but they will be strangers to us. I know that some village leaders might want the APF because of political pressures from the district administrators but I wish we talked about it as a group among all villagers from the region. We are scared that the new APF border people might stop us from continuing to travel to Tibet. We are also scared that because of these changes, our kins who are citizens [referring to Ghunsali and Walung peoples] might distance themselves from us.*

Anxieties over border mobility are warranted, especially for Phale Tibetans. If Ghunsali and Walung people can obtain a border citizenship card to cross into Tibet, Phale Tibetans will no longer be able to cross the border to visit their kins and for trade. While borderlands are liminal spaces of cultural and social exchange, borders are also the most securitized. Borders are performative in the sense that they produce and condition experiences for people who live in the vicinity of them, by security personnel who are ordered to protect their sanctity, and by the matter that passes through them (Mahtani 2002). In the Nepali context, the border is made sacred - it has a pious aura, a piety that is nationalist in the broadest sense. Irrespective of local friction

against the APF, in 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yogesh Bhattarai[20], then Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, and APF senior officers laid the foundation to a structure that will in the near future become an APF station in Walung. They laid the foundation for (*shilanyas*) the border post through Hindu land rituals (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 Yogesh Bhattarai performing shilanyas of the Walung APF Border Post in 2020

The APF is established and situated through high-caste Hindu rituals of nation-building. The northern regions of Nepal are places where Himalayan Indigenous peoples practice mostly Nyingma, Gelug, and Bon religious practices. However, the APF is in *essence* a federal agency that seeks to relegate these spaces through Hindu notions of power and purity. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue that states represent themselves through a set of metaphors and practices that legitimize and naturalize their authority through "spatialization of the state". States invest in mundane rituals and practices to ensure that they are imagined in particular ways (Anderson

[20] Walung lies within the administration of Taplejung district, which is the constituency of Yogesh Bhattarai.

2006; Scott 1998). Such Hindu rituals of purity and performative actions of *shilanyas* at the border speak to the fallacy of Nepal as a secular state and illustrates how the state security apparatus functions through Hindu hierarchies of caste and ethnicity, codified previously in the Muluki Ain.

New bordering practices at the northern borderlands have influenced Himalayan Indigenous peoples to create new political subjectivities, which involves politically distancing themselves from Tibetans. This separation of kins in the villages is something that Norbu had feared. Since the majority Brahmin-Chhetri community perceive of Tibetan peoples through a historical gaze of lower ethnicities and political understanding as outsiders and lower in the hierarchy through the Muluki Ain, much of Himalayan Indigenous politics in Nepal has tried to associate their histories parallel to the modern history of Nepal so that they can make political claims and associations with the state of Nepal. However, Indigenous politics is still regarded as opposed to or different from national politics. A TV interview of a long-time Indigenous leader commenced with his introduction - of how he started with Indigenous politics but now has *successfully* shifted to national politics. This narrative argues that Indigenous activism is always a politics of the other, which cannot have a space in "national" politics. However, the interview manifests how Indigenous peoples must shed their identities to participate in such national politics. This is pertinent to this discussion on borders because forms of Indigenous politics among Himalayan ethnic peoples from the borderlands are always othered. Politics of indigeneity remain at the edge and in opposition to, and regressive to, national politics (Paudel 2016). People involved in the politics of borders and bordering - vis a vis Indigenous politics - are not viewed as a proper,

nationalist Nepali. Through these hierarchies of caste and ethnicity, Nepali national politics considers the border an *a priori* entity and borderland citizens as outsiders in Nepali politics.

Conclusion

Chinese development projects are politically constructed as desirable among the Nepali public through narratives of Tibetan development disseminated through magazines, radio and TV programs, and development aid. Chinese *geocultural power* (Winter 2019) manifests through visual and discursive narratives in the *Himalayan Story* magazine, programs in China Radio International and Daphne TV, all of which share particular Chinese state-sanctioned narratives of Chinese emancipation of Tibetans from the so-called "dark past" to an imagined brighter modern future. These narratives create a desire to secure Chinese development among politicians, government officials, and citizens. Most importantly, at the scale of national politics, this desire to secure Chinese development by integrating into the BRI creates an alternative economy and politics so that the Nepali state is no longer dependent and reliant on India.

However, these desires for development are not new. The Nepali state has used similar tactics since the Panchayat era to construct subjectivities of bikas by relegating the village as backward, while situating hill-based Hindu elites as modern and desirable (Pigg 1992). I identified how ethnic and caste-based hierarchies to illustrate the historical and contemporary ways in which Brahmin-Chhetri groups are privileged while ethnic and Indigenous populations are marginalized and neglected in state politics. I outline how the Muluki Ain codified and placed ethnic and Indigenous peoples in the lower hierarchies of the social and political contract in Nepal. These hierarchies have conditioned Walung and Ghunsali life not only historically but in the present in their access to social and political mobility – for employment, education, and access to state

services. These existing inequalities and marginalization are further entrenched through increased security from the Nepali government and enforced through the APF. Nepal has continued to receive development assistance and improved geopolitical relations with China by committing and adhering to the "One China Policy". This securitization meets China's geostrategic interests in containing or preventing Tibetan political activism or public criticisms against China in Nepal. Since Tibetans – both as political refugees and social underclass because of historical relations – are outsiders, it is not difficult for the Nepali state to suppress exile Tibetans to secure development from China. Many government officers do not see an alternative to the need to securitize Tibetans in Nepal for Nepal's transition on the development path.

In this chapter, I argue that as Nepal continues to see the need to secure China's development and security assistance, Tibetans will continue to be securitized by the Nepali state. This is evidenced over the last two decades, such as in response to Tibetan protests in 2008, and after the 2015 earthquakes that pushed Nepal even more into the geoeconomic and geopolitical fold of the PRC. Based on state categorizations of ethnicity, in subsequent chapters, I emphasize how Tibetan refugee subjectivities are produced and negotiated in the backdrop of increasing Chinese geoeconomic and geopolitical influence in Nepal.

Chapter 3. Surveillance and Securitization

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which surveillance and securitization is planned by the Nepali state, and how Tibetans and community members in Kathmandu (in Boudha and Jawalakhel) come to terms with such securitization. It might be obvious that it is difficult to obtain much information on how exactly surveillance is planned. I was naïve enough to think that I will be able to obtain detailed and official data on video surveillance and policing practices. But to obtain such data from state and regional administrative and security sources became incredibly difficult. During fieldwork, I came across several leads and interactions that were dead-ended - especially with elected officials in regional and local administrations. I spent many mornings and afternoons waiting for officials who were either busy, at lunch, or unauthorized to talk to me. Through various connections and happenstance, a few security officials in Boudha talked to me. In addition to such conversations with security officials, I draw on conversations with community members on their interactions and reflections on surveillance and policing.

One late afternoon in May 2018, I had scheduled to meet the Deputy Superintendent (DSP) of the Metropolitan Police Circle Boudha, locally known as the Boudha police station. I waited for him outside the station about half an hour past our meeting time. Heeding to numerous complaints from locals along the Chahabil – Jorpati road, along which lied Boudha, the municipality was fixing and expanding the road. Since it was pre-monsoon with little rain, the road was dusty and where I stood waiting for the DSP, I had direct exposure to the enormous smoke and dust from the road. Previously, I had waited for him across the street and by the time I crossed the street when he arrived, he had already entered the police premises, and I was no

longer allowed to enter. I was adamant on meeting him this time. After another half an hour, a police van stopped in front of the gate. The DSP along with a few other constables stepped out and made their way towards the entrance to the station. I walked towards him and said, *"Namaste Sir! I am here to talk to you like we had planned earlier about Boudha"*.

The DSP looked towards his constable to the right. The constable nodded left to right a couple of times in disagreement. Then the DSP noted with his hands on my shoulder, "*Bhai!*[21] *I am busy today, we just came back from a case and there are important things to settle here. I don't have time to talk to a reporter today. Come back some other time."* He walked inside the gate before I could complete my sentence: *"Sir, I am not a reporter…."* A young constable at the gate stopped me from walking any further and I was asked to return at another time.

With this failure in securing the interview, I walked towards the Boudha kora. I led myself away from the daylight and openness of Boudha kora to one of the side-alleys. The alley led to a small, elongated space lined up with a few eateries – they read *Tamang Restaurant*, *Sherpa Khaja Khar, Himalaya Momo,* and *Mustang Restaurant*.

I walked to the end of the alley and lifted side-ways through a door curtain that led to a dark yet quaint Mustangi teashop. The curtain is symbolic of Tibetan and Himalayan restaurants and usually displays auspicious Buddhist symbols - some with a few, while others dawn all eight

[21] *Bhai* means younger brother in Nepali and is used to speak or refer to someone who is either younger or assumed to be younger than oneself.

auspicious symbols. This tea-shop curtain had a large *dpal be'u* (endless knot) print which was pertinent to how my day had transpired – of the cyclical struggles to meet and talk to the police in Boudha. The shop, that is usually crowded during mid-day lunch, had simmered down by then. The only person inside was the Amala wiping the tables with the lightest of touch that had no effect for the food droppings on the table. I waved, smiled, and walked to the center of the room to my regular table. Without Amala noticing, I grabbed a napkin, poured some water over it, and cleaned my table, and ordered a plate of buff chowmein and sweet milk tea. The food came and after a couple of spoonsful, a man - with a mustache that was a cross between a chevron and a painter's brush - lifted the door curtain upwards and walked inside with a confident gait. He joked with Amala, the contents of which I couldn't decipher from far away. Then he, like me, walked to what seemed to be his regular table. I knew I'd seen him before in Boudha not once but in multiple instances. While Amala was in the kitchen preparing his food, he couldn't bear the silence and started talking to me, asking me the usual questions one gets from strangers at a local eatery - *thar ke ho?* what is your last name? Through my reply of "Shrestha", he, like most other Nepali people, then can triangulate my identity along Nepal's social and religious hierarchy. Shrestha meant belonging to the Newa Indigenous community, even within it a Newa who practices Hinduism, and from a caste that is somewhere middle in the spectrum of caste hierarchy.

Then he asked, *"ghar kata*? *where is your home?*" (which signifies not the current abode but the origin village). At first, I was confused on how to answer his question on where my home was. I grew up in Patan, on the other side of the Kathmandu valley from Boudha. Even within the neighborhood that I grew up, my family were considered outsiders since they lived in a

predominantly Newa Buddhist artisan community even though they were Newa Hindu. And then, I had lived in multiple places that I called home in the United States for over a decade. While the concept of home was complicated for me, as for many of my interlocutors (which I discuss in Chapter 4), I realized that what he wanted to hear is where my family *originally* came from.

After a bit of hesitation and annoyance with the question, I said, *"I am from Patan. But my village is in Kavre"*. After finding out that I am a Newa from Patan - but originally from Kavrepalanchok (a district where both my maternal and paternal ancestral villages are located within) - he opened to me since his last name was the same as mine. He introduced himself as Newa from Chitwan and that he now worked at the local police station. Right then, I remembered that I had seen him on patrols on the kora, many times surveilling the social space in Boudha from the Boudha Ghyang Monastery's terrace, and occasionally accompanying APF Inspectors on security rounds of the Boudha kora during major Tibetan days of celebrations. At the time, I did not know what to make of this encounter. Earlier that day, his superior at the police station refused to talk to me and now an Inspector is seated at the same teashop making small talk to pass the time and kill boredom.

We began talking about the everyday-ness of Boudha. He complained he had long and incoherent shifts but that he enjoyed being in Boudha rather than with his family at home. We both shared our love of sweet, light milk tea in Boudha that has a slight hint of butter tea, a departure from the strong milk tea that most teashops in the valley serve. He noted that he liked being at the Boudha police station rather than his previous station in Gaushala. In Boudha, he

liked taking the kora rounds and meeting locals who he had befriended over time, and especially the availability of diverse ethnic food options in such a small space. He said, *"here, there are people from all jat [ethnicity] and walks of life. And I am proud to protect this place."* I replied, *"That is true, that is why I come here a lot too. And I have noticed a lot of police here lately to keep the space safe"*. He replied with approval, *"that is our job!"*

Slowly yet with much caution, I brought up the self-immolation from 2013, when *Karma Ngedon Gyatso*, a Tibetan monk had set himself on fire in Boudha to protest Chinese occupation of Tibet. Sadness overtook his face, and he was silent for a few seconds before he tried to utter something. He felt quiet again. Amala then brought his food to the table and quickly made her way back to the kitchen to tend to more cooking. After a loud sip from his glass of tea, he opened,

> *We are sad that he died in such a way. As you well know, we only burn the dead but never the living. This was a sad thing for all of us to watch and hear stories of. Before this, I only saw the dead being burned at the ghat there in Pashupati*[22].

Referring to the Hindu rituals of burning the body after death (see Desjarlais 2016), he was appalled by what he had witnessed. I did not ask him in his affective state who he meant by "we". According to him, the sight of burning changed him and the way he approached policing. He said,

[22] Pashupati is a temple complex dedicated to the incarnation of the Hindu deity Shiva. Like Boudha, it is a World Heritage Site and is located along the Bagmati River, about 30 minutes' walk from Boudha.

I have been more aware of the surroundings since that day. It was a sad thing to witness once, and I do not want to see again, nor do I want it to happen again. One of our Senior police officers was invited to a workshop conducted by the Chinese Embassy immediately after the incident. He then came back to the station and brought a few of us who lead patrolling in Boudha and showed us photos of what to look out for to stop these things from happening again - in the photo were some things I had seen before, while some new things. There was the colorful flag that we learned to be the Tibetan flag, the one which you sometimes see Free Tibet written on it, do you know that one?

I nodded. He continued,

That is it, we now just look out for these signs when we are on daily rounds. At the end of the day, we are here to protect people from hurting themselves. We get strict orders from above and we must follow protocol". He finished his food and took the last sip from his tea and walked towards the door curtain. Placing some money over the table, he waved towards Amala inside the kitchen, wiped his mouth, and waved at me, "okay bhai, we will meet again!.

I am surprised by the way in which he opened to me, but I thought it might have been because of my positionality. I do not think he would have spoken frankly to me if I was from a Tibetan or a Himalayan ethnic community. This was an example of how ethnic and caste identities create possibilities and impossibilities not only in casual settings like at this teashop but also in social

and political mobility and claims making, similar to the discussion on ethnicity in Chapter 2. Since, as I discussed earlier, in the eyes of most non-Himalayan peoples – including Brahmin-Chhetri, non-Himalayan Indigenous, and Madhesi peoples – at times there is no distinction between Tibetan refugees and the multiple Indigenous ethnic groups that here I collectively call Himalayan Indigenous peoples.

I was lucky to meet the Inspector at the teashop. He spoke to the ways in which the Chinese Embassy is involved in the policing practices in Boudha and other Tibetan areas in Kathmandu. Surveillance tactics rely on visual markers of clothing and what is inscribed on the clothes. A couple of weeks before this, I had met Tenzin Nyima, a self-defined "ex Tibetan activist" in his late thirties. As my other interlocutors note, Tenzin was active during the protests on and before 2008 but now is rather passive because of direct pressures from the police. At yet another teashop, Nyima noted how he no longer wears his "political Tibetan" t-shirts in Boudha. With a sheer volume of intense emotion in his face, he had explained,

> *I had designed many Free Tibet clothes to protest. After 2008, when things became bad and I was unable to show my support for Tibet publicly anymore, I was so angry that I took one of my Tibet t-shirts and burned it in front of my friends. I said to them – I am a coward; I cannot burn my body, but I will burn this t-shirt.*

I disagreed and said, *"you are not a coward dai, if someone is a coward then it is the Nepali government".* He nodded in slight agreement. Tenzin Nyima's words haunted me then and still haunt me now. His words and actions are a result of the Nepali state's policing of Tibetan

activities in public. At most times, as the Inspector alluded to earlier, the police look out for visual markers in clothing. But at times, this extends beyond a focus on policing politically pro-Tibetan attire. Rai (2019) reports that during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Kathmandu in 2019, a Mustangi elder woman, a Nepali citizen, was taken into custody at the Boudha police station for carrying a bag with embroidered Tibetan scripts. Since she could not read, the woman in custody did not know what the script meant. For the officers who took her into custody, Tibetan was just a set of scribbles that is illegible as they could not read Tibetan as well. The illegible Tibetan script became a marker of illegality in that time-space because of which the Mustangi woman was in custody for more than twelve hours and was required to report to the police station in four-hour intervals the next day.

Vibrant "Free Tibet" t-shirts and Tibetan scripts are anti-China markers that the Boudha Police look out for. The detention of the Mustangi elder woman and the words of the Inspector and Tenzin Nyima illustrate the ways in which the police are tasked to minimize risk through a focus on identifying visual markers in public. This was not new information by any means. Human Rights advocates and reporters that I spoke with also confirmed this information. But what I found to be the most perplexing is the notion of illegibility for the police that produces suspicion for not only Tibetans but Himalayan Indigenous peoples, whose bodies are rendered illegible by the state. As the Inspector noted in the teashop, the job of the police is to protect for which they must follow policing protocol. If pro-Tibetan items were previously illegible to the Nepali police, the Chinese Embassy provided, and continues to provide, the Boudha police station with guidelines and training on what to look out for as visual markers of Tibetan anti-China protest. This form of policing can be traced back to the early months of 2008, when everything changed

politically for exile Tibetans in Nepal. Heightened tensions, protests, and military crackdowns in Lhasa, Tibet in 2008 led to new forms of Chinese surveillance in the Lhasa valley and self-surveillance that Tibetans practiced themselves to avert risks of imprisonment, unemployment, torture, and disappearance (Yeh 2013).

Such a sense of security and surveillance reverberated across the Himalaya into places like Boudha in Kathmandu, where the Chinese state saw the need to create new modes of security and surveillance. In doing so, to "protect" and secure the space, policing practices ensure that the illegibility of it is made legible. But, as made clear earlier, because of the inability of the Nepali police to identify cultural and social difference between and among Himalayan Indigenous peoples and exile Tibetans, many objects and processes remain illegible to the Nepali state. This is parallel to the discussion in Chapter 2 on the Muluki Ain and the forced conflation and historical illegibility of Himalayan Indigenous and Tibetan communities as outsiders in the social and political realm of the Nepali state.

One human rights reporter noted, "*the police find young adults and middle-aged men with Tibetan-like facial features to be the main problems in Boudha and a little bit in Jawalakhel*". This form of ethnic policing targets a category of the population that the police and the security in Boudha are trained to code as "deviant". In these surveilled spaces, bodies and symbols labeled as deviant include wearing or carrying the Tibetan flag, clothing and bags with "Free Tibet" or *illegible* Tibetan scripts inscribed on them, and posters and clothing with the Dalai Lama's portrait. Tenzin Nyima also notes that during days of importance to Tibetans, the police are attentive to groups of young men who look Tibetan and are even likely to question or detain

them without a warrant. More so, the closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are strategically placed throughout this area. They are both a visible reminder of the state's power to provide security and control this space, and a method for the state to "capture" Tibetan political activity, in order to remove such deviance from this space.

I understand the above discussed intersections of surveillance and policing as a result of the need to *secure development* in Nepal. Any form of protest or *unlawful* assembly is made visible through the surveillance apparatus and is marked as illegal and the transgressors subject to detention. In the midst of rising security, Tibetan refugees in Kathmandu engage in secrecy to *make do* (de Certeau 1984) in their everyday lives and to imagine alternative futures (Rose 2016) as I discuss further in Chapter 4. In the next section, I provide a review of the literature on surveillance followed by an examination of state logics and structures of surveillance.

Surveillance Literature Review

As a technology of state power, surveillance is generally implemented as an expression of spatial security. It further legitimizes the authority of the state to secure and control public spaces, including the removal of unwanted or undesirable bodies from a particular place by collecting and coding visual knowledge (Koskela 2000; Hannah 2006). The sorting of individuals is integral to the separation of the wanted from the unwanted other. For example, Appadurai (1996) discusses the counting of individual bodies as an outgrowth of colonial practices that sought to manage populations by identifying a range of acceptability among aggregated groups. New forms of technology include risk profiling as part of enumeration systems such as biometric technologies (Amoore 2006). These technologies have become increasingly used to track

mobility across international borders from a variety of governmental and non-governmental agencies (Cobarrubias 2020).

Panoptical surveillance as discussed by Foucault (1977) exemplifies the state's ability to view spaces as a method of security. The physical presence of the panopticon, such as the conventional prison tower, and now the camera, operate as a visual marker of the state's ability to watch over spaces along with its subsequent power to remove individuals who are deemed harmful from those spaces. Foucault (1977) argued that the panopticon's presence ultimately leads to individuals (citizens, civilians, residents) internalization and subsequent docility and obedience to state authority. Foucault's analysis of the panopticon remains a key fixture in carceral spaces. However, spaces, such as portions of cities or entire neighborhoods under intensive surveillance and policing have become quasi-carceral locations, where bodies and their movements are heavily monitored based on the presumption of potential violence (Speer 2018). Certain bodies based on racialized and gendered calculations are viewed as suspicious and others as acceptable. Similar to Dongol and Neumann's (2021) examination of the territorialization of nature in Nepal through technologies of governance that produced "self-disciplining subjects" and "governable spaces", surveillance technologies in Boudha seek a similar result. In many respects the use of surveillance technologies has accomplished its desired effect as Tibetan protests have not occurred in Boudha since the onset of video surveillance and increased police presence during Tibetan Buddhist festivals and days of commemoration.

However, surveillance is not always top-down as inverted panoptical surveillance has also been used to document the atrocities of state governments (Fluri 2009). Video-evidence continues to

be used to identify perpetrators of violence (including the state), such as bystander videos and in some cases to hail the actions of perpetrators when they their actions are believed to be justified by bystanders (see Fluri and Lehr 2019). Additionally, certain geographies are not conducive to panoptical surveillance. The terrain itself can pose limitations that make it impossible for video surveillance to operate effectively. For example, mountainous areas with steep valleys along the border of Nepal and China, where locals have more knowledge and experience, in what Gordillo (2018, 61) refers to as the "opaque terrain" stymies the effectiveness of surveillance technologies. Surveillance as a technique of visibility through the presence of the surveillance camera in public places reminds people "of their own visibility" (Koskela 2000, 253). In this sense, surveillance techniques are panoptic strategies of territorialization that aim to manage threats in a place (de Certeau 1984; Hannah 2006). The following section provides an overview surveillance discourses and structures in Nepal.

Discourses of State Surveillance

In a Nepali television talk show, *Good Morning Nepal*, one of the hosts casually claimed that CCTV cameras have become a "*part of our lifestyle [in urban Nepal]*". Both hosts then continued to discuss the benefits of surveillance technologies by stating that they provide security in everyday life acts as a medium of visual assistance for solving crimes (Gyawali and Sharma 2019). The hosts went as far as to argue that CCTVs could provide disciplinary aid in schools to monitor students and teachers irrespective of who is watching on the other side of the cameras. This warm acceptance of CCTV surveillance cameras on a popular national TV program is parallel to the larger absence of critical discussions about surveillance at the national scale. However, the Jan-Feb 2020 edition of *Himal,* a widely read Nepali language fortnightly

magazine, initiated conversations that were critical of state surveillance practices (Sapkota 2020). The cover (Figure 3.1) displays a cyborg clad in Nepali government service attire - Daura Suruwal - surveilling the urban citizens of Nepal whose identities are darkened and seemingly illegible. Similarly in Boudha, surveillance technology seeks to render public lives hypervisible through the continuous, but not always consistent, gaze of the state.

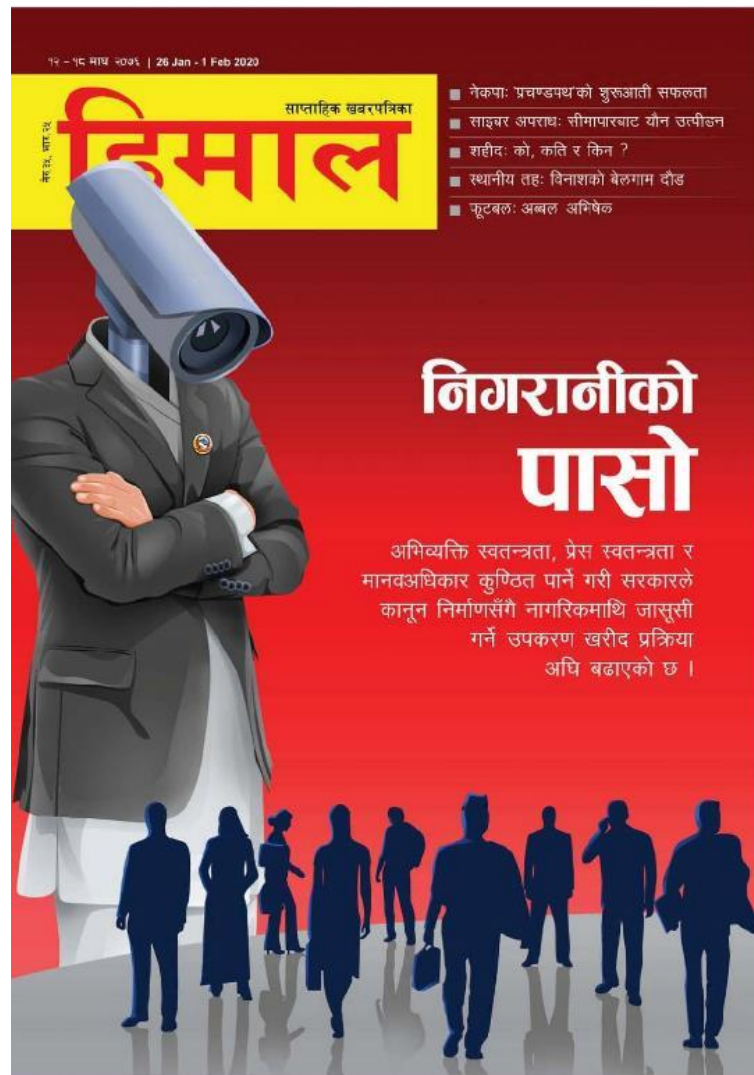

Figure 3.1 Cover of Himal with the headline “the trap of surveillance”

The cover story notes that most CCTV cameras are illegally and informally placed. If the CCTV cameras are placed to prevent illicit activities, the cameras themselves are illegal under the

Procedure for CCTV/Camera Installation and Operation, 2015 issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Such illegal cameras are present throughout the urban landscape of Kathmandu. In 2018-2019, approximately two hundred and sixty thousand CCTV cameras were imported from the People's Republic of China (PRC), while less than a thousand such cameras are registered with the state. Although pertinent and timely, this report is silent on the prevalence of CCTV cameras that are Chinese funded and supported in Kathmandu. Further, implications of cloud-based storage and algorithmic surveillance remain topics of concern as recent reports indicate that China and Russia can gain access to data from IP based surveillance cameras that they manufacture through algorithmic cloud computing (Graham 2005; Weber 2019). It is then necessary to uncover these concerns of surveillance in Boudha, where video surveillance cameras are widely present. While most CCTV cameras in Boudha are closed circuit and the video data is stored on local drives, there are multiple cameras that are Internet Protocol (IP) cameras, like the one in Figure 3.2 which has pan, tilt, and zoom technologies and the ability to transfer video data through an IP network.

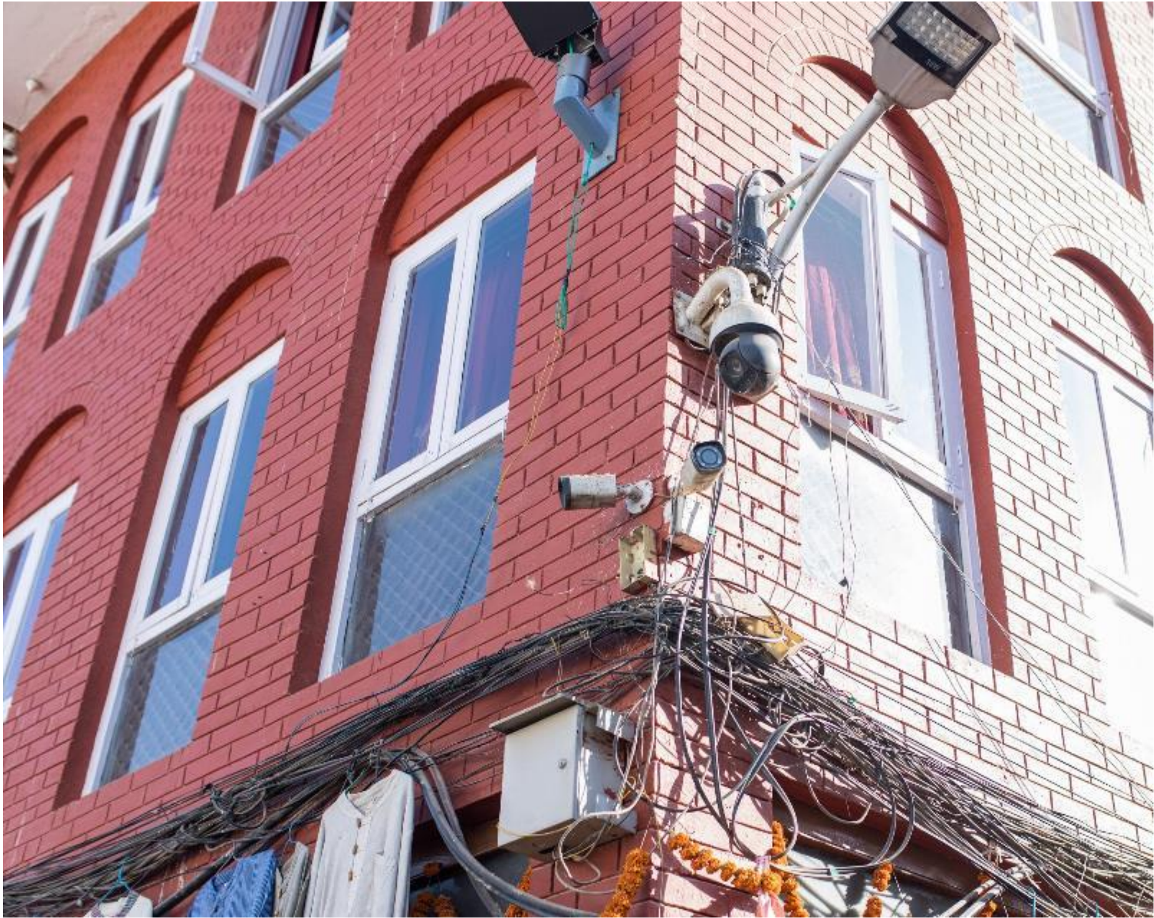

Figure 3.2 CCTV cameras at the eastern gate of Boudha.

Namgyal is a Tibetan activist who works closely with local human rights offices for claiming transparency in the detention of Tibetans. While critical of surveillance cameras in general, he is also quite interestingly keen on keeping track of how police globally have incorporated surveillance technologies as a tool to uncover crime and provide a notion of security to the public. Locally, he has witnessed firsthand how surveillance technology has evolved in Boudha. I met Namgyal and his friend Kamal, a Tamang male at the eastern side of the Boudha stupa and we all started making our way clockwise on the kora. Namgyal notes:

> *There used to be only a couple of CCTV cameras in Boudha. We are not sure if the local businesses put those up or the police. It might also be the Boudha Development Office.*

But what you see now when you walk around the kora are many, many cameras – all different kinds here. Many are given by the Chinese to the local police. Some are old-school and I am sure capture bad images [laughs about it], and some are super high-tech. That right there, remember the building we met earlier right after you came inside from the Boudha Gate? There is a camera on that building that is very different. It is large and circular [referring to the camera on Figure 3.2]. *I think it is one of few cameras that is similar to what I found from my research in Lhasa. That one, I am certain you can use IP address to watch video from it.*

In conversations about algorithms and cloud technologies, Namgyal is certain that by using these internet-based technologies, Chinese authorities are capable of surveilling individuals in Boudha from within China. As Namgyal, Kamal, and I were drinking iced coffee in an open patio inside one of the alleys leading into the kora, Kamal pointed to a CCTV camera right above us. He jokingly commented:

Don't worry about this one! The shop owner had to put it because people were throwing garbage in the alley during nighttime. Now the owner dai doesn't have to worry about cleaning out somenody else's garbage in the morning.

Namgyal nodded and replied, *"See, I think for these things, maybe these cameras are useful. But, if the police are monitoring our [Tibetan] every activity, and if the Chinese can do so from far away, then that is not good for us."* Both Kamal and I nodded in agreement. Namgyal then received a phone call from his sister in Delhi. So, the rest of the time I answered the relentless

questions that Kamal had about life in the US, as he had been longing to migrate to the US for work, especially since he was not able to find a good job even with good grades in his Bachelor's degree from a reputed college. After Namgyal ended his call, we walked towards the kora continuing to look at surveillance cameras that cover the entire premises of Boudha. A little before sunset, we parted our ways. Namgyal and Kamal walked towards Phulbari – a set of cameras on a building were pointed towards the direction that they were walking. I continued the other direction to complete the kora – a set of cameras were pointed towards my way.

Boudha is arguably the first public space in the entirety of Nepal to have video surveillance instruments in place. People in this space move around the stupa in a circular fashion - a clockwise circumambulation around the sacred stupa (kora in Tibetan):

> Circumambulation, 1. n. སྐོར་བ་ skor ba. 2. Circumambulate, va. - བརྒྱབ་ brgyab. Sonam circumambulated the monastery. བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིས་དགོན་པར་སྐོར་བ་བརྒྱབ་བ་རེད། bsod nam kyis dgon par skor ba brgyab ba red/
>
> (English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan, 49)

In Boudha, video surveillance cameras are placed in such a way that the cameras, at least in theory, capture everything and everyone performing kora in this space. Because of this, Boudha becomes a site of security confluence. Here, the state apparatus views Tibetan events and activities as illegal because of their perceived potential to initiate protests and garner the ire of China. The sovereignty of the state lies in its ability and capability to restrict and remove certain "unwanted" people from public space. In conversations with Nepali security personnel, it becomes evident that to ensure that the sacred space of Boudha remains free from politics, they

are trained in the practice of imaging (surveillance), coding (to make particular illegible bodies, scripts, and activities legible) and erasing (through detention for extended time) overt displays of Tibetanness.

The presence of surveillance cameras is hypervisible not only to Tibetans but to other people who traverse this place. As one police officer claimed, this awareness of surveillance technology is to ensure that in the stupa premises people behave in ways that the police deem to be non-political or proper behavior that is considered "disturbance" to the sanctity of the space. Such technology has the power to define what acts can be performed and what actions are identified as unacceptable in this public space. In 2021, the Boudhanath Area Development Committee and the Boudha police station initiated a ban on people recording Tik Tok videos in the Boudha premises (*Recording of Tik Tok videos banned around Boudhanath Stupa*, 2021) citing disturbance to thousands of tourists, religious practitioners, and devotees that come to Boudha every day. I discussed this with a few of my interlocutors, who are Tibetan exile residents of Boudha, through a social media group.

Nyima: *This is right! This is how the police should spend their time. There are many people at the stupa jumping, running, and dancing on the stupa.*

Dolma: *yes, yes. I feel like they [the police] have finally learned how to contribute to society. Threatening us to not meet during the Dalai Lama's birthday makes no sense if they keep allowing random people dancing in the stupa.*

Nyima: *yes, yes. When we perform religious and cultural things, they want to stop it, but they allowed this nonsense for so long. This is a sacred space for us.*

For Nyima and other Tibetans including members of multiple Indigenous communities, the premises of the Boudha stupa is sacred. There is a shared sense of urgency to restrict non-religious behaviors. But besides that, there is no consensus on how to understand Tibetan activities as sacred or profane in this space. While the Nepali state surveillance mostly targets Tibetans, it also includes Tamang and Himalayan Indigenous peoples as suspects under the umbrella of providing security for all Nepali people. A long-time friend - a male, Khumbu Sherpa in his mid-30s who lives in Kapan, Boudha - tells this story with sharp critiques of past Tibetan political activities in Boudha:

> *Don't you think this is a religious place? We all revere this site and have a lot of respect for its importance to our culture and society. Tibetans should not use this place for holding protests or other events for their benefit. Since we share a lot of festivals, it is getting hard for us to celebrate festivals without too much policing.*

The concerns that he holds for his community are not singular. Members of other ethnicities in Boudha have repeatedly made similar critiques. Although unlike my friend, community leaders are aware of the ways in which Boudha is squeezed politically between calls made from the Chinese Embassy that are passed on through the hierarchies of the Home Ministry to the local Boudha police station[23]. They recognize the political situatedness of Tibetan exiles who, like them, also claim Boudha through multiple forms of religious and social placemaking.

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[23] Although in popular language referred to as the Chinese Embassy and Home Ministry, the official names are the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Nepal and the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of Nepal.

While the Nepali state categorizes Tibetan cultural politics as deviant and illegal in this public space, Tibetans (including Nyima) along with other Indigenous communities see the space as sacred. Irrespective of this, as the Nepali police is guided by the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu to secure Tibetans, Boudha becomes the ground zero of security intolerability in Nepal's quest to secure development from China. These new modalities of surveillance evoke what we know of the surveillance infrastructure in Tibet and more specifically in Lhasa (Barnett 2006; Makley 2015). Based on interviews with Tibetans and non-Tibetans in Boudha, the rise in surveillance technologies, which initially targeted Tibetan refugees, have now slowly configured Himalayan ethnicities as potentially dangerous. This is especially so since the Nepali state has historically failed to distinguish between Tibetan refugees and Himalayan peoples of Nepali citizenship.

This distinction is illegible to the state and the security apparatus. This has engendered forms of claims making and politically recognizing among Indigenous Himalayan communities, such as developing a sense of belonging or connection with other hill-based communities. Tibetan speakers in Humla, in northwestern Nepal, in the past identified themselves as Lama or Gurung because of the prestige that the ethnic markers carried compared to their former category as *Bhotiya*. Many of my interlocutors in the Walung and Ghunsa region speak of taking up the last name - which also marks ethnicity - of Sherpa so that their representation is not misunderstood by the Nepali state. Therefore, while the state finds the diversity of Indigenous Himalayan ethnicities and Tibetans illegible, some individuals rework their identities and visibility vis-à-vis the state through name-changing practices to make themselves legible to the state.

The following two quotes speak to the notion of the illegibility and the effects of change in the northeastern Nepal borderlands, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

Dhondup Sherpa, male Ghunsali:

> *We are not Tibetan. We do not want to be sidelined because we look like Tibetans. Also, how can you imagine us trading across the border with a Tibetan name? My father was smart to include Sherpa in our names….now that is the story of our villages, here in Boudha it is even more different. We hear stories of the government stopping refugees [Tibetans] from doing certain things. Think about what would have happened if our fathers left our names as it was before without the last name.*

Pasang, female Phale Tibetan:

> *We were one before, even if we did not have citizenship. We lived in the same village, celebrated together, and ate together. But now, we have been pushed aside because of ethnic politics. A piece of paper defines the fate of our children differently even if the children are from the same village.*

Dhondup is exasperated by the Nepali state's indifference and lack of understanding of his identity in relation to Tibetan identity. He believes that his mobility for trade across the Walung border might be difficult if he had a different name. He further commented that his father chose to add Sherpa after their names to ensure that their access to Tibet remained secure and that the Nepali state recognized them as their own citizens rather than outsiders. This was rather interesting at the time because Himalayan Indigenous peoples (including the Ghunsali and the

Walungnga) did not have last/family names, quite similar to Tibetans. However, Tibetans in Phale are upset that the politics of citizenship has created divisions within their kins.

These narratives illustrate how state level interventions in security and surveillance have disrupted intimate relationships between communities in Kathmandu, which have repercussions in the villages in the northern borderland regions. As Himalayan ethnic peoples are racialized by the state because of the similarity in appearance to Tibetans, as Dhondup notes earlier, many Himalayan Indigenous peoples that I talked to from multiple communities in Walung, Ghunsa, Humla, Upper Mustang, and Dolpo speak to the need of separation of their identities from Tibetan identities. They argue that this necessitates dropping the descriptive marker of "culturally Tibetan" when describing their own communities. This is one commonality that I found across multiple communities, especially in the backdrop of increasing Chinese pressures in Kathmandu and at the northern borderlands to ensure that their access to Chinese markets and capital is not curtailed because of naming practices. This is one of the ways in which surveillance and policing have created ruptures in the relatively integrated Tibetan and Himalayan communities.

Illegibility

I use the metaphor of digital errors to think with security and surveillance in Boudha. The photograph (see Figure 3.3) is partly legible and partly illegible. On the left is the Boudha stupa, pigeons basking in the late afternoon sun on its dome. The section to the right is illegible to the human eye and evokes a visual akin to thermal imaging. One late evening in the spring of 2017, while processing image and video files from Boudha, my hard drive crashed. Bits and pixels

became disfigured, and the ontological sphere of an image was reconfigured at that time-space. Rummaging through files and files of visual material, I was trying to place my understanding of Boudha through multiple place-based identities: as a pilgrimage place situated in the practice of *kora* (McGranahan 2010), a place of western Dharma practitioners (Moran 2004), a site of cultural change for young Himalayan children at several Tibetan monasteries (Childs 2004), a place of global capital exchange among tourism entrepreneurs, and a space for school and college going youth to pass the time.

Figure 3.3 Boudha error: part-legible, part-illegible

The digital error opened new possibilities for analyzing how surveillance, as a technique of urban governmentality that is "based on the operationalization of infrastructural flows and the development of novel ways of seeing and engaging with the city" (Luque-Ayala and Marvin

2016, 204), works to reconfigure illegibility in the space. Particularly so, and evident in the photograph itself is an attempt to render a particular space and individual movements within that space legible amid a vast space of collective illegibility. The use of surveillance technology includes sorting and separating bodies that are "in place" from those "out of place" (Cresswell 1992). Surveillance is infused with preconceived ideas about what is acceptable individual and collective behavior in each place. Therefore, certain bodies are targets of surveillance and others ignored. The presence of these highly visible cameras operates as technological panopticons. A warning to some and a welcome site of security to others, and subsequently ensuring and expecting docility and obedience to state control (see Foucault 1977).

As discussed earlier, since the Tibetan protests in 2008, Boudha has become a geopolitical microcosm of Nepal-China politics that is manifest in the intensification of surveillance and security in this place. In the Figure 3.3 photograph, the Boudha stupa and its multiple layers and structures are legible. But the everyday lives and religious practice of people in this place – distorted and full of visual errors on the right - remain illegible to the viewer. I argue that the Nepali security faces similar problems when surveilling the circular spaces of Boudha. In an attempt to render what is illegible as visible and legible (Figure 3.4), the state deploys surveillance and security tactics to render this space visible as a node of state control.

Figure 3.4 Boudha as illegible public space

A few weeks after I had met Namgyal to walk around Boudha counting and coding the different types of video surveillance cameras, we got together again. On my laptop screen, I showed him my collection of bright, blurry photographs from which only certain angles, positions, and markings were recognizable. Figure 3.4 is one of such photographs.

Namgyal: *"it is cool, bro! Is this from here [Boudha]?"*

Author: *"yes dai. After we talked about the surveillance cameras asti[24], I was walking to Shechen Gonpa and remembered that I had taken these images. I processed them so that it resembles what we talked about."*

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[24] *Asti* in Nepali means the day before yesterday. It can also be used to denote a time that has passed, which is not necessarily the day before yesterday and could mean a couple of days ago or a few weeks ago. When I used asti here, I meant the latter usage to note "before".

Namgyal then had a large smile over his face.

Namgyal: "*Aah, now I get it. This is good, bhai. I am from here, so I can imagine the people here walking on kora, talking to one another, going inside that alley to drink tea, coming out and then continuing their kora. They could be Tibetans; they could be Sherpa people. But I bet when police look at it, they cannot understand it.*"

Author: "*exactly what I thought and remembered you mentioning something similar when talking about the cctv cameras.*"

Drawing on my conversations with Namgyal, the complexities and nuances of interactions in Boudha remain illegible to the Nepali state, due to an often-hollow understandings of Tibetan-ness, which are reduced to simplistic readings of corporeality, visual cues and markers of otherness. In this space of illegibility, state apparatus seeks to make spaces legible by reordering social spaces into surveilled spaces (Marquez 2012). The police and security apparatus relies on making public space legible for them to practice policing and security. In doing so, I argue that Tibetan practices of politics and religion are often blurred, while the state seeks to distinguish between the two. Politics is situated as profane, and therefore deemed as separate from the sacred worship in Boudha.

Who owns the camera?

In November 2018, Norbu, a sixty-year-old Tibetan man from Phale, and his family arrived in Boudha to spend the winter months in Kathmandu, as they have done the year before, and every year before that. This year, on their six-day journey to Kathmandu, they were joined by the family of his newly married niece from Ghunsa. The morning after they arrived, I visited them at

their rented flat in Tinchuli near Boudha. After a couple of cups of tea, Norbu and I decided to go to the Boudha stupa and do kora. We walked through the Boudha main gate, past the Sakya gönpa, and towards the Boudha Ghyang monastery with "the large bell". We climbed to the top of the Boudha Ghyang monastery, from where he claimed one can get the best view of Boudha. Others seem to agree to him as there were several other people on the roof taking photographs. From inside his side bag, he took out his phone. Pointing towards the stupa, he captured a few photographs. He said, *"I have many photos of Boudha from this spot. But when I come here, I still take a few photos. Now, my memory is full."*

Norbu loves taking photos. While in his house in Phale, he showed me numerous photos from his travels: outside the gate of the Central School for Tibetans in Darjeeling, where his kids studied; inside a sweet shop in Old Delhi; along with his friends on the edge of a deep crevasse just north of Yangma on his way back from Ri'og in Tibet; and, on the alley that led to the Mahabuddha temple in Okubahal in Patan, a photo he loved showing me since the day I told him I grew up in that neighborhood. After Norbu is finished with taking photos of the Boudha stupa, we descend the monastery and then continue our walk around the stupa. When we complete one kora towards the east entrance of the stupa premises, Norbu stops and points with his face towards a set of video surveillance cameras that are placed on the outside edge of a red-bricked building.

Norbu: *bhai! You see over there, the [surveillance] cameras. They are similar to our cameras, right?*

Author: *yes, yes. They are at the end of the day cameras and capture photo and video.*

Norbu: *yes, that is what they are. But you see, they are also different. If I take a photo here of that woman selling flowers, then we know that we are taking a photo of that woman, and then we also know that I am capturing the photo. But see, who is taking the photo from that camera [again pointing towards the camera with his head] and what photos are they taking? That we do not know.*

Author: *I have heard that the Boudha police look from the cameras*

Norbu: *That is obvious. My friend who works at the Boudha Development office said that a few cameras also lead to the Boudha Ghyang monastery. That is the monastery that we climbed the roof of earlier. But who knows if these [CCTV cameras] even work at all! I see them everywhere when I'm doing kora. Is there someone watching me when I go around the stupa in circles? Who knows? But even if the cameras do not work, they make people conscious of their actions.*

Norbu is articulate about how the surveillance cameras operate, at times evoking contemporary theories on photographic thought that speak to the absence/presence and representation in an image (Bell 2013). In Boudha, a few Tibetan interlocutors, including Norbu, directly and confidently link the video surveillance cameras to the Boudha police station and the Boudha Ghyang Guthi office. Whereas others - including shopkeepers that I talked to - are oblivious to who actually is on the other side of the camera. CCTVs have rendered the space as a site of liminality because it is difficult to decipher who is in control of, and is responsible for, the cameras. Koskela writes that "like the inmate of the panoptic prison, the public in urban space are often unaware of who is responsible for the surveillance" (2000, 253) rendering the doer of surveillance anonymous. In so doing, as Norbu notes, people under the gaze of surveillance then

employ caution and self-discipline in such spaces as their image is continually and anonymously captured.

Beyond the camera

In Boudha, video surveillance complements rather than replaces individual police surveillance on the ground. I repeatedly observed, and later verified with residents that civilian clothed policemen were occasionally hired as security contractors by the Boudha Ghyang Guthi. A few times, I recorded Chinese civil clothed security officials meeting monastery staff at the Guthi office premises, which are guarded by clothed security officials and monks (Figure 3.5). The Chinese Embassy started working closely with the Boudha police station to stop threats and risks of Tibetan self-immolation and protest from occurring again, which has resulted in massive policing with numbers as large as 300 security officials patrolling in uniform and plain-clothes in and around Boudha (Richardson 2014). I closely tracked these policing practices during fieldwork.

Figure 3.5 Chinese civil-clothed security personnel in the Boudha Ghyang Guthi terrace

On the morning of December 10, 2018, I left Shechen monastery's guest house after breakfast to do *kora* around the stupa. There I saw a couple of APF personnel. For the Chinese Embassy, December 10 is registered as the day the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Prize for Peace, which subsequently leads to additional security in spaces identified as sacred for Tibetans, such as Boudha. This form of security exemplifies 1) Chinese influence on "security" of Tibetan bodies in Nepal, and 2) a routine performance of security as a reminder of state power and control over this place.

During my *kora*, I saw some more. I remembered Tashi Paljong saying with humor: *"we tend to*

forget which Tibetan event or celebration it is. We only realize it when we see police in Boudha. Sometimes rather than making us forget, they make us remember". Another interlocutor, Nyima, mocks the police to note that during instances when he forgets Tibetan days of celebration, he is reminded of them after seeing the large police presence in Boudha. So, while the goal of policing is "to restrict Tibetans from organizing to erase particular forms of Tibetan political and cultural practices, what it inadvertently does is remind Tibetans of these events rather than make them forget these dates that hold significance in the social and political lives of exiled Tibetans" (Shrestha and Fluri 2021, 196).

After my *kora*, I followed an ASI (Assistant Sub-Inspector) of Police through a dimly lit brick alley that leads to a series of local eateries. Towards the end is a restaurant. The ASI along with two others find a seat at the corner table. I listen as they discuss the recent extradition of a Huawei executive. One of the officers firmly concludes: "*America [the US] has no chance against the Chinese*" speaking to the increased confidence and belief in Chinese domination of world political and economic order that many of my interlocutors (including some Tibetans) share.

At mid-day, after visiting other historic sites in the Kathmandu valley - tourists start pouring to Boudha in multiple groups - the Chinese in larger groups, the Japanese in smaller ones, and the Americans in even smaller ones. The guides take them inside souvenir shops that sell objects to tourists - carpets, Buddha statues, thangka paintings, cheap prayer beads, and refrigerator magnets. Tourists have long imagined Tibetans - through an orientalist gaze associated with the myth of "Shangri-La" - as magical and timeless place of simplicity and primitive people. These imaginations are co-opted into the curation of tourist souvenirs that cyclically feed into the

orientalist imagination. The tourists are regularly shocked and appalled when encountering exile Tibetans in Boudha who are connected transnationally and in no way fit the categorization of their imaginations (Moran 2004).

The police are now outnumbered by people that feed into the global tourist economy. At 4pm, the Armed Police Force (APF) were gathered in front of the Boudha Ghyang monastery A sub-inspector says to the Inspector: "*Sir, there might be someone at Sechen Gönpa too*" referring to an official who was posted outside the monastery. I did not catch the insignia, but I followed an officer to find a constable at the main gate of Sechen Gönpa, one policewoman at the Ka Nying Shedrub Ling monastery, and another constable at the northeast entrance by the coffee shop. There were more - one ASI, a head constable, and one constable in front of the popular Himalayan Java Cafe; two sub-inspectors under the Youthok Tibetan clinic (this team was mobile and moved from one alley to the other); one in the alley next to La Casita; one, named L.N. Singh at Boudha gate; one head constable with a machine gun along with four followers at the southern side of the stupa. This was the local police. Then, there were the APF personnel headed by Inspector Dhirendra Chand. The Sakya Gönpa was closed. There were thirteen standing by its walls and three positioned in the front. Inspector Chand, along with two sub-inspectors, were inside a Newa Handicraft store casually chatting with the owner of the bronze statue shop for quite a long time. Three followers in front of the old Dolpo Art Gallery; five more standing beside the *Thulo Ghanti*, a large bell in front of the Boudha Ghyang Monastery. There was a team of three APF police who were mobile. Led by a sub-inspector, they went through to the alley along Yak restaurant. As the alley ended, a unit with two personnel were at Guru Rinpoche park, a park donated by the Chinese Embassy. The ASI, that I had initially

followed, is back with two non-uniformed officers. Later before the APF made its move outside of Boudha, one more APF Inspector (M. Chaudhary) and an ASI (S. Karki) appeared in the securitized and now supposedly legible space of Boudha. In this performativity of security, Boudha became a space of speculative threat.

A week later, I was scheduled to meet Pema (female) and Tenzin (male), two middle-aged Tibetan activists. Instead of meeting in Boudha, they said they would rather meet in Patan since they were craving for some good Newa food and that they had wanted to visit the Mahabuddha temple for some time. After visiting a few temples, we sat outside a teashop in Mangalbazaar.

Author: *"I wanted to ask you both about the police presence in Boudha few days ago. I wonder if you noticed it?"*

Pema: *"People will be blind not to notice it. Of course, we realized that there were many police in the area"*.

Tenzin: *"We are now used to having the police around. It is nothing new for us."*

Author: *"I thought so, especially since you are both active in Tibetan politics"*

[They both looked at each other's faces and smiled]

Pema: *"I don't think we are active anymore. We used to be for sure…"*

Tenzin: *"…you see, the number of police keep increasing every year. And every year the police put our friends in detention even the day before any celebration and threaten them with torture"*

Pema: *"so, it is difficult to do anything political, you see, because they are so many there. They are in the kora, in alleys, around monasteries, along the main road, they are everywhere."*

Author*: "Is it too stupid for me to ask why the police are there?"*

Tenzin laughed.

Pema: *"I think you know this already and ask anyone, other active Tibetans in the community, or human rights people. Even the police will tell you sometimes that they are there because of us [Tibetans]. At the end of the day, it is all to make the Chinese Embassy happy.*

Tenzin: *"Right, we know that before the Chinese Embassy somehow provided training to Boudha police. But we also have some friends in the local police. They say now it has become a ritual. Sometimes the Nepali police or APF will just show up in large numbers during Tibetan celebrations to make their superiors at the Home Ministry happy".*

Based on conversations with Pema and Tenzin (and with Sanu, a human rights activist) policing in large numbers had multiple roles and goals in Boudha. First, by displaying a large show of force, it created a sense of omnipresence so that Tibetans do not do anything that the police find to be de facto illegal in that space. Second, the performativity of policing ensured that the Chinese Embassy was kept happy by showing that Nepal is serious in controlling pro-Tibetan activities. However, as Tenzin notes, this has become so ritualized that at times a mid-ranking police officer might plan such show of force just to appease his superiors at the police headquarters or the Home Ministry.

Conclusion

When I came across the advertisement (on Figure 3.6), I knew I had to share it with Namgyal. He thought that it was quite smartly produced. He commented, *"You cannot deny that this is a good advertisement. Just like Boudha can see on all sides, the cameras can see too. But that's*

just it, right? We Tibetans are responsible for peace in this beautiful nation [referring to the words from the advertisement]*"*

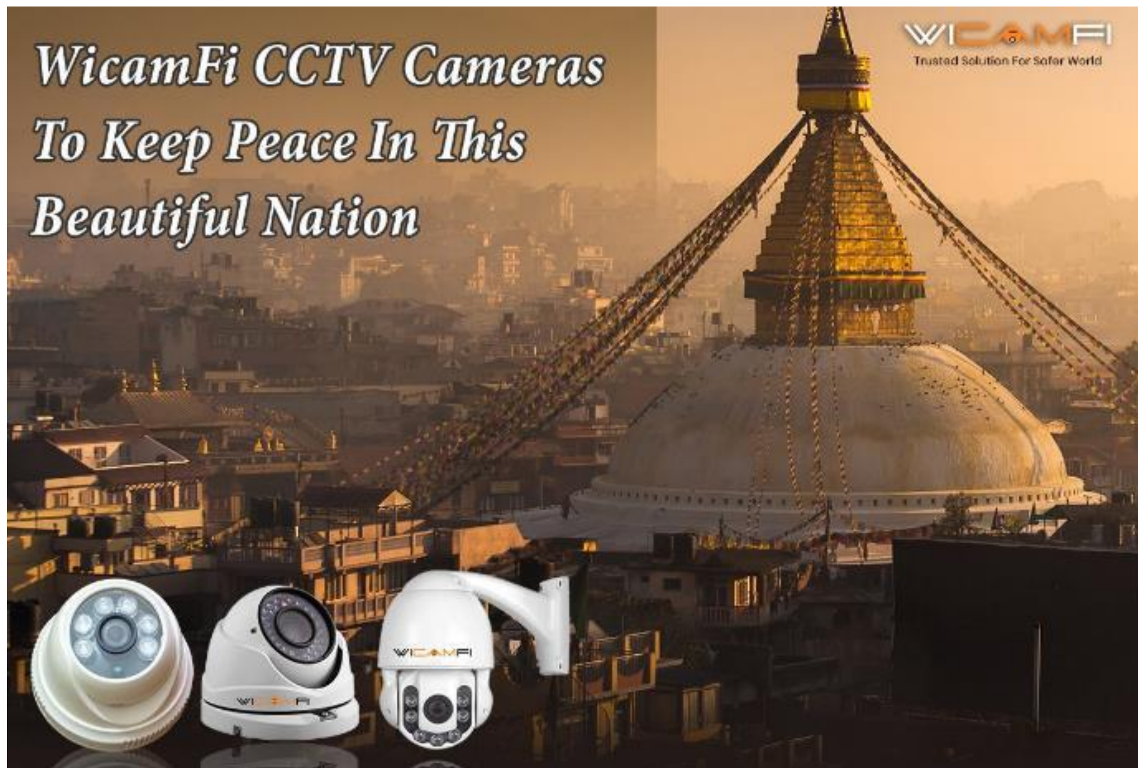

Figure 3.6 Advert for CCTV cameras with Boudha serving as a backdrop of all-seeing security.

The Boudha stupa has become a pertinent landmark for advertising the effectiveness of surveillance. As Namgyal notes, CCTV cameras co-opt and tap into the "all seeing eyes" of the Buddha for security. The advertisement reads "WiCamFi CCTV cameras to keep peace in this beautiful nation". This discursive and visual representation of security underscores a particular national aesthetic (see Ghertner 2015), in which peace is conflated with securitization through surveillance technologies. If read through the lens of securing development, as Namgyal sarcastically alludes to, "Tibetans are responsible for peace" in Nepal.

To reiterate from Chapter 2, the Nepali state finds it necessary to securitize Tibetan refugees to secure Chinese development funds. To ensure capital keeps flowing for Nepal's development

needs, this has led to overt and covert forms of surveillance. In the process of securitization, the aim of surveillance and policing is to make public spaces legible in the eyes of the state through coding and employing visual markers. As these processes of securitization are heightened in Boudha, in this chapter, I predominantly focus on how security and surveillance are operationalized, realized, and perceived in this space.

Similar to the advertisement on Figure 3.6, I discussed how a discourse on surveillance places the importance of cctv cameras in deciphering the illegible and coding them into neatly legible categories. But the police are unable to always translate illegible markers to visual markers of legibility. Because of these corporeal confusions, in many instances, the surveillance apparatus has brought not only Tibetans but also Himalayan Indigenous peoples into the security fold. Nevertheless, through the deployment of these policing practices and everyday surveillance, Tibetan political and cultural practices in Kathmandu are heavily restricted in public spaces. Even if contradictions or misunderstandings exist on who is really watching from the other side of the video surveillance cameras, Tibetans employ caution and self-discipline in these spaces. At the backdrop of increased policing and surveillance, I discuss in Chapter 4 how Tibetan practices of remembrance are relegated to private spaces of secrecy.

Chapter 4. Placemaking and Making Do

In this chapter, I outline the ways in which Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous peoples *make do* by navigating, countering, and at times actively ignoring the surveilled and securitized public spaces and subjugations in Nepal through placemaking, collective memory, and *objects of flight*. In Chapter 3, I discussed the ways in which China's influence on the Nepali state, including the training of military and paramilitary personnel, increased surveillance, and security measures in sites such as Boudha, a place commensurate with Tibetan religious praxis. In Boudha, analytically conceived as a securitized place, the Nepali state codifies visual markers of Tibetan-ness including Tibetan celebrations of the Dalai Lama as deviant and illegal. It views these performances as inherently political and to appease the Chinese Embassy, the Nepali Home Ministry curtails these events in Kathmandu. One of such days is December 10, a day that Tibetans celebrate to honor the Dalai Lama's awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize on that day in 1989. However, when the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Nepali government forced Tibetans to cancel all public festivals and processions that the Tibetan exile community had planned to celebrate the Dalai Lama (*"Nepal Bans Celebrations"*, 1989). Penpa, who used to live in Boudha in 1989 but now lives in Jawalakhel, vividly remembers how these events transpired.

It was December 10, 2018. I had spent the morning and afternoon in Boudha observing the large number of APF and Nepal Police in the premises. Later in the evening, I biked from Boudha across the valley to Jawalakhel. There I met Penpa while he was circumambulating the local monastery. I joined him in the kora after which we sat on a wooden bench outside a small

teashop. It was quiet at the shop, contrary to the Laphing store[25] a couple of houses down the alley, which possibly attracted all the customers. I noted, *"I just came from Boudha. There are a ton of police there today. I had forgotten when I stepped out from my room in Shechen this morning. I was walking towards the newspaper shop on the main road and saw just so many police. So, just hung out there until I came here".* Penpa remarked:

> *So, what did you find out [and laughed]? I have been telling you that this is nothing new. I remember when I used to live in Boudha, this was back then. We heard the news that His Holiness was about to be awarded the Nobel Prize. We were all very excited that maybe this will help the world know more about our sadness. But more than that, we were just excited and wanted to celebrate. Just think if King Birendra [Nepal's monarch at the time] was awarded the Nobel Prize. Will Nepali people not celebrate it? Obviously, they will, you will, and even us Tibetans would celebrate that. So, when we heard the news, we Tibetans in Boudha got together and planned a large ceremony with prayers for His Holiness, and traditional music, dance, and food. But the people from Nepali government told our community leaders that we cannot celebrate it anymore. We had no choice, but to celebrate in our own homes. Some people celebrated inside monasteries in small groups in secret without notifying anyone with fear that the police will find out. As far as I remember, we have been doing the same every year since then.*

I asked, *"back then, why did they not allow the Nobel Prize celebration?"*

[25] Mostly street food, Laphing is a cold, starchy Tibetan noodle dish made from mung beans. Laphing eateries have taken Kathmandu Valley by storm over the past few years, as the following article in the Kathmandu Post notes: https://kathmandupost.com/food/2019/03/22/laphing-all-the-way

He replied:

> *Well, first because of the Dalai Lama. I don't think I need to tell you that. But we think it is also because of many fighting [protest] in Tibet that same year. China did not want to risk anything so told Nepal government to not allow anything like that. And then, there were many things happening with India at the same time.*

The years (1987 through 1989) leading to the Dalai Lama's awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize saw widespread Tibetan protests in Tibet against Chinese occupation and for calls for greater autonomy or independence. Exile Tibetans in Nepal, including Penpa, believe that China saw the need to control Tibetans not only in Tibet but also exile Tibetans in Nepal. Regionally, Nepal was feeling squeezed because of the Rajiv Gandhi-led Indian blockade at the Nepal-India border during the first few months of 1989. Around the same time, Nepal and China were involved in bilateral trade meetings over the opening of new border routes along the Nepal-China borders and China had extended a grant of $13.6 million USD to Nepal in November 1989 (Garver 1991). While Nepal-India relations were quite bitter at the time, Nepal saw that securing development funds from China was the only way out of the territorial dilemmas that the state was facing because of the Indian blockade. As discussed in Chapter 3, to continue to secure Chinese development funds, Nepal saw the need to securitize exile Tibetans.

The shopkeeper brought out two glasses of milk tea. As the winter evening was getting colder, we each grabbed the warm glass of tea with both hands. Penpa continued:

If you ask me, they [Nepali government] are just wasting our time. They always do this. First, they say, go on and continue with your celebration. And then, a few hours before it is supposed to start, they come and say you cannot do it anymore. We put so much time into it. We do not get to celebrate and then we also lose so much time. They think we have time saved up in a bank account. How do you remember and make sure the next generation remembers in these situations? You can think of it yourself, this is cruel.

Penpa commented how in recent years, even when Tibetans get permission to celebrate festivals from the Nepali government, the state sends directives on the day of the celebration to cancel it altogether. He conceptualized this form of denial to remember and celebrate as a violent form of control over time. Penpa, and other Tibetans that I spoke to, understand how the Nepali state operationalizes this sort of temporal violence over the community. Since public acts of remembrances and commemorations are strictly restricted, exile Tibetans make do through private gatherings and new forms of placemaking to sustain cross-generational awareness of collective memory and community-building. In the next sections, I discuss the multiple ways in which exile Tibetans make do in Nepal.

Fire: a close encounter

4 August 2017. I was to meet up with Tsering Dorje in the evening in the Jawalakhel refugee settlement. Tsering is a highly revered figure in the community - he was the caretaker of the gönpa, a community leader, and a retired headmaster of the local Tibetan school. An epitome of transnational and cross-border Tibetan mobility, he was trained in different Tibetan schools in India, after which he spent time in Nepal, working as a teacher and administrator of Tibetan schools in Dhorpatan, Mustang, Pokhara, and Kathmandu. After retiring, he led evening monlam

(prayer) sessions for the elderly to continue the practice of teaching in his community.

The metal latch on the main gate clamped behind us when Tsering Dorjee and I entered the monastery premises in Jawalakhel. The front door of the monastery building was locked from inside. Tsering led the way around a narrow pathway into a small one-room outbuilding next to the gönpa. A few butter lamps were lit inside the dark room where discolored walls manifested the power of fire. Fire is one of the purest forms of offering in Tibetan Buddhism. Butter lamp offerings carry an aspiration to recognize clear light at the time of death. In that way, it is an action that looks to the future - one that hopes to attain liberation after death.

Tsering and I walked outside the outbuilding into the inner kora around the gönpa. A kora signifies both space and action. It is consecutively both being and doing. Spatially, kora is a sacred space or rather an assemblage of sacred spaces - a symbolic and religious circular path around a sacred material structure or landscape (here the gönpa). The doing of kora constitutes a symbolic mobility in all its materiality - the mobility engenders affect, emotion, reverence, and transformations. Through bodily mobilities and motions, places are "embodied contexts of experience(s)" (Till 2008, 105). Tolia-Kelly (2004) draws on Toni Morrison to highlight re-memory as embodied practices of shared material and social experiences that counter hegemonic memory making. Re-memory manifests itself during kora, when bodily movements around the stupa constitute the experiences that formulate memory and nostalgia. The doing of kora is a continuous process of meaning making and placemaking in the world for exile Tibetans and Buddhist practitioners. This space is rhizomic - you can start your kora from any node in the space, and complete it, and yet it is still whole.

In the kora, a middle-aged Tibetan man stood on the steps of the side entrance to the inner hall of the gönpa. Tsering started conversing with him. My attention panned to a few inches of opening on the side door behind the man. Inside the main prayer hall of the gönpa, many Tibetan elders and youth were seated around the hall - edge to edge. Praying, weeping, praying, weeping.

Tsering did not enter the monastery but started making his way around it on the kora. I followed him. We passed by a small, barred window that was the only other opening to the events that were unfolding inside. For a few seconds, the micro-events revealed themselves through the window bars. Three young Tibetans were bringing the snow lion flag - the national flag of Tibet that signifies the Tibetan independence movement - towards the main altar. Next to the altar was a framed photo of a Tibetan man. Then it struck me why the prayers were so secretive. It was a vigil in the memory of Passang Dhondup, whose body was left discolored and charred by fire six days ago. Around 1500 kilometers away, in Dharamsala, India, Passang had self-immolated along the kora around the Dalai Lama's main temple (Monlam 2017).

This exemplifies the melding of politics and religious practices of remembrance, which both China and Nepal seek to separate as distinct, one profane (politics) and the other sacred. Who gets to mourn death - and whose death can be mourned - is a very political question (Butler 2006). Butler (2009) defines "grievability [as] a presupposition for a life that matters" (14). She argues that a life that is valued is mourned once it is extinguished. When deaths are not grievable, the lives of those now dead, are absent of political significance. Therefore, the ability to extinguish life is interlinked with the framing of grievability and political value, suggesting that a grievable life is one that retains political value upon death.

The vigil at the monastery was an event to mark death, claim remembrance, and a pledge to not forget. Such collective acts of remembrance were relegated to the space of the private because Nepal (as China's proxy) had to erase the political value attached to these deaths. The materiality of the monastery wall separated the normalized everydayness - where Tibetanness was subject to state surveillance and policing - from the rituals that were hidden from sight and site. The wall rendered events within the monastery into realms of intimate, secret spatialities. These spatialities of events were not just secretive micro-events for Tibetan refugees in the community but they linked to, and were conditioned by, broader narratives of power, politics, policing, fear, and agency. The state did not view these deaths as worthy of grief (Butler 2006) and public acknowledgements of grief were deemed as acts of political deviance, because of the political meaning attached to these deaths through public memorials.

After one full circle of the *kora*, at the front door to the gönpa, Tsering instructed me in Nepali: "*bhai, please do not go inside [the monastery]"*. The sensibilities and modes of mourning in that state of precarity demanded secrecy and trust. I listened to Tsering. I had only just begun researching in the community and knew only a few other community members then. As in Boudha, the police are present in Jawalakhel in Tibetan days of commemoration, yet they are uninvolved in the place - only so much as to perform as human panopticons to discipline the people and to legitimize what can be and what cannot be performed in that space. Tibetans are then acutely conscious not only of the police in uniform but others in the community who are suspiciously wandering about, hanging out, and passing by. This engenders and necessitates secrecy in the community by Tibetans themselves as a tactics of claiming and sustaining religious, social, and political beliefs.

We started making our way back to Tsering's room through the inner alleys of the Tibetan settlement. In his two-bedroom apartment, we walked through the small living space into his study and religious space. There, on the right wall was the altar where fire on the copper butter lamps was slowly dying as the end of day was nearing. On the left wall were a few mattresses stacked on top of one another. Tsering took out some pillows and laid them on the floor. We sat down, and Tsering poured warm water from his large reddish green thermos onto two glass cups, and then placed a teabag of Tokla tea in each cup. We were silently taking a few sips of tea listening to the continuous prayer sounds of "*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*" coming from a small speaker at the altar. After we both took in the beautiful silence in the room, he shared his frustrations with the Nepali state, with Nepali people illegally encroaching on land and buildings provided by the state to Tibetans in the refugee settlements, and with the political impossibilities for later generation of Tibetans who cannot receive refugee cards. However, Tsering understood freedom relationally. For him, even though the Nepali state placed political restrictions on Tibetans, it was relatively moderate in comparison to the Chinese restrictions on Tibetans in Tibet.

> *We are free, not as in Tibet. It is true that we have no identity cards here, we must go to the CDO [Lalitpur District administration] office for them to sign any paperwork we might need for education to basically everything. We can go to Boudha whenever we want and can go to pilgrimage in India. And in India, I know it is even easier than here. So, I do not understand why Tibetans are burning themselves. They can be of better use for society and for Tibet if they are alive and spread the message of peace and Tibet. When they die, we lose our future.*

Tsering expressed a deep sadness over and opposition to the recent acts of self-immolation in Tibet and now in Nepal and India. Scholars have theorized self-immolation as the fundamental refusal of politically marginalized peoples to live in spaces of precarity conditioned by a damaged sense of future (Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Shakya 2012). Resisting precarity, some Tibetans have resorted to self-destructive violence of self-immolation, which is symbolic of the fundamental refusal of the Tibetans to live in spaces of political restriction and precarious disposability. While many Tibetans like Tsering discourage self-immolation, some believe that self-inflicted violence is a symbolic manifestation of the desire to survive in a space of utter control and conformity. Self-immolation becomes the most intimate resistance against the intolerable and "coercive transformation of body and space" (Shakya 2012). As for Tsering, death is the end of all political possibilities. This illustrates how Tibetans do not hold a singular opinion on the act of self-immolation and that they have differing opinions about the political efficacy of life and death in exile.

Ignoring the Police | Fixing the Road

10 July, 2017. It was four days after the Dalai Lama's birthday. Three Nepali Police constables were seated in front of an incense store on the outer kora of a monastery in the Jawalakhel Tibetan refugee settlement. Next to them was a local tea shop frequented by exile Tibetan in the community. In the surveillance of the space, it was evident quite visually how state sovereignty was realized in the everyday. One of the policemen would get up every few minutes and walk the kora – he was the primary manifestation of a horizontal, panopticon of security that sought to render Tibetans as docile bodies (Foucault 1977). As much as kora is a symbolic practice of everyday life for Tibetans, the police walking the kora engendered a circular surveillance of the

community. Surveillance became the reminder of the Tibetans' political position as refugees. Here, one is guilty not by performing transgressions or illegal/legal acts, but just "by virtue of being before the law" (Secor 2007, 43). The bodily presence of the police engendered fear and anxiety. Usually about half a dozen Tibetan men sit in front of the incense store, drink tea from the teashop next door, and engage in extended conversations about life, politics, iPhones, pollution, and migration to the West. That day, the benches were barren, and the tea was undrunk.

If Foucauldian disciplinary power is pervasive in space, then people employ ways of operating through multiple practices to reappropriate space in everyday life (de Certeau 1984). As tactics operate in the turf of strategy, it makes use of the fissures in surveillance of dominant powers, "it poaches in them" (de Certeau 1984). As policing inscribe security discourse on the Tibetan body, Tibetans use tactics to make their own meanings out of them and engage in intimate processes of being political. If the Nepali police operationalize security through visual markers to transform the illegible into legible, Tibetans lay claim to their own forms of visuality in private and public that speaks to memory and placemaking. Political visuality as such has the potential to link imagined histories and memories with possibilities of a just future (Rose 2016). An event that occurred in the following year illustrates how Tibetans in Jawalakhel make do in their spaces through sarcastic ways that both discredit the state while at the same time contributing to their community.

10 March, 2018. Tibetans observe March 10 in remembrance of the Tibetan Uprising of 1959. Similar to the policing from an earlier year discussed above, a dozen police officers were

stationed and were actively patrolling and surveilling Jawalakhel for “suspicious Tibetan activities”. In Boudha, earlier that day, the policing presence was considerably larger. Spring was in the air and the day was sunny and warm. Around the monastery and the refugee settlement office were about a dozen police officers. I was getting a little anxious over the police presence, so soon after completing the kora, I started walking towards TJ’s house through a small road that cuts through the settlement.

I had promised to meet Tsering for mid-day tea. He wanted to show me an old Tibetan currency note that he had kept in his possession. But first, I stopped at TJ’s house to talk about the police presence. As always, I met him at his rooftop. He was in the process of texting and calling other young, local Tibetans to come out into the settlement road. TJ shared:

> *So you saw the number of police in Boudha today. I am sure there are many there. But there is a lot of police here too in Jawalakhel right there [pointing towards the monastery]. So, what can we do in such situations? We can obviously not go out in placards protesting. That is of no use. We wil ljust get beaten or put in jail for a couple days. So, we have stopped doing such protests for some time now….but we have planned something exciting for today, you will see.*

TJ then receives a call on his cellphone, after which he said, *“let’s go. I think we are all ready”.* While we walked downstairs, TJ explained:

> *You see, some of us were talking a couple of days ago that the community that we live in*

is the most important of all. So, if Nepali police want to say don't do this and don't do that, we will find other ways to engage in the community for its own good. We have decided to clean the settlement road and fix some potholes.

As we stepped outside TJ's house, a dozen young men and women including children were gathered and ready to contribute to TJ's plans. Each person grabbed a couple garbage bags and started collecting pieces of paper, plastic, and small rocks from the road (Figure 4.1). Phurpu, TJ's friend, commented to the group, *"you see, these rocks are dangerous for our old people when they walk here. There is high possibly of them falling if they step on them. So, let's pick those up too!"*

Figure 4.1 Tibetan youth in the Jawalakhel settlement fixing the road

After two hours of cleaning, we took a break. I sat next to Phurpu and TJ. Quite proud of what we had achieved within a couple hours, TJ remarked:

> *Oh, it looks so clean now. You know Rupak, it is so important that we decided to do this today. We know the police would stop us if we did anything cultural or political today. They are right there but we have decided to not care about them. Cleaning the road is neither cultural or religious or political. We are cleaning for community-building, to care for our elders, and to maintain a clean neighborhood. Maybe it is also protest, but what is funny is that our cleaning and fixing of the road is a response to the government not fixing the potholes and dirt here in this road. Because of this poor road we have, we are as Nepali as anyone else in this country.*

For TJ, during heightened policing presence in the neighborhood, what is central to his conceptualization of politics is the act of ignoring the police itself. Some of the community members saw it fit to actively ignore the policing of their space that day. Not only did they perceive cleaning and fixing the road as a form of countering the police presence, but it was also a helpful way in which to contribute to the exile community in such an important day of remembrance. Cleaning also became a form of satire of the inability of the Nepali state to mend a road. TJ jokingly commented that the bad road is one commonality that both exile Tibetans and Nepali peoples share across Nepal, because of which he too felt like a Nepali. This community effort speaks to the ways in which an exile Tibetan community engaged in creative ways to practice place-making through acts of cleaning and fixing in the backdrop of police presence.

Objects of flight

A focus on the politics of memory, remembering, and forgetting makes it possible to move beyond a simple categorical discussion of refugees (Ehrkamp 2016). Memory remains a relentlessly persistent node through which to understand displacement and refugee experiences. Memory necessitates remembering. Re-enactments of loss, vulnerability, sadness, humor through performances of songs and dance reanimate common and shared memories of displacement, exile, loss that are crucial for the feelings of solidarity and construction of a shared Tibetan-ness in exile (Diehl 2002). Memory and memorializing sustain in such depth that everyday practices are guided and situated by them. Memory becomes acutely political because it actively exists and is made in the present while countering hegemonic state discourses and surveillance.

In conversations with first generation exile Tibetans, objects that they brought along with them from Tibet – which I call *objects of flight* - are key in sustaining the memory of their space/time of Tibet. Objects of flight are active remnants of memory making. In the diaspora, artefacts and traditions are reified, reinvented, and revalorized to sustain memories of time and space that are long gone (Ramadan 2013; Tolia-Kelly 2004). The everyday lives of diasporic communities are interspersed with objects that engender potentials to "affect human behavior and identification" (Ramadan 2013, 73). I argue that these objects are politically significant and that they carry the material potentialities to engender forms of intimate sociality over history/memory. These enactments and performances of memory making are forms of future-making. For many first-generation Tibetans, it ensures that Tibetan everyday lives are sustained in particular ways when the future of returning to the Tibetan homeland is realized or when their stories are passed onto future generations of Tibetans.

In that regard, Tibetan homes in exile where these objects of flights are regularly cleaned, stored, and displayed become key sites of memory making. Although individual objects produce individual stories and biographies, the objects are important in thinking through how particular identities are related to political belonging. In doing so, the domestic and the private spaces of the home become sites of "historical identification" (Tolia-Kelly 2004, 315) and the material objects within the home become nodes through which to relate and belong to collective traditions and political identities. For Tibetans who I visited at their homes, material possessions are familiar objects that are tied to Tibetan national histories, which are directly tied to their personal and collective pasts. This sense of belonging through objects is not just limited to *objects of flight* but can mean gifts from family members, neighbors, friends, who bring back objects from pilgrimages elsewhere in Nepal or India. These become objects of normalcy in the private life of exile at the intimate sphere in contrast to the disruptions and ruptures in the public sphere.

The ways in which people attach meanings to the past are reflected through material objects. For Karma Dhondup, who lives in the same Tibetan community as Tsering, the materiality of objects carries the weight of history and memory of a place that he left long ago. Karma Dhondup fled Kham in eastern Tibet in the mid-1950s during the Kham resistance against the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The eighteen-year-old Karma made his way west towards Lhasa. When the PLA invaded Lhasa in 1951, Karma was in Nagchu, a small town north-east of Lhasa. To flee violence and repression that swallowed Lhasa, Karma decided to head south across the border to Nepal. Yaks carried some of his belongings. To avoid being seen by the PLA, the group that Karma was traveling south with had the yaks go on a different route than themselves - to meet at a point down south. But the yaks and their stuff were captured by the Chinese troops

en route. They lost most of what they had brought along from Kham, their homeland.

In the summer of 2018, Tsering and I visited Karma's house. Earlier that day, I was telling Tsering about my interests in old objects and artefacts, and since Tsering shared similar interests, we planned to visit a couple folk museums and temple complexes in Bhaktapur, a city on the eastern edge of the Kathmandu Valley. He thought it might be interesting to visit a few of his neighbors' houses so we walked towards Karma's house. Dolma, Karma's daughter opened the door and welcomed us inside. Tsering and I talked to Karma about our interests in looking at old things, things that he might have brought from Tibet with him. Karma was excited to show what he had. He asked Dolma to bring out the things from the closet. Dolma placed four teacups (Figure 4.2) on the wooden table, and Karma noted,

> *I don't have many things, but I have these. Our yaks were captured on the way here. And all my stuff were gone with them. I had this cup with me. Now I have this cup with me in sorrow and in happiness. I think all Tibetans have something like this – the cup is common. But in this cup, my personal history is engraved. I have shared stories about my journey from Tibet to my children and grandchildren. The hope is that they remember my story and remember Tibet from my stories. If these things remain and pass on, these stories will continue.*

Figure 4.2 Karma's teacups

For Tibetans, after losing their homeland, what remained in their life in exile were their bodies, memories, hopes, experiences of distress, fear, and anxiety, and a few objects that they carried with themselves - Tibetan paper notes, medicine bags, eating knives, and teacups. As Tibetans fled Tibet, these objects of flight accompanied them in their arduous journey across the Himalaya. As Tsering puts it, *"the phörpa (teacup) is inseparable from a Tibetan"*. Wherever the person went, the phörpa went along with them. As these objects of flight were imbued with meaning and visual markers of the past and a method for ensuring memories for future generations to carry, these became objects of memory. I include a selection of photographs of these objects of flight in an addendum to this dissertation.

Khatag Ban: a ban on a “Free Tibet” object

In thinking about the social efficacy of objects in the backdrop of pro-Hindu Brahmin-Chhetri national politics (drawing on discussions from Chapter 2), it is pertinent to discuss the recent discourse on the need to ban *Khatag* from official use in Nepal. What counts as politics and political are remarkably blurry categories that rub against the idea of Nepali nationalism. *Khatag* (ཁ་བཏགས་) is a ceremonial scarf used by the Tibetan, Himalayan Indigenous peoples, Tamang, and other communities that practice Tibetan Buddhism across the Himalaya as a form of offering to deities, but also given to people as a sign of welcoming someone to a space, for safe departure to carry blessings for the future journey (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Walungnga men rolling *khatag* for a community gathering in Boudha

In 2019, Khagaraj Adhikari, then Nepal Community Party (NCP) affiliated Member of the House of Representatives, in a public event organized by a local chapter of the NCP, spoke about the potentially anti-nationalist elements in the *khatag:*

> *Is this khatag made in Nepal? Let me tell you what is written in this scarf. When an NCP party member held office in the Tourism Ministry, he went to the airport to welcome the Chinese Tourism Minister. In the scarf that he gave the Chinese party, there was written Free Tibet. For three years, that Chinese delegation ignored communist parties from Nepal. What you want to incorporate, do so only after educating and learning about it. Here [holding a khatag that was offered to him in the event], I don't understand what is written on this scarf so please do not offer me this scarf. I don't know how to read [Tibetan], so I don't know if there is Free Tibet written on this scarf too. I am not a supporter of Free Tibet.*[26]

Adhikari coded the *khatag* as an object that says "Free Tibet" in a language (Tibetan) that he cannot read and decipher. This example illustrates the conflation of Tibetan and Himalayan Indigenous identities. Countering such rhetoric, people from numerous Himalayan communities, supported by the Nepali Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), came together in protest at Maitighar Mandala, a public "protest-free" space increasingly used as a site of anti-government protests. Protestors shared anger that the minister chose ignorance and unwillingness

[26] The original post on social media is no longer available. A reposted video can be accessed here: https://www.facebook.com/100006263235732/videos/2268566340028785/

to learn about Himalayan cultures ("Khada | Restrictions on Use of Khada | Maitighar" 2019). One of the protestors noted:

> *There is no Free Tibet or anything against the One-China Policy written on the khatag. I want to make that clear first. Khatag is a tradition that we Himalayan Indigenous people and Buddhist practitioners have.*

Protestors speak to the increasingly pro-Hindu and Bahun-Chhetri ways in which the state is governed even though Nepal is now a constitutionally secular country. One protestor noted:

> *This is now a secular country because of which many communities started openly celebrating their religions and cultures. So, this [khatag ban] maybe because of jealousy. So, the government's pro-Hindu ideology will slowly and slowly burn us.*

Tenzin Paljor, a Sherpa NEFIN activist believes that the discourse of marking certain objects as anti-national is masked by pretense that seeks to appease China. In an online interview in the summer of 2019, he told me,

> *…This [khatag ban] is all a political drama for the NCP to say to the Chinese that, hey look we can control things that are Tibetan. They do not care that so many Himalayan communities also have this tradition. They [the Bahun-Chhetri majority] have never looked at us as citizens of Nepal, we are outsiders here. They do not care about our traditions and cultures. So easily a minister said our khatag is anti-Chinese and we*

support Free Tibet. He erased our long history of struggle to become part of Nepal. We are not Tibetan, how many times do we have to say that?

To think about the discourse on the *khatag* ban, I draw on Feminist Geographers who have incorporated the body as a site of analysis. Several geographers have also examined the geopolitics of corporeality through dress, such as the controversies over the Muslim headscarf in various spaces (Bagheri 2019; Fluri 2009; Gökarıksel and Secor 2012; Gökarıksel and Secor 2014; Secor 2002). Gökarıksel (2012) notes how the headscarf becomes a site of politics in Turkey - a space of collision between place-based politics and situated agencies in the oppositional politics of Islamists and secularists. The materiality of the headscarf (re)produces geopolitics through the formation of embodied subjects as well as "bodily production" of Turkish politics (Gökarıksel 2012). Similarly, the abandonment of the *khatag* from the nation is a visual marker through which Nepal is imagined as a nation by upper-caste Brahmins. This visual practice is however not new.

At the scale of the body, the Nepali police use visible markers by including sartorial choices as a method for sorting the acceptable from the deviant. This form of policing was heavily practiced during the Maoist civil war. Camouflage trousers, and more so GoldStar shoes, were markers of Maoist insurgents[27]. The discourse on the *khatag ban* is one way in which the policing of an object produces othering by the state for Himalayan Indigenous communities, a form of political marginalization that has continued through time as discussed in Chapter 2. Here the *khatag*

[27] There were rumors of young adults tortured, jailed, and at times killed because they wore the wrong shoes at the wrong time and place.

became the site of politics where place-based Indigenous cultures and identities was placed as oppositional to national sentiments. The ban itself was not successful. Khagaraj Adhikari later apologized and remarked that all the discussions and hatred against him was unwarranted, and he was mistaken when he initially made the public comments on the *khatag* because of language issues. The discourse on the *khatag* ban revealed many realities in the "New Nepal". First, pro-Hindu Bahun-Chhetri narratives still of social hierarchies and nationalism still hold strong as discussed in Chapter 2. Second, Himalayan Indigenous peoples work in solidarity and as a collective to counter hegemonic ways of placing them on hierarchies that define what objects count as national and what counts as foreign. And third, as a spillover effect, Himalayan Indigenous peoples are increasingly seeing the need to separate themselves from exile Tibetans to negotiate their place within the Nepali state, as the conversations with Tenzin Paljor illustrate.

Panchen Lama

October 2018, Phale. The inside walls of the monastery are lined with wallpaper made of cloth, with square blocks in hues of red, purple, and blue with rose blossoms juxtaposed in the foreground. On one side of the monastery are Thangka paintings of Tibetan Buddhist deities. As I entered the shrine room of the monastery, there were two red pillars at the center of the room. On the pillar immediately facing the door is the portrait of the 10th Panchen Lama (Figure 4.4). Only while wandering around the room, I noticed the portrait of the Dalai Lama on the other pillar - not a recent photo but when the Dalai Lama was much younger. At the altar, there is another portrait of the Dalai Lama.

Figure 4.4 A portrait of Panchen Lama at the Phale monastery

While in conversation with Lama Dhondup later that day over evening tea, when we were revisiting some of the photographs that I had taken that day, he mentioned that:

> *Facing [pointing north] the altar, the Dalai Lama's portrait is on the right of the Panchen Lama's portrait. This follows Tibetan ritual tradition of ordering of things and people. In the Gelug tradition, as the Panchen Lama is second to the Dalai Lama, the Dalai Lama is on the right side. That I think is the main reason. But from what I know, the head monk in the monastery placed the Panchen Lama portrait there so that people who look at the monastery shrine room from the door and do not come inside, they only see the Panchen Lama photo but not the Dalai Lama photo. You see, non-locals don't*

> *come inside so much, and the police do not come as well. But if they do, I guess they just see the Panchen Lama photo. They do not recognize the Panchen Lama.*

This placement of portraits ensures that non-local visitors to the monastery only see the portrait of the Panchen Lama when they peek inside the shrine room from the door. Since the Nepali police recognize, or are trained to recognize, the images of the Dalai Lama, this visual placement of portraits is beneficial to counter such visual markers. If the police were to come inside and question anyone, they will not recognize the Panchen Lama. However, Lama Dhondup points out quite quickly that if the police were to come inside and look more closely there are images of the Dalai Lama on the supporting pillar and the main altar. He notes:

> *Nepali police personnel, unless they are Sherpa [and from other Himalayan Indigenous communities], do not know the difference. But, in this area, our monastery is a Gelug monastery and the ones in Ghunsa and Walung are Nyingma monasteries. They do not have portraits of the Panchen Lama there. So, if they [the police] knew, just looking at the first sight inside the monastery they could say, Oh there is the Panchen Lama, that means this is Gelug monastery, that means the people here are Tibetans. But they do not know the difference.*

Here the portrait of the Panchen Lama was placed to negotiate with the political weight that the portrait of the Dalai Lama carries. In placing the Panchen Lama portrait central to visual sight when entering the monastery, it not only followed Tibetan ritual practices of spatiality by having the Dalai Lama's portrait on the right-side, but it averted any questionings by police or people

passing by. In that sense, Tibetans are aware of the discursive ways in which the Dalai Lama portrait is coded as an object of "Free Tibet" activity in Nepal. In Phale, monks responded to this by strategically placing portraits in particular ways inside the monastery.

A multifocal sense of home

In the earlier sections, I discussed how exile Tibetans create possibilities for themselves in the diaspora through memory, objects of flight, and placemaking. In this section, I explore Tibetan exile experiences with place to tease out a multifocal sense of home and place-based identities. In doing so, I draw on Massey's (1994) conceptualization of place as "articulated moments" where multiple experiences, understandings, meanings are co-constructed. In popular narratives about refugees, refugees do not live in a place and are displaced and always longing for their lost home while their current place of residence has no currency. Counter to this simplistic understanding of placemaking is the idea that there is "no single way to experience exile or be a refugee" (McGranahan 2010, 55). This is because, as my interlocutors make clear, places that refugees inhabit in the present engender deep attachments and produce multiple subjectivities in their lives in the diaspora. Tibetan exile identities are simultaneously situated in multiple places, as I illustrate is the case in Chapter 5 with Phale Tibetans as well. In addition to the affective and national belonging to Tibet, many second and third generation Tibetans who grew up in Nepal in extended exile identify their urban neighborhoods and villages in Nepal as their hometown.

On one post-monsoon evening in 2018, I was *hanging out* with TJ (or known as Tenzin to Tibetan elders in Jawalakhel) on the rooftop of his house which had a great view of the hills of Kathmandu valley towards the south. Dawa, TJ's cousin who was then studying for her

secondary level exams, was seated next to us in front of a plastic table covered with a set of open books and a notebook. TJ was commenting on the situated nuance of home. He mentioned:

> *I have a Canadian passport. But when I came through Nepali immigration at the airport last month, the official behind the booth asked me where I was from. Obviously, I did not tell him I am from Tibet. I told him my home is in Jawalakhel.*

TJ responded that he was from Jawalakhel to avert any unnecessary questioning and detention at the airport that might have occurred if he had said he was from Tibet. This strategic response is not however present only in TJ's interaction with the state. TJ notes of this ruptured sense of home in other situations:

> *When in Toronto, when my khaire [white] Canadian friends ask me ask where I am from, I say I am Tibetan and grew up in Nepal. When Tibetans ask me where I am from, I tell them my hometown is Jawalakhel in Patan. And then they tell me their hometowns of Boudha, Swayambhu, Pokhara, and so on. We are all always Tibetans but what we identify as home is so complicated. When the airport person asked where I am from, I had no hesitation to tell him I am from Jawalakhel because it is true. This is my home.*

By now considerably frustrated with the amount of reading she must finish before the next day, Dawa remarked:

> *This [Jawalakhel] is the home that we know of. When my grandfather is cleaning and*

reordering his old things in the living room closet, he tells us stories of how he came here [from Tibet]. These conversations remind us that we are from Tibet. But there is more to that. We are also from here. And TJ-la is also from Canada [and laughs loudly].

For Tibetans, place – through an emphasis on memory - exists in multiplicities and produces diverse political subjectivities while placemaking lies at the centrality of meaning making (Massey 1994). First generation exile Tibetans make sense of and make do in Nepal through sustenance of objects that they had brought from Tibet and through storytelling and emotions that the objects evoke. For many first-generation Tibetan refugees, who were quite young when they first left Tibet or grew up mostly in other camps before moving to sites in Boudha and Jawalakhel, *objects of flight* exemplify a type of mobile placemaking and a medium through which they remember their homes in Tibet and their flight across the borders into Nepal. When they narrate their oral stories in relation to the objects, it ensures memories are sustained, and specific political histories remembered. For exiled Tibetan research participants in this study, home, where these objects of flights are sustained, is not a static, fixed, or singular reality. They have felt that home is not static and fixed from their own life trajectories and from oral stories their parents or grandparents speak of from their refugee migrations from Tibet to Nepal and India. Many families have also moved between refugee settlements in their lifetimes.

As Blunt and Dowling (2006) note, people "negotiate belongings to several different homes at the same time...but such multiple belongings can be painful and difficult" (218). For most exile Tibetans, the topic of return and affective belonging remains in Tibet - a longing and belonging that is remembered and commemorated through events, school education in Tibetan schools,

discourses from the Central Tibetan Administration, and public memory. While some Phale Tibetans, whose stories I later write in Chapter 5, are still able to cross the border into Ri'og in Tibet, this is quite uncommon for majority of exile Tibetans who cannot return to Tibet. So, in addition to a form of affective belonging to Tibet, my research participants have a sense of belonging in their "settlements" - either in neighborhoods of Kathmandu, Patan, or Pokhara, or in villages across northern Nepal, and in places around the world.

Towards the end of 2018, Tsering's health was deteriorating. Tsering had just returned from Pokhara after staying with his eldest daughter, a nurse in a regional hospital. When I went to visit him in his room, he was frailer than the last time I had seen him. His daughter let me inside the apartment to the main room where Tsering was resting on a couple pillows against the wall. I asked him how his trip went. He responded:

> *I feel at peace in Pokhara. The air is nice, and it is relaxing. It is a good place for me to recover [from my illness]. In Jawalakhel, the air is bad, and it is always busy. I go to Pokhara often, but I do have to return to Jawalakhel to take care of the monastery and to teach dharma, and for pilgrimage in Swayambhu and Boudha. That [Pokhara] is my home too, this [Jawalakhel] is my too.*

Tsering has traveled extensively in his lifetime serving communities in settlements in Dhorpatan, Pokhara, and Jawalakhel. Most recently, he was the headmaster of Atisha Primary School in Jawalakhel. We dwelled on the idea of travelling together to Dhorpatan as he his keen on showing me the places that are peppered with memories from when he was there as a teacher and

a community member. Along the route to Dhorpatan are other places in which he was rooted in and through which he made sense of the world around him. But the route and his personal histories of mobility across Nepal signified how his sense of belonging and place-making were antithetical to place-based territorial practices of placing refugees into place-less categories, further conditioned by hierarchies of caste, ethnicity, and class.

Even though the Nepali state's policies on Tibetan refugees, or the lack of, condition exile Tibetans into a life of protracted exile, many like Tsering practice mobile forms of belonging through which they conceive of an understanding that is situated in multiple homes. While this is the case that is much more pronounced for Tibetans in urban areas, it is not true that Tibetans live in isolation and a sedentary mode of life in rural areas. Tibetan refugees in Phale are an important part of the equation in the local trading of carpets, yaks, and other items in and across the border. In doing so, they often work along with Limbu, Rai, Walung, Ghunsali, and Sherpa peoples from across the varying topographies of Taplejung district. Tashi, a Phale Tibetan trader, notes:

> *For my business, I have to rely on Limbu men to carry goods from Tapethok to Phale. Who will buy these? The locals will not. It is the people who travel up and down this route - tourists going up to Ghunsa or going down to Amjilosa, or other villagers going up and down from Taplejung. As you know, I also work on carpets. I sell them to folks coming from Walung or Yangma and they sell the carpet in Tibet. Before I have sold yak and dzo to them, and they will graze them for some time and then sell them in Tibet for*

> *more money. Sometimes, tourists buy carpets to take with them to Kathmandu and to their countries.*

Although highly mobile, my interlocutors in Ghunsa and Phale conceive of their place as remote. A similar discourse on remoteness of the region is present in tourist brochures, conservation policies, military dialogues, and political conversations. However, my interlocutors make it clear that to say a place is remote does not necessitate that it is disconnected from the world. Sonam, a hotel owner in Ghunsa talks about the ideas of remoteness:

> *Our region is remote (दुर्गम). For everyone, politicians, and everyone else, we are people of the corner. We have nothing here but ourselves and our hard work. Whatever needs to be done, we have to do it ourselves. Our families are spread out in many places but we all come together to work for Ghunsa, that is the only way for the state to know that we exist.*

Phale and Ghunsa residents share a form of strategic placemaking in which remoteness is preserved because villagers in the region believe that if they were to develop road infrastructure here, tourism, which is their main source of income, will disappear. Tsewang, a guest house owner in Ghunsa, makes the distinction between being physically and politically remote. For him, the physical remoteness and rurality are key to the survival of the communities here who rely on tourism. What he is vocally opposed to is the sense of political remoteness that he feels his community faces within Nepal. The narratives of the community members in these two places speak to the way in which they simultaneously embrace and deconstruct the discourse of

rurality and remoteness by elaborating on their own experiences and their family linkages that are regional, global, and always in the making. I have been incredibly grateful to conversations with Nyima Dorjee Bhutia, who through his writing and archival work, is committed to illustrating the rich and diverse histories of trade and belonging for Walung Indigenous peoples. In his recent exhibition, selected as part of the Kathmandu Triennale in 2022, he juxtaposed visual histories and stories of the Walung community with objects that he has meticulously collected over the years - passport photos, border citizen certificates, family portraits, and objects that speak to the long histories of mobility, trade, and connections in Walung. His archival and anthropological work finds resemblance to what I noticed in Ghunsa and Phale, in the ways in which materiality and objects allude not only to mobility but peoples' perceptions and imaginations of their pasts, presents, and futures by reworking and strategically rupturing the notion of remoteness.

In this discussion, I emphasize the importance of both roots and routes. While it makes clear from a situated understanding of routes that communities have multiple forms of belonging, a roots approach to studying a place manifest how communities strategically use essentialized notions of place-based territory to make claims over space. At the face of protracted exile and corporeal violence for exile Tibetans and continued marginalization by the Nepali state for Himalayan Indigenous peoples, rootedness becomes a way in which both communities make do and claim their spaces within Nepal. This is also political action.

However, Phale is connected to the extended Phale Tibetan communities at multiple scales - through trade with other local communities, through forms of education and governance to cities

in Nepal and India, and through migration to places like Dharamsala, New York, or Sydney. Stories from places near and far are told and retold in the village. Many members of the community themselves are highly mobile. The monks frequently visit important religious centers in Nepal and India. Many of their relatives who grew up and spent a formidable part of their lives in Phale are now in Paris and New York City.

Family portraits create a lens through which to understand this form of multifocal sense of place for people in Phale and Ghunsa. Inside the homes of Tibetans that I visited in Phale, and in Boudha and Jawalakhel, were family portraits both old and new. There was no rural-urban divide in conceptualizing how Tibetans are increasingly mobile and translocal through place-based connections at multiple localities through their mobilities across scales (Oakes and Schein 2006). As much as Tibetans in urban neighborhoods of the Kathmandu valley are mobile and have their kinship ties extended across the world, Phale Tibetans similarly engage in translocal connections within and across regional borders.

All the villagers in Phale that I spoke to, except for one household, had transnational connections. While spatially located in the village, the villagers themselves were able to relate to places globally. Many Phale Tibetans are traders themselves who have historically moved stuff from India and Nepal into Tibet and back. Their stories were of their or their kins successes in setting up new homes in locations that were unknown to them before but are now all too common. In Phale, next to the entrance to their shrine room, there is a photo of Tashi and Pema from before their first child was born. They said they had the photograph taken in a studio in Taplejung bazaar. The photo had a vivid blue background with a scenic view of a hamlet from

Switzerland. Next to this photo are photos of Tashi with his two older daughters at the Red Fort in New Delhi, a city where Tashi notes he and his family have spent considerable amount of time working, studying, and "making memories".

In another house in Phale, Paljor has photos of his nephew who is in New York. Paljor claims that his nephew is waiting for their green card after which he believes that he will also qualify to apply and finally join his kin in Queens, NY. Across the village walkway, at Lama Nyima's house, the photo that stands out the most is of his aunt and her children in a small, green park where they are seated on a bench all drinking from their translucent Dunkin' Donuts cups – also in Queens. Next to this photo is an old photo of his mother taken in Shigatse, Tibet. Lama Nyima notes how his life is *"not there and also not there"* pointing to the photos from Queens and Tibet. He continued, *"But my life is at both places and many more in between".*

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which exile Tibetans make do in the backdrop of surveillance and policing of their bodies and neighborhoods. Since the Nepali state codes Tibetan commemorations and actions of remembrance as deviant and illegal to appease to the Chinese state, Tibetan refugees have moved such moments of remembrance into secret, private spheres.

As the discourse of the *khatag* ban elucidates, the Nepali state conflates Himalayan Indigenous peoples and Tibetans thereby reinforcing historical forms of marginalization through the policing of an object that is shared among Himalayan and Tibetan communities. What this has inadvertently caused is the gradual move of Himalayan communities away from Tibetan politics.

In Taplejung at the Nepal/Tibet borderlands, exile Tibetan and Himalayan Indigenous peoples engage in strategic forms of placemaking by reworking and rupturing remoteness. However, their mobilities - sustained through objects of flight, portrayed in family photographs, and retold as life stories - express not only their conceptualization of a multifocal sense of place but also illustrates how place itself is always in the making.

The conditions of exile for Tibetan refugees in Nepal are embodied in their objects of flight. For them, these objects become the medium through which to express their political potentialities. Some exile Tibetans find it productive to actively ignore policing and collectively work towards the development of their communities. In actions of placemaking, such as the case with cleaning and fixing the settlement road, their community action speaks to the negligence and the inability of the Nepali state to take care of its own territory. For exile Tibetans, these expressions of memory-making and placemaking are reflected in the objects of flight, the doing of kora, and in the tactics through which they make do in their everyday lives.

Chapter 5. Intimate Social Worlds

In this chapter, I discuss the role of sovereignty in transforming the cultural politics of being at the borderlands. I address everyday and intimate geopolitics to examine how interactions and events reveal the intricacies of macro-scale Nepal-China geopolitics. Tibetan refugees in this region engage in strategic forms of intimacy with the Indigenous Walung and Ghunsa communities to negotiate placemaking and political belonging within Nepal. Tibetan refugee interactions with Walungnga and Ghunsali communities are juxtaposed and conditioned by various manifestations of everyday life. For example, kinship and familiarity occurs across communities, while in other cases familial ties are viewed with suspicion and disruption through covert and overt surveillance by informants who might be neighbors or kin. This surveillance has precipitated by increased Chinese presence in this region, and seeps into everyday life through eavesdropping, rumors, and gossip.

This chapter draws from my ethnographic research with Tibetans and Ghunsali and Walungnga peoples. I interviewed many of them in in their villages but also in Boudha where a large number of people from this district reside in close proximity to one another in Kathmandu. The photograph in Figure 5.1 is from one such neighborhoods in Boudha informally called *Walung Chowk*, an intersection renamed by the villagers as such, whose lives at the borderlands are at a crossroads. I briefly describe the villages of Phale, Ghunsa, Yangmu, and Walung to provide a general overview of daily life in these places.

Figure 5.1 Walung Chowk: placemaking at an intersection in Boudha, Kathmandu

The villages of Phale, Ghunsa, Yangma, and Walung see infrastructural absences in many forms. None of the villages are connected by road to the Nepali road grid. Although a road is being built that will connect Walung to Lelep and then to the regional municipality of Phungling and then to the plains of Nepal. And while 5G networks reach parts of the world and stakeholders at some regions debate the totality of connectivity through 5G wireless technology, Phale and Ghunsa only received 2G phone connectivity in 2019. Before that, the only way to communicate - except for paying an exorbitant amount to a satellite phone owner in Ghunsa - was to walk two hours uphill on a mountain path to perch oneself to the side of the cliff to receive network on a CDMA channel (Figure 5.2). Even then, the “network” was patchy, and it always felt like a bad radio signal on a walkie-talkie.

Figure 5.2 On the only mountain side that receives CDMA wireless connectivity

Nyima, the youngest monk in the Phale monastery – with whom I became close, and he later became my unofficial mit[28] in the village - tried numerous times to reach his mother who lives in Tibet through the CDMA line. After trying numerous times and still losing “minutes” on his newly recharged card, he was finally able to contact his sister in Shigatse to let their mother know that he is well in Phale. He tried his mother again to no avail. Unsuccessful yet unsurprised, he turned his phone off and then we made our way downhill towards Phale (Figure 5.3). He would come back again the next day to try to reach his mother. This winter, while the other four monks at the monastery will descend for pilgrimage to various sites in Nepal and India

[28] *Mit* or miteri relationships are a form of “fictive kinship...between two individuals and in some instances by extension between wider categories of kin....It provides a measure of relief from the highly restrictive and hierarchical expectations of both caste and kinship” (Messerchmidt 1982, 35).

(Sarnath), it is his rotational duty to stay in the village and practice daily monlam and protect the monastery from imminent theft. This necessitates that he remains in the village and will not be able to travel to Tibet this winter. He shares his worries: "*what if they stop us from going there anymore?*". I stood silent unsure how best to respond when he replies to himself, "*as a monk, I should live in the present!*"

Figure 5.3 Nyima after his unsuccessful attempt to reach his mother in Tibet

This living in the present that Nyima wants to focus on to avert from feeling continuously anxious is, as he notes, an emphasis on creating just temporalities. He understands that there are new forms of border practices and securitization are that are surfacing at the borderlands. He is also aware that Phale Tibetans are caught within this state temporality of *bikas* (development). If

the region were to see material infrastructure and increased securitization, then the future that Tibetans are anxious about will be realized sooner. If most of the region were to remain as it is today, then the temporality embedded through kinship and continuity will sustain in the region.

The following section begins with a story of extradition to illustrate China’s influence on intimate social relations at and across the borderlands of northeastern Nepal. This is followed by ethnographic vignettes from my engagements with Phale Tibetans and villagers from Ghunsa and Walung to narrate the border’s affective bearings on everyday lives. I use these examples to argue that border logics present contradictions to citizenship and sovereignty. My aim lies in bridging the gap between Tibetan, Himalayan, and Nepal Studies - all of which have rich histories of scholarship on politics and society but only few engagements that speak across the three regional disciplines.

A cross-border marriage

The elevation is 5200 meters. An event of extraordinary rendition is coming to realization. The year is 2017. On a recently constructed mountain road linking China to Nepal, Chinese People's Armed Border Police Force (PABP) stationed at the border town of Ri'og (རི་འོག་) in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of China wait in two couple Chinese-state SUVs. They cross the border at 5200 meters and ride into Nepali territory. They drive some 30 kilometers south of the border to Walung, a village settlement predominantly inhabited by Walung Indigenous peoples. The road ends in the village and does not go any further south to connect with the Nepali road grid. The PABP stormed into a house and held captive a newly married, young Tibetan woman. She was from Ri'og in Chinese Tibet. She had fled a few days ago with a Walung man who

makes annual visits to Ri'og for trade. They crossed the border into Nepal and married in Walung. The PABP places the Tibetan woman into one of the SUVs and steers back towards China. The event of rendition is fully realized when they cross the border at 5200 meters.

Even after the demarcation of the border as a process of state-making for both Nepal and China, cross-border marriages remain common in this region until recently. Of the many participants that I spoke to in Phale, Ghunsa, and Walung, and in conversations with villagers from Yangma, many men married women from Tingye in Tibet. In Phale, after his first wife died at an early age, Dorje, a 40-year-old exiled Tibetan yak herder, went to Tibet and returned with Dawa as his bride from a village a few miles north of Ri'og. In 2019, when Dawa mentioned this story, they had a ten-year-old child studying at a Tibetan Children's Village school in Dharamsala. These familial events of matrimony were very common up until the early 2010s. In contrast to other northern border spaces in Nepal, this region saw border securitization from the Chinese state relatively later. In Phale, while Dorje and I put a tarp on top of the firewood that he cut that morning to prevent dampness from imminent rain, he said,

> *It has become very hard for us to visit family who live away from Ri'og. We are only allowed to go to Ri'og after first visiting the police station and declaring how long we plan to stay in the town. Why do we have to declare how long we decide to stay with our own family? Before, we were allowed to go further north from Ri'og to our ancestral villages but now our family members have to come all the way down to Ri'og to visit us. Although, it is fine. This way we can all stay with our cousins and have a very large*

gathering and eat and drink together. But how can we continue this family and our way of life in these lands if we are not allowed to marry wives from Tibet?

His neighbor and cousin, Dechen - a fifty-year-old Phale Tibetan - who is putting aside firewood in her front yard, jokingly exclaims that he is saying this just because he wanted a second wife. After a flurry of uncontrolled laughter, the air grew solemn. Both Dorje and Dechen realize the complications of sustaining cross-border kinship. If Dorje has visited Ri'og in Tibet multiple times, Dechen has not stepped on Tibetan territory for the past fifteen years because of the difficulty of high mountain passes that she is no longer able to traverse. This is especially so because when Phale Tibetans visit Ri'og in Tibet, they mostly use the higher and difficult Kang La pass (5746m) which during many months of the year involves crossing deep ice crevices. Traversing through this border crossing ensures that they are not subjected to checks by either the Nepali police or the Chinese police at the immediate border close to Walung. Instead, they register themselves as visitors when they reach the police station in Ri'og town in Tibet. Not only Tibetans, even Ghunsali people find it easier to cross into Tibet through the Yangma route as it provides ease of travel and makes it possible for them to skip the border check post in Walung.

I argue that the concept of "living in the present" reveals a shrinking of territorial citizenship and mobility practices in the region. Nyima as I noted earlier understands living in the present in terms of the continuation of kinship practices, co-living, and mobility within and across the borderlands while being attentive to spatial practices that might limit or hinder this mobility. Many women in the village emphasize the gendered ways in which matrimony is situated and

how Nepali law creates impossibilities for Tibetan-Indigenous marriages. Sahana Ghosh (2017) eloquently illustrates how at the India-Bangladesh borderlands, a "close attention to the spatial practices employed by borderland residents opens up a world of negotiation with multiple contingent factors: the ambivalent pressures inherent in kinship, an unequal pair of border control regimes that demands certain performances of citizenship especially of its religious minorities" (51).

In the Phale and Ghunsa region, mobility for matrimonial practices is gendered in the way in which only "wives are from Tibet" as Pema puts it. Existing gender roles and relations associated with marriage, include the expectation that women will leave their birth home to join her martial home (which includes her husband and his family, i.e., the husband's parents, his siblings, and potentially another married brother and his family). This customary practice coupled with Nepal's patriarchal citizenship laws further entrench women's unequal status in the family and nation. Nepali citizenship law remains fundamentally patriarchal. For example, Nepali women's bodies reproduce new *citizens* but women cannot themselves bestow citizenship onto their children (Thebe Limbu, 2015). Therefore, if a Nepali woman marries a non-Nepali man, neither her husband nor their children have a direct path to citizenship through her. These patriarchal tendencies are enacted at the local scale when women face the impossibilities of regional bureaucracy at the District Administration Offices (DAO) while applying for citizenship for themselves or for their children.

Therefore, cases where male Tibetan refugees have married *yehi ko keti* (trans. Nepali, a woman from within Nepal) remain in a liminal space, as citizenship is not easily attained. Tashi's (a

Tibetan refugee) and Pema's (a Nepali citizen from Lungthung) marriage is one of those familial relations. Even though Tashi is married to Pema, a Nepali citizen, due to the patriarchal structure of the law, this marriage does not provide him with a path for Nepali citizenship. This underscores the gendering of state practices through gendered forms of categorization and citizenship.

Many people in this region navigate through multiple citizenships - Nepali and Tibetan. This practice I argue is a form of embodied refusal that is not a refusal to, and of, citizenship (McGranahan 2016) but refusal to a life that is dictated by one state. It is to refuse a life that is demarcated by national borders. Many families possess papers that allow them to move across Tibet and Nepal, which provides an opening to a world in which "alternative ways of imagining the social, political, and natural orders that trouble or upend the norm of sovereignty" is possible (Bonilla 2017, 334). Drawing on Michel-Ralph Trouillot, Bonilla (2013) asks us to pay attention to the "terrain of the ordinary" not to romanticize banality but to view it as a "critical site for the investigation of global, interconnected, historical processes" (165). However, these forms of mobilities and alternative ways of imagining social worlds—beyond the bounded spaces of sovereignty—are under threat due to new method of securing the Nepal-China border.

I return to the event of extradition. This event exemplifies intimate geopolitics, as Chinese state's border politics disrupt the intimate entanglements of people on both sides of the border combined with the Nepali state's power to determine the ability and legitimacy of cross-border marriages. This further exemplifies the intimate effects of Nepal's obedience to China's geopolitical influence in exchange for additional investment and development assistance. Although China has

been persuading Nepal to sign a Treaty of Extradition since 2015, no such agreement has been officially recognized or signed. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Nepal allows intimate disruptions through micro extraditions to occur in marginalized communities that are excluded from Nepali state protections.

Therefore, the event of extradition, narrated above, remains illegal and extrajudicial. It reveals the covertness of everyday surveillance and eavesdropping. For the Chinese police to travel across the Nepali border knowing exactly within which house the Tibetan woman resided, has been perplexing to locals, and validates the rumor that some Nepali people may be Chinese informers. This extraterritorial practice of Chinese sovereignty is much more pronounced for Tibetan refugees who live in Phale. And if the extradition is to become legal in the future, it deepens the impossibilities for Tibetan refugees at the margins who already live in an affective state of insecurity and geographies of uncertainty. I argue that these tensions and impossibilities will expand further as China seeks to increase border security and geopolitical influence by way of diplomacy and economic aid and development in Nepal. This argument is shared by many of my interlocutors—particularly human rights advocates and activists—in Kathmandu who have worked tirelessly to safeguard Tibetan political and social life in exile.

This example of extradition illustrates an intimate geopolitics through the securitization and border and control at the scale of the body and through the policing of cross-border intimacies, such as marriage. The Nepali and the Chinese states have rendered certain cross-border marriages illegal, particularly when they violate state authority, border managements, and the control and containment of marginalized ethnicities and Tibetan refugees. The dispossession of the Tibetan body and the policing of intermarriage between Nepali citizens and Tibetans

exemplify gendered citizenship along with Chinese influence and Nepali state compliance. In this way, women's bodies are the borders upon which different scales of patriarchy are enacted from family and community to state and inter-state geopolitics (Smith 2020). Social reordering and political negligence by the Nepali state, inasmuch as political aptitude, are the ways in which the state ensures that territory and territorial effects are preserved in particular ways. By disregarding and overlooking the event of illegal rendition, the Nepali state and its regional district governments in the northern borderlands bring border citizens into its calculations. The state also extends sovereignty onto the bodies of Indigenous people and Tibetan refugees, not to provide them with the protections afforded to Nepali citizens at the top of the socio-political hierarchy, but rather to meet the state's own geopolitical and geo-economic objectives. Thus, both Indigenous and Tibetan communities are marginalized and controlled under the umbrella of border security. Securing territory as a form of sovereign practice becomes political techniques through which the state apparatus functions at the borderlands (Beurskens and Miggelbrink, 2017; Elden, 2013).

Further, negligence from the central government provides opportunities for regional administrators to re-interpret and practice their own forms of sovereignty (Kraudzun 2017). In Taplejung, sovereignty is reinterpreted through the customary gift giving of Tibetan rugs to the Chief District Officer during the yearly renewal of Tibetan refugee documents reinforcing sovereignty at regional scales of politics. When I asked a senior officer in the Phungling, the Taplejung district headquarters about the extradition, he noted, "*We are aware of what happened, we have notified Kathmandu, that is all we can do*". This revealed political inaction by underscoring the limits of his own power at the regional scale. Awareness is not action. Even

in this action of overlooking, border citizens remain the object of sovereign power, and territory becomes the means through which to achieve it. Here, Nepali state logics vis-a-vis the border view Tibetan bodies as refugees as a paradigm of state making - the ability to decide which bodies count as citizens within its territory and which bodies are situated into the liminal and gendered categories of political belonging. In doing so, the state excludes narratives of placemaking and making do that is conditioned in the contemporary moment by the "emotional residue of the unnatural border" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3).

While state narratives of borders create particular national discourses, the border itself is realized through materialities and everyday realities of interactions with border infrastructures and ways of bordering (Ghosh 2021). Communities at the borderlands place the understanding of their communities in relation to the border as they occupy the spatial corners of territorial Nepal. In the Nepali context, as much as it is in other South Asian contexts, the border between nation-states does not imply that an ethnic and Indigenous community abruptly stops living and existing beyond the national territorial boundary. All along the Nepal border with India and China live ethnic and Indigenous communities that have deep kinship and cultural relations with people across the border. Although spatially seven-seas away from the places that I write here, I find it pertinent to think through decoloniality with Gloria Anzaldua's borderlands. She aptly states, borderlands are "where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, 1987). The territories of Walung, Ghunsa, Yangma, Phale, and Gyabla in contemporary Nepal are such that the ecology of things is interrelated in and across the border for as long as they can remember to call it memory. Phale Tibetans' placemaking here – and of the Indigenous groups in the region - is through their engagement with yak herding in high mountain pastures, networks of

trade, histories of mobilities, affects and intimate social relations with other villages, and their territorial deities that demarcate placemaking. Because of these interconnected lives with villages in and across the border in Tibetan towns like Ri'og, Phale Tibetans construct their social milieu by carving out intimate and affective cartographies of kinship that counter the logics of the border (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 The women of Phale. Who is a citizen, who is a refugee, who is Indigenous?

Kothiyal and Ibrahim (2021, 2) note that "the shifting contours of national belonging, that is, who is or is not a citizen, demonstrates that borders are not encountered—either in law or practice—as always-already existing territorial demarcations". Questions of political belonging in the northern Nepali borderlands draw on the politics of borders along Nepal's border with

India. The Nepali hill centric Bahun and Chettri elites in power have historically and in contemporary times conceptualized forms of transnational belonging in the borderlands as a form of political illegitimacy to citizenship. Political belonging through claims for citizenship by communities along the borderlands are questioned and inextricably defined through gendered and patriarchal norms. Perceived as borderland peoples by the hill-based political elites, the 2015 constitution of Nepal regressively denied women to pass on Nepali citizenship to their children. Many politicians cite the fear of Indianization of the Nepali population if Nepali women were to marry Indian men after which their children will be Indianized. This further underscore a patriarchal representation of gender relations, i.e., men are expected to dictate the social and national identities of the family.

In these territorial and intimate geopolitics, Madhesi women embody the anxieties and fears of Indianization (Grossman-Thompson and Dennis 2017; Lal 2020; Smith 2012). Many politicians place the same logic of territorial anxiety over the body of Himalayan Indigenous women. In the context of the northern border with China, the desire to control the population-territory nexus is exacerbated as cross-border marriages and kinship are now securitized along with the securitization of the border to control movement of Tibetans from TAR into Nepal.

However, when bodies are vulnerable to state border practices, they "experience and produce smaller scale forms of territory" (Smith et al. 2016, 259). Bodies are not objects of state power or of geopolitical analysis, rather they are active, territorial agents (Smith et al. 2016, 259). Thus, Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans engage with these security regimes by reworking their

place within the state-security-territorial apparatus through multiple forms of placemaking and making do.

Walung and Ghunsa Social Worlds and Tibetans in-between

Scholars have called for researchers to align their analyses with the political aims of Indigenous groups. While this remains essential for counter geopolitics, focusing on Walung indigeneity silences the claim for space and recognition by other smaller Indigenous peoples that have been subsumed into the larger Walung identity. Here the politics of scale provides a method for understanding the nuances of Indigenous identities in this place.

During the Panchayat regime in Nepal (1960-1990), documents became essential to avoid dispossession and historical invisibility. Elders from Walung, Ghunsa, and other villages have over the past few decades worked to (re)construct their histories and folk stories to remain visible and relevant to the Nepali state. Ethnic groups started organizing in Nepal more cohesively in the early 1990s for political recognition. During and after the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), Indigenous communities in Nepal started to make political claims for access to and control over spaces based on Indigenous territorial rights. One political movement in the Walung community sought to establish an autonomous Walung territory within the state of Nepal. Since Walung was an important space for cross-border movements of trade and people, and that the Walungnga were leaders of the regional village panchayat, it was comparatively easier for the Walungnga - although still a relentlessly difficult task - to construct their identities. For this, the Walungnga designated Walung territory as covering the five historic settlements in the region:

Walung, Ghunsa, Yangma, Lelep, and Lungthung into a larger Walung ethnic identity to navigate the Nepali discourse of political belonging[29] (Wangyal 2009).

However, recently elders and leaders from the other villages have spoken about their separate identities and origin stories. Ghunsali people demanded representation through their own identity rather than being subsumed under Walung recognition. For the Ghunsali, Walung does not represent their identities since Walung signifies the name of just one village - that of Walung. By doing so, it erases the histories of the individual villages of Ghunsa, Gyabla, Lelep, and Lungthung. For instance, Tenzin - a village elder from Ghunsa - repeatedly reminded me of the distinction of Ghunsali from Walung Indigenous identity. Tenzin calls out - as do many other Ghunsa villagers - that they are Khambachen-da, literally people from Khambachen. They began calling themselves Ghunsali after moving to, and making, Ghunsa their permanent settlement. Lobsang, who is unofficially recognized as Ghunsa's village leader because of his unwavering faculty, suggests that the term Walung received traction because the people in Walung became famous - as ministers, traders, doctors, and so on - and were able to use the name for recognition. Lobsang notes, *"while the people there [Walung] became famous, कुनाको घुन्सा [cornered Ghunsa] remained unknown"*. However, as Walung ethnicity and Walungge language became codified in Nepali national statistics, identities of other villages remain subsumed under the larger Walung politics of recognition. Walung and Ghunsa were part of two separate Village Development Committees (VDC) earlier – respectively Olangchungola and Lelep. In 2017, after the reconstruction of administrative divisions in Nepal, Olangchungola and Lelep VDCs became

[29] Interview with Sonam Gonjyang, Vice Chairman of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities. For a discussion on ethnic identity politics in Nepal, see Paudel (2016).

wards within the larger Phaktanglung Rural Municipality (*gaunpalika*). But, Walung is still a separate ward and Ghunsa – along with Phale and Gyabla – are part of another ward within the rural municipality. This enables Walung to have primacy over local politics as Walung is the largest village in the ward. Ghunsa and Phale however are within a ward where the ward headquarters of Lelep, further south along the Ghunsa river, is much larger and is a confluence of politics involving Himalayan (Ghunsa) and Yakthung Indigenous politics.

Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997) reminds us that nation-building does not occur in a container that is separate from the world order. Rather, nation-building is tied to, and in a lot of ways conditioned by international relations at the global scale. Ethnic relations that are engendered during nation-building manifest through hierarchical politics of majority and minority ethnicities. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997) argues that *local elites* are continuously challenged by local activists not only at the scale of the local and national but through transnational Indigenous activism enacted at the scale of the global. Thus, when groups use their ethnicity or culture as a marker for political struggles and aims over state resources, culture becomes a tactics through which to imagine alternative political possibilities. The Walungnga sought to expand their population to include the other villages in the region as a tactic of political placemaking. Historically, they defined people outside the Walung village in relation to their place names: Yangmali, Khampachenda, Walungnga. This form of ethnic inclusion under the umbrella of a singular Walung category is a new phenomenon. This form of political performativity seeks to recognize Walung as a coherent Indigenous group in Nepal. Ghunsali villagers claim that they were never Walung peoples. Rather, they are Khambachenda - the people of Khambachen, another mostly unsettled village north of Ghunsa. They now settle in Ghunsa which used to be the winter settlement - Ghun

(winter) and sa (place). Later, Ghunsa became their permanent settlement and Phale their new winter *place*. Ghunsali have mostly abandoned moving to Phale for winter - their houses lay in the rocky landscape of lower Phale - barren and derelict. Since the early 1960s, Tibetans have settled in upper Phale. It is the Tibetan refugee settlement that is arguably the furthest away from both Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and Dharamsala, India, where the Tibetan government-in-exile is located.

For Tibetans in Phale, Walung is a place of nostalgic importance. Their *jowo* settled in Walung for a number of years before moving across the Nango-La pass to Ghunsa and then to the Gelug monastery in Phale. Biographies of the *jowo*, narrated by village elders and monks speak to *his*[30] prominence in the social histories of the village and the histories of mobilities of Phale Tibetans. On an October evening, outside the window, darkness has swept away Phale. Tashi and Pema, his wife from Lungthung, are now cooking cow intestines - steamed and then fried over oil and garlic. At the back of my fuzzy mind, I think about how Dashain - a Hindu festival celebrated by Hindus ethnic groups in Nepal - has started and it might be bad to eat cow meat let alone cow intestines. But then I console myself saying how this is no longer Hindu territory, I realize that we are deep in Gelug territory that cuts a small niche in the long stretch of Nyingmapa tradition along the Himalaya. For Phale Tibetans born in Nepal, Nepal is as much a home as Tibet.

Tashi notes, *"sometimes the lamas tell stories of our mothers and fathers coming here, and tears fill up the eyes"*. For Tashi, Phale is the only home he knows of. His father came to Phale from

[30] The *jowo* is referenced in the honorific both in Tibetan and Nepali languages in third-person, male pronouns. See Ramble (2020) for a discussion on the efficacy of sacred Tibetan objects.

Tingkye, and he has gone back multiple times to Ri'og. Yet his social world is intimately tied to Phale and the northern Kanchenjunga region. Tashi narrates Phale's origins. Twelve to fifteen Tibetan men initially came to Phale in the mid to late 1960s. Nepal *sarkar* (government) at that time gave the Tibetans the choice between Phale, Suketar, and Chauki-danda to settle. The Tibetans chose Phale since it was the closest to the Nepal-Tibet border. They cut trees and bushes to build the first house at the settlement, where they all lived together. The space where they built the house is now vacant - the remnants of which are memorialized by a stone wall (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 walled memories

Their spouses came later after which the men started building individual houses. The Khampa, stationed in Jaritar just south of Yangma, in the early 1970s came to Phale and helped build the

Gelug monastery. The *jowo* moved here immediately after the monastery was completed. All land in Phale is Nepal *sarkar* (government) land. For Phale Tibetans, it is a land where they can live and grow (a gift from the then receptive Nepali government). This story becomes more complicated when non-Tibetans occupy the land for their own private investments. For example, Phale Guest House, which is owned and run by a Ghunsali family, is the first hotel on the walking path in the Phale/Ghunsa trail on the Kanchenjunga trekking route. As Tashi sees it, "*they take all the guests into their roofs. They've capitalized on सरकारी जग्गा (government land) without giving rent or tax to the government*".

Place gains specificity not through a "long internalized history" but through "a particular constellation of social relations" encountering each other at particular moments (Massey 1994, 154). So, thinking of places as bounded territories closes off possibilities for interactions, diversity, and difference. Rather, Massey (1994) asks us to think of place as "articulated moments" where multiple experiences, understandings, meanings are co-constructed. This is important to think through because a place is always in conflict - in the making of its past through heritage and history making, the present on who has access to it and who does not, and the design of its future. After living in Phale, I began to understand Phale as a place in relation to the social worlds of Ghunsa and Walung, all of which are important nodes in the story of meaning making and co-construction of this *borderland* region.

Vignettes of Everyday Life

For long, I was looking at narrow edges of my research questions that are codified through disciplinary vantage points. Watching visual materials and reading notes from the field, it kept

haunting me - the silence of what I might have missed while thinking with the *data*. In thinking about Phale Tibetans, it aches to write the word *refugee*. Now, two generations of Phale Tibetans have been born in Phale or Kathmandu (or recently in New York). Temporality is key in understanding how Phale Tibetans understand the idea of home and placemaking. The construction of multiple homes for most Tibetans is imagined as temporary although two generations of Tibetans in Phale have now lived and learned to understand the world around them from outside Tibet. In the diaspora, the memory of home and the everydayness of the current homemaking practices rub against one another. Placemaking then is an embodied and collective practice that answers to the past yet something that is not romanticized as such. Rather, placemaking through memory is an active experience of making do in the context of contemporary ways of policing political belonging that offers a method for overcoming anxieties about the future.

For Phale Tibetans, Tibet remains in CTA newsletters that reach the village excruciatingly slowly through the Indian and Nepali post-mail. On one spring evening in 2018, Tashi burnt newsletters from the CTA because most of what was printed in the newsletters were both old news and reminiscent of party politics that he was not fond of. As he saw it, the uncertainties that his life rubbed against were not going to disappear after reading the newsletters. While the burning of the newsletters seemed quite mundane - as one can imagine the burning of a newspaper for that matter - the act of burning in the space of the home exemplified "the micro-geographies of social and spatial uncertainty which influence, and are influenced by, wider structural forces of unhomeliness, alienation, and homelessness" (Brickell 2012, 227).

The space of the home is multi-scalar as it is a site where the social and spatial relations traverse and transgress the political (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The *home* for Phale Tibetans - the affective and of the senses - remain in Phale. Rites of birth, of death, and of passages between and beyond these two ends of life are performed in the village - at the local monastery that houses the *jowo*, and at multiple times to appease the territorial deity that stays under a rock escarpment north of the village. *Ek ankhe*, the territorial deity, protects the land and the territory that is confined by spirits and deities on all four directions of the village. In the social production of the political sphere, Tibetans intermingle the sacred with the spatial.

After Tashi's father died in October of 2018, the lamas from the monastery gathered in his house and made torma. The next day, all the villagers - Tibetans and Gunsalis who live in Phale - gathered in Tashi's house early in the morning. Above us, the skies were overcast, and the mountains had a light coat of snow over them. The lamas chanted in the house. Juniper continuously burned in the front of the house. Members of the village were getting ready to carry the torma on large plates to take them to four cardinal directions. I went eastward towards the cliff edge that falls into the Ghunsa river. The lamas, Awa Phurpu and Awa Tenzin called out from the house porch, *"do not look back until you place the torma there, do not look back at the house"*. The placing of the torma on all corners of the village was to create a possibility for the soul to move beyond the social and intimate milieu of the village.

"One of the obvious features of Tibetan geography, especially in the Himalayan region, is its strikingly vertical character, and it is therefore not surprising that this aspect should be emphasized in popular celebrations of the landscape" (Ramble, 1999, p. 5). While the villagers

celebrate the landscape through folksongs and prayers, commemorations are also performed in the verticality of the landscape. In addition to the placing of the torma in the four cardinal directions, Tashi takes prayer flags onto a 1000m steep climb on a rock massif that towers the village to the west. This site of memory for Phale Tibetans - a “rocky steep cliff and ordinarily inaccessible” - is also where a Mil Mi-8 helicopter crashed in September 2006, when the day was “cloudy with light rain” (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, 2006). Twenty four people died that day including Nepal’s foremost geographer Harka Gurung and conservationist Chandra Gurung. Tashi was one of the locals that went to the search party on a sleepless night with clothes drenched in cold rain searching for bodies from the crash. All the men from the village were there. The women left behind in hopes that they find the bodies and that their kin return safely. If the Nepali state is ill-equipped in these vertical terrains, Phale Tibetans and other villagers in the region are cognizant of the landscape and hold the physicality of the landscape as sacred and that which remains affectively close to their oral histories and lived memories.

In recent times, Phale Tibetans and Ghunsali villagers are aware of the broader politics of infrastructures that shape narratives of Nepali development (Murton 2019; Pigg 1992). As more rivers are getting obstructed by hydroelectric dams and more hills are denuded by roads, Phale Tibetans and Ghunsali who live along the Ghunsa river are wary of surveyors, geologists, and hydrologists that traverse the territory to collect and record geological data. On my first trip to Phale, I was accompanied by a Kathmandu-based hydrologist who was contracted to travel to Ghunsa to survey the waters of the Ghunsa river for a prospective hydroelectric project. Village leaders - both in Phale and in Ghunsa - were curious yet wary of such surveyors. Tashi becomes furious and frustrated when he sees surveyors measuring and photographing rocks around his

village. He feels that he as a resident of the land needs to protect the land and the territory from such outside forces. Even though the state categorizes him as a refugee, he believes that he is as much a resident and caretaker of this land as Ghunsali villagers are to their territory in Ghunsa.

While there is heterogeneity in how people feel about micro hydro projects on the Ghunsa river, almost all the villagers that I talked to in Ghunsa and Phale speak of possibilities of road construction with animosity. Villagers along the Ghunsa river oppose the road since their villages predominantly cater to the trekking and mountaineering tourism in this mountainous region that is centered around the Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world. Here the trekking route is not as well-pronounced and traversed like that of the Everest and Annapurna mountain treks. The villagers of Phale and Ghunsa - and Walung for that matter - come together for more than marriage, and therefore regional development projects interrupt and disrupt the various aspects of their everyday lives.

Territories are effects of social practices that have material consequences and that involve both human and non-human agencies in its making. Territory-affect as a product of socio-political networks and processes are manifest in these human and non-human agencies and actors that traverse multiple scales of territories (Painter 2010). These vignettes speak to the ways in which Phale Tibetans hold on to and relive their memory of place and territory within the Ghunsa and Walung social worlds. In these ways, memory making is a crucial element of Tibetan placemaking in the Kanchenjunga region. For Phale Tibetans, *home* is affectionately related to practices of placemaking that is constitutive of memory. Home lies in the realm of sacred geographies of the village marked through territorial deities and protective spirits that guard it

from catastrophes of turbulent winds and other environmental disaster. Irrespective of their categorization as refugees, this home becomes their territory that they seek to protect.

Affective borderings in an intimate border world

Emotions are bound in social, political relations and are capable of (re)producing people's subjectivities. Emotion is a key to engage with fear, anger, aggression in the performance of politics (Routledge, 2012). These emotions, drawing on Butler and Athanasiou (2013), have the potential to be political. Through hegemonic national discourses and power/knowledge, certain populations are rendered unworthy to be counted and accounted for. Therefore, the catharsis of certain groups resonates as part of a national imagination of storytelling more than others. The relationality of power and vulnerability are distributed differentially, so to counter the condition of precarity, account for themselves through performative acts of resistance (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013; Puar et al., 2012). In a precarious situation, people are transported into another space - "into a social world in which one is not the center" - when they are moved by what they see, feel, and learn (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. xi). This form of intimate emotion and responsiveness, or the 'geography of responsibility', is a dispossession that gives birth to political action (Davis, 2015). For Gregg and Seigworth, the potentiality of affect lies at a "body's capacity to affect and be affected" (2010, p. 2). Affect marks a body's belonging in a world of encounters (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010).

I draw on Sara Smith's (2020) research to further examine the ways in which states disrupt intimate relationships and how intimacy fragments and seeps into categories politically and socially constructed by the state. People experience territorialization through their gendered

bodies as certain bodies are actors of territorialization through reproduction. Smith (2020) by way of her examination of inter-religious marriage in Leh in Ladakh, India, argues that religious identity is "inescapably political" - each body is configured and marked by encouraged and forbidden intimacies that condition biological reproduction. Border conflicts are remembered, realized, embodied, and enacted in interactions of the everyday that are conditioned by communal politics and built practices. Smith (2013) argues that the intimate geopolitics of borders have made it possible for a "border sensibility to seep into everyday bodily practices" (Smith, 2013, p. 48), and that "territorial meanings" have been mapped onto the body and the landscape (48). Inasmuch as geopolitical imaginations are realized in processes of nation-building, they are acutely experienced in intimate interactions and engagements that are stored and remembered as place-based memories. Further, these geopolitical strategies and conflicts are played out on the body, as people experience territorialization through control over marriage, intimacy, and reproduction (Smith, 2009). In re-configuring hierarchical scales to attend to the lived experiences of geopolitics (Dowler and Sharp, 2001), it becomes clear that the body is not just a site of territorialization, but it is a site enmeshed with emotions, affects, fears, actions, anxieties, collaborations, vulnerabilities, and economic calculations (Fluri, 2015; Hyndman and Giles, 2017; Salih, 2017; Smith, 2012). Salih investigates "fields of affects" that are the "sensual, perceptual, non-cognitive movements, vital forces" that remain beyond conscious knowledge that connect the being of the body to the world (2017, p. 743). In its vitality, affect exceeds emotions. Salih's use of affect in "ordinary relations" makes a "radical political imagination" possible as it uncovers "ways of remembering" that are hidden and unnoticed in macro-scale nationalist frameworks.

Scholarship examining the politics of governance and scale in Nepal have argued that rather than a focus on the national scale, a reorientation to the sub-national or local scales, provides nuanced conceptions and understandings of everyday enactments of authority and the often-competing forms of governance (Laurie et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2016). It is at the micro-scale, where structural violence is realized, negotiated, and contested, and where people experience and perform particular subject positions that either align with governance practices and projects, or resist and move away from state authority (Rankin et al., 2016). It is with an emphasis on local scales of the everyday that it becomes clear the catch-22 situation for women with political and social histories of displacement, exile, divorce, and widowhood (Laurie et al., 2015).

As Berlant notes, intimacy speaks to "familiarity and comfort". Yet, intimacy engenders *disruptions* that can produce events of "estrangement and betrayal" (Berlant, 1998). I argue that this intimate theorization can be one way in which to understand Tibetan refugees' lives within Walungnga and Ghunsali social worlds. Through marriage, familial ties, and membership in kyidugs, Tibetans share comfort and familiarity with the Walungnga. But, at the same time, some Walungnga and Ghunsali are unhappy with particular forms and manifestations of political claims made by Tibetans, because these claims are not accessible or available to them. In the following example, I illustrate these disruptions in the everyday in Phale.

Kelsang's mother is a Sherpa from Lungthung. She has a Nepali citizenship and although many people in this region identify as Sherpa, they are subsumed within the larger and much more recognized Indigenous category of Walung. Pema's other sisters are married to husbands in Yangma, Ghunsa, and Taplejung. Dickyi's father is a Phale Tibetan. Pema met Tashi when she

came to teach at the Phale local school, which was quite larger in the early 2000s. The school now has only one child - Pema and Tashi's three-year-old daughter, Kelsang.

Kelsang has been watching the exact same nursery rhyme on repeat since dawn. Pema is making a batch of rich, powdered milk tea in the kitchen. Smoke from damp fired wood on the pit under the teapot billows into the room. Tashi is separating damp wood to dry in the front yard. Stirring the tea, Pema evokes, "*I am glad that I made citizenship papers back then in Lungthung, if I had not done so, it would be chaos right now*". She speaks of the uncertainties of citizenship, especially so since she married a "refugee".

If Pema, a Nepali citizen, had waited to make her citizenship documents after her marriage with Tashi, she would fall into the vicious cycle of red tape creating impossibilities for her children. Even with her citizenship, because of the patriarchal scalar politics discussed earlier, it is nearly impossible for her to pass on Nepali citizenship to her three children since their father is a Tibetan refugee. The liminal space that Pema, Tashi, and their children occupy remains common. Many familial relations of matrimony in Phale, Walung, Ghunsa, Yangma, Gyabla, and Lungthung are problematized by these gendered, legal dynamics, and are further exacerbated by border politics that delegitimize cross-border marriages. When the state makes particular marriages unrecognizable and outside the gendered structural violence of state patriarchy, the consequences for living and being in the world as political subjects becomes a rather complicated and messy undertaking. Seemingly banal tasks like purchasing plane tickets, SIM cards, and motorbikes, or opening bank accounts and registering at schools become strenuously unattainable.

Here, intimacy marks the distinction between refugee and citizen. Berlant says that this "simple boundary can reverberate and make the world intelligible" (Berlant, 1998, 283). She further argues that "intimacy was supposed to be about optimism, remember? But it is also formed around threat to the image of the world it seeks to sustain" (Berlant, 1998, p. 288). For decades since the "border came in between" them, marriage was one mode of social and political possibility for Tibetans and Walungnga and Ghunsali. It was a medium for a futurity with possibilities - for trade, social welfare, and for education. With the intensification of border regimes through both the Nepali and the Chinese state, cross-border marriages become territorial threats. I argue that by making these intimate relations illegible or illegal, both the Chinese and Nepali states reify the border and their power and authority over this space including intimate mobilities.

While conducting field research, day after day, I witnessed multiple manifestations of hope in Tashi and Pema, in Tenzin and Palden, in Dhondup and Sherab, and many more families who longed for something better for their children. The emptying of the village is a precursor to that hope. Teaching children in the village school means knowledge is derived from Nepali nationalist histories and modalities of being in the world and Nepali as the language of instruction. This is not something many Tibetan or Himalayan ethnic families would prefer. Rather, education in the Tibetan schools - in Tibetan Children's Villages or the Central Tibetan Schools in India or the Tibetan schools of Nepal - ensured that their hopes and dreams for their children to be well versed in Himalayan/Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhist ways of learning remain.

Two elder daughters of Tashi and Pema are in Tibetan Children Village schools in Dharamsala, India. By the evening kitchen fire, Tashi tells me how one year, out of twenty-eight students, his second daughter landed in the tenth position in school. Tashi jokingly asked his daughter how she landed in the tenth place and let the *toppers* slide past her to gain higher scores. In the next term, in a parent-teachers' meeting, the names of the top three students were called out. For second place, he heard his daughter's name. Initially, he thought it was someone else as he was not sure if his daughter was doing good in her studies. Later his daughter yelled, "*pala, it's me. That's my name*". Then he asked her to go run and get the *khatag* from the stage. It was a happy moment for Tashi and a moment that kept his hopes lit. "*If my daughter reaches America, I will cut a yak to feed the village*", said Tashi with excitement. The kitchen fire started to crackle, and Pema teased Tashi for talking too much*, "आगो बेलुका करायो भने बोक्सि आउँछ रे, बिहान करायो भने राम्रो पाहुना आउँछ रे। - If the fire crackles at night, then they say a witch will come, if it crackles in the morning, then a good guest will arrive".* While Tashi is hopeful that his children will someday make it to the US, Pema grounds him in present realities and foregrounds the need to work on the present so to the future possible. Pema continues, "*if they work hard, they might be able to go. But for that, we have to make money too!*".

Such hopes for the children are conditioned by social and spatial relations in the borderlands, which have created diverse political subjectivities based on locality, geography, and intimacies with other Himalayan ethnic communities. Phale Tibetans believe that their parents came from Tingkye (གཏིང་སྐྱེས་) in TAR in and after the 1950s, and that people in Ghunsa and Walung came much earlier, hundreds of years earlier. In honor of the place from where their parents and grandparents came from, Phale Tibetans opened another kyiduk, a mutual aid association

common among Tibetan and Himalayan ethnic groups and named it *Tingkye Kyiduk*. Many Walung and Ghunsa families joined the kyiduk, complicating notions of belonging in the borderlands even more. As people intermarry across places and communities, they see new ways of belonging at multiple places.

Phale Tibetans belong in the social worlds of Walung and Ghunsa, and many a times like the story of Pema, it is the other way round. Tibetans are members of both Walung Kyiduk in Walung and the Kanchanjunga Buddhist Social Service in Ghunsa. Kyiduk in this region can be understood as place-based social organizations through which members claim cultural belonging. Kyiduk supports rituals of birth, death, and other events in life. In the US, Walung Kyiduk America based in Queens, NY encapsulates all three of these communities. Their meetings and picnics prominently feature the Tibetan flag. The materiality of the Tibetan flag in Walung gatherings, and the coexistence across several kyiduk speak to the multiple sites of home and placemaking for Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans.

As such, ruptures in these practices of belonging here led Tashi to say, "*We are the same people. The border came between us"*. Other Tibetans of Phale speak similarly with a sort of affectionate verity. Belonging involves the practice of muting, hiding, and untelling of one's being to align with hegemonic, heteronormative ways of being, doing, and appearing. History and memory are then infused with politics at the margins. While identity formation of Tibetans in exile constitutes the embodied act of forgetting in their everyday lives, McGranahan makes it clear that there is "no single way to experience exile or be a refugee" (2010, 55). Rather, McGranahan meticulously shows how Tibetan exile identities are situated in place. Phale Tibetans' being in

this transborder region complicates the village-led politics of recognition since many families from each of these villages have historically married from and into Tibetan villages across the Nepal/Tibet border.

In recent memory, new cross-border marriages have become increasingly uncommon and are policed by locals who are paid informants working for the Chinese border police or local Tibetan administrations. As Craig (2020) notes in her book on transnational mobility of Himalayan ethnic peoples to New York, these informants are known in the villages. They live in the houses that I and Tashi avoided on our walks around Walung. Through informants, rumor is fed and surveilled through eavesdropping. At the scale of the village, every minute action is felt and realized. Minor changes become the talk of the village. Phale Tibetans are wary of Walung because of the presence of such social and political realities. It is not to say that these social processes do not exist in Phale. Yet, for Phale Tibetans, it creates an atmosphere of fear and anxiety for some and animosity for others. Much of Chinese extraterritorial influence that surfaces in the borderlands of Nepal/Tibet is sustained by the politics of eavesdropping and through rumor, perpetuated by informants. Rumors then become potentialities for political reaction by the state when rumors remain at the fringes of politics. They are also ingrained in the everyday that informs and shapes political actions. Such rumors and politics of eavesdropping aid in the sovereign project of surveilling people at the border.

Sovereignty and border crossings

Shneiderman's (2013, 25) work builds upon a shift in political geography from "border narratives to boundary histories" (also see Megoran 2012). In doing so, such approaches illustrate how borderlands are social processes made through states and citizens. This extends our understanding of how sovereignty and agency are articulated at these borderlands. Trading across borders is easier for border citizens if they possess formal Nepali documents and a border identity card (Figure 5.6). In absence of either of these documents, locals - like the Phale Tibetans - can obtain a *parchi* - an official note - from the local border police post in Ghunsa or Walung. Even with the *parchi*, to avoid having to deal with the Nepali border police at Walung, Phale Tibetans prefer to travel to Ri'og town of Tibet through the Yangma route, which is exponentially arduous - at times the journey necessitates ropes and make-shift ladders to cross crevasses at elevations above 5700 meters.

Figure 5.6 Border citizen card[31]

I argue that Nepali desires for development at the scale of the nation are realized only through the dispossession of Tibetans at the scale of the body. These realities of cross-border mobilities for Tibetans in this region will cease to become realizations and possibilities in the future. Both the Chinese and the Nepali interests in sovereign security include bolstering their borders for the territorial integrity of each nation. As a Ghunsa elder says of contemporary bordering practices, *"for Nepal, we have always been the corner people, we are soon going to be flattened again"*. He speaks of the many ways throughout history that villages in the northeast Nepali Himalayas and hills are rendered as "others" and marginalized from Nepali central politics. To be flattened

[31] I thank Nyima Dorjee Bhotia for letting me photograph his extensive archival materials from Walung

is to take the core out of something [or someone] through acts of consent and coercion. To flatten a community is to dispossess them from their histories, struggles, lived experiences, and memories of exchange, mutual aid, and connections over centuries across territories that nation-states identify as border regions that necessitate securitization.

On the Tibetan side of the border, new assemblages of political and social infrastructures are opening in the landscape creating new forms of trade and mobility logics (Harris 2013; Murton 2017). The construction of a road from Ri'og in Tibet to Walung in Nepal, the making of larger customs and border posts on the Tibetan side has created heightened cartographic anxieties (Painter 2008) for Phale Tibetans. On the Nepali border, the securitization of the Walung areas moved from state discourse to material practice when the Armed Police Force (APF) constructed a border post in Walung. In doing so, the people at the borderlands are placed amidst the security apparatus of the APF, which as discussed in Chapter 1, has histories that are tied to violence, forms of which are "enacted by modern states in the name of sovereignty" (Bonilla 2017, 330).

The photograph in Figure 5.7 of Tashi is of the moment after we have reached the Nango La pass (4795m) on our way to Yangma and Walung. I juxtaposed the photograph with the trails in which Tashi has traversed numerous times. Although trails do not end and start like this on the ground and on a map, borders are imagined as these spaces that demarcate particular distinctions in territory. The space between the upper and lower trails represents the spatiality of the border that is erased through state practices of border securitization. Ri'og is the furthest north that the Walungnga can go with a Nepal-China Border Citizen Entry/Exit Pass Card (see Figure 5.6). The issuance of border citizen cards - to citizens of both China and Nepal who live 30km from the

TAR/Nepal border - is one way in which both states articulate and assert their sovereignties (Shneiderman 2013). Uncommon in other Nepal-China borderland crossings, here, even Tibetan refugees who live in Phale cross the border from Nepal into Ri'og in Chinese Tibet every year where their family members from other villages and towns north of there come to meet them.

Figure 5.7 Tashi and the trails that he traverses

The "boundary biography" of the Nepali/TAR border sites are spaces where multiple citizenships and overlapping state sovereignties are articulated and realized (Shneiderman 2013, 29). Shneiderman argues that the challenge in understanding this border lies in analyzing it as "a socio-politically constituted category of analysis" made possible by historicizing the politics of

the boundary's biography and understanding how the everyday lives of border citizens are conditioned by these processes. While living with Phale Tibetans and among the web of social worlds that they inhabit, I began analyzing the ways in which Tibetan refugees engage with Walung Indigenous peoples. The Walung peoples share a deep history of trade and family with Tibet. The state of Nepal recognizes Walung as an Indigenous community. Yet, many Walung people claim political alliances with the CTA by obtaining official Tibetan identity documents. Conversely, many Tibetan refugees in the region receive Nepali documents through engagements with Walungnga and Ghunsali people. Love and marriage are primary examples of these entanglements. If some become citizens by obtaining paperwork through informal means, others become citizens by claiming themselves as members of other Himalayan and ethnically Tibetan groups (Sherpa, Tamang, Walung). Up until 1990, the CTA discouraged exile Tibetans to receive other citizenship citing that these were acts of disloyalty to the Tibetan cause. In 1990, "Charter for the Tibetan Exiles" was ratified to denote that Tibetans can obtain citizenship from other states in the condition that they remain loyal to the Tibetan cause and that they pay taxes to the exile government (Frechette 2002). Deconstructing claims for Tibetan authenticity, Yeh contends that Tibetans attach stigma to Tibetans who receive citizenship from either India or Nepal as this denotes leaving aside hope for an independent Tibet. However, Tibetan authenticity is not questioned when Tibetans obtain citizenship in the United States, Canada, or other states in the West through varied political and migratory trajectories (Yeh 2002).

In the Tibetan exile community, "narrative possibility is intimately tied up with political hegemony and social reproduction" (McGranahan 2010, 769). If in pre-1950s Tibet, the ability to speak of history in first person rested primarily with male elites, non-elites have constructed

spaces for narration in exile. Since place-identities are always in the making "by reference to the past" (Massey 1994, 8), the past becomes a threshold through which to define belonging in a place in the present. This is evident in the ways in which Phale Tibetans narrate their histories of mobility and intergenerational attachments to the village of Phale. Phale becomes the site of "fields of affect: sensory, perceptual, non-cognitive movements, vital forces beyond the realm of knowing which connect bodies to the world" (Salih 2017, 743). Salih's use of affect is pertinent here as it uncovers ways of remembering that are hidden and unnoticed in macro-scale nationalist frameworks - of either the CTA, Nepal, or the PRC. Through this understanding, subjectivities, and social worlds of Phale Tibetans are constitutive of place-identities formulated in Phale and through their relations with Ghunsali and Walungnga Indigenous peoples. The embodied acts of Phale Tibetans to align to a place - deeply and territorially - make it clear that there is "no single way to experience exile or be a refugee" (McGranahan 2010, 55).

It was historically common for Tibetans to marry from families across the region - Walung, Ghunsa, Gyabla, Lungthung, Yangma. Noble and elite families of northern Nepali communities married into communities across the border in Lhasa, Shigatse, and other towns. The Walungnga married within their own class in Tibetan towns (Bista 1979, 21). Yet, details on the towns and where men/women marry are unclear from Bista's account. Histories and memories of intimacy continue to this day but are now glazed with secrecy. The border is a relatively new creation in this place and is continually being re-made to fit the extraterritorial interests of China through its influence on the Nepali State. These social relations among Tibetan refugees and Walung/Ghunsa Indigenous peoples create possibilities for political intimacy along multiple sovereignties for both populations.

While Nepal and China have created different modes of citizenship for border citizens, some Tibetans have claimed Nepali citizenship identifying themselves as belonging to the ethnic Tamang group to avoid political impossibilities as Tibetans (Shneiderman 2013). If Walung peoples living in Walung-identified territory (situated in another mountain valley across the Nango La pass, a two-day trek from Phale) are Nepali citizens, Tibetan refugees in Phale are sans papiers. Yet Tibetan refugees exist in Walung social landscapes through participation in Walung politics of indigeneity and representation. Tibetan refugees constitute a politics of subjectivity through interactions with this space. If they rupture the notion of sovereignty, Walung people do so too through political intimacies with multiple sovereignties. In Humla, Limi villagers navigate such "overlapping sovereignties" through new forms of mobility for trade and labor, and in doing so partaking in "making Nepali citizenship...to enjoy an exceptional form of it - border citizenship - the origins of which are in everyday practices 'from below' that precede the border itself" (Yeh 2019, 14).

In the northern Kanchenjunga region, in the villages that I focus here - obviously excluding the settlement of Phale - integration into the Nepali and Indigenous sovereign folds are much stronger than in regions like Humla in western Nepal. Walung's Gowa (chief village leader) have played key roles in negotiations during the Tibet-Nepal war and have overseen land and trade tax for the border region since 1841. Unverified accounts show that as early as 1775, during disputes with Sikkim, Walung leaders presented evidence that Walung territory lied within the political realm of Nepal (Thapa 2009), which solidified Walung loyalty with Nepal. The Gova administered five villages: Walung, Yangma, Ghunsa (and with extension Khambachen and Yalung), Lunthung, and Lelep. The historical lineage from this local Gova administration have

remnants in contemporary Indigenous politics of representing these five villages as Walung region as discussed earlier. It is key to note that before 1775, Walung villages were under the Subba system of administration within the Upper Kirat Limbuwan territory.

For Arendt, action is the beginning of something, action engenders something new - in it lies natality. Action makes the impossible possible and challenges the ways in which normative and hegemonic political discourses structure social worlds and knowledge making practices (Arendt 1958). I find here a direct link between how Arendt theorizes action and how de Certeau employs "the practice of everyday life" particularly Arendt's philosophy that through action people can interrupt the automatic course of their everyday life (Arendt 1958; de Certeau 1984). Reeves (2011) focuses on "ordinary affects" to argue that territory does not belong only in state imaginings of sovereignty. Rather, territories are sites where "borderland dwellers...improvise, cobble together, and mirror each other's actions: 'fixing' the border here poised in the fragile space between enactment, repair, and pretence" (Reeves 2011, p. 920). Similar attention to situated knowledges of action in the Nepal borderlands moves political analysis away from Walung peoples' singular identity of being in one state, and rather places it in multiplicities that are engendered through political alliances across multiple sovereignties that repurposes and intervenes borders. It creates a new understanding of borderlands that is ruptured yet re-imagined in the backdrop of new Chinese influence at the border.

Conclusion: Thinking through hope

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which intimacy produces affection and familiarity at one end, while at the other engendering notions of disruptions on familiarity in the everyday. I do

so through a theoretical lens of intimate geopolitics and politics of scale with attention to affect and emotions in conditioning the everyday at the borderlands. The narration of actions and events of everyday life in the northeastern Nepal borderlands elucidates the multiplicities of identities, engagements with geopolitics, intimacy, and placemaking that are engendered through political and social alliances across multiple scales. If Walung and Ghunsa peoples are Nepali citizens, Tibetan refugees in Phale are *sans papiers*. Yet Tibetan refugees exist in Walung and Ghunsa social landscapes through participation in Walung/Ghunsa politics of indigeneity and representation. If Tibetans rupture the notion of sovereignty, Walung peoples do so too through political intimacies across multiple identities and sovereignties. In conclusion, these modalities of sovereignty and intimacy create a new understanding of borderlands that is simultaneously being ruptured and re-imagined.

Day after day, I saw multiple manifestations of hope in Dorje and Dolma, Tashi and Pema, and many other families who longed, and acted, for something better for themselves and their children. Kinship, kyidug relations, and the political will to action are how Phale Tibetans in the northeast Nepali/Tibetan borderlands conceive and nurture their futurities through coexistence in the backdrop of increasing political anxieties over technologies of securitization that will border their lives even more because of the political apparatus in the making in these vertical zones of converging sovereignties.

After lunch on a new moon day (*gobi tarkari* with sheep meat from Tibet that a senior monk brought along from his recent trip), Tashi and I walk southwards along the Ghunsa river. We are headed to a तार (relatively flat space) down from the Phale gate, and further south from the पहिरो

भिर (a landslide cliff). Besides the trekking trail that is on an incline, there is a small area that is flat. Here, below a huge rock, Tashi plans to start an eatery - mostly tea and biscuits. It is better than sitting at home, Tashi states. Once we get there, he starts clearing the bush and plants that occupy the space. I try helping but the stems of the plants are thorny. "*Sir don't do it. You might cut your hands*". I oblige. He keeps calling me sir, and I keep calling him sir. After clearing the bush, Tashi starts setting up a rock wall enclosement. It starts to look like a fort. I ask if he needs help. He says I might press my hands on the rocks. With little or none to give, I start clearing plastic off the trail - remnants of what used to be biscuits, instant noodles, chocolates, chewing gums, Red Bull cans.

Entrepreneurship is interesting to think about and even more so to live with. Money is hard to come by. For Tashi and Pema, even 1000 Rs. per day for the household is hardly enough to sustain their lives here in Phale and their two daughters who are in Dharamshala. Opening a small tea shop on the trekking trail creates an avenue through which Tashi and Pema realize their future as hopeful.

While I sat next to the trails, I thought about how forms of exchange were still practiced – mostly with vegetables and food stuff. One evening, Nyima, the youngest monk went to a villager's house to ask for some vegetables. Nyima waved at me while he was returning to the monastery with a cauliflower in hand. When he had started cutting, he noticed that the vegetable was infested from within. Then, Awa Tenzin, the head monk, frustrated that the villagers gave an infested cauliflower, came towards Tashi's house, and asked for some vegetables. Tashi gave him a healthy cauliflower. Tashi noted, "*good things will happen to you only when you do good*

things to others". I remember this short incident as a way in which Tashi perceived how the interlinkages between reciprocity and good intentions create "good" futures.

While I was writing these notes into my diary, Tashi walked down into a forested section of the trail that led directly into the Ghunsa river. When I go looking for him, I clumsily hit a small stone that breezed through the hill. The size of a large potato, it had potential to seriously injure. It missed Tashi's head by a few inches. Ignoring such potential of fatality, Tashi starts cutting a tree with his *khukuri* and before it is completely off its bark, he holds onto the tip right above the cut and lifts it. He carries the tree upward and pushes it up the cliff. I catch the top end and pull it up on the trail. With all the strength I could muster, I lift it up and place it inside the tea shop. The next day, the plan is for the whole family to come out here, finish setting up the teashop (Figure 5.8), and then open the store to people passing by. Tashi and Pema think about this new venture with much hope. Tashi says, "*free मा ब्ल्याक टी दिनु पर्छ खैरे हरुलाई" - I'll give black tea for free to tourists*" - with hope that the tourists spend a little more at his eatery.

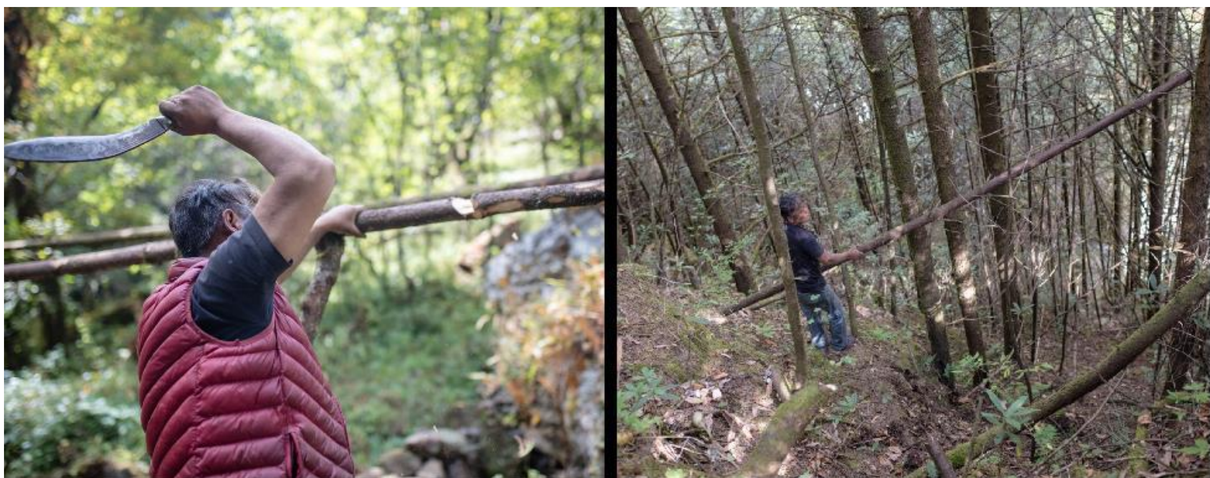

Figure 5.8 Tashi constructing his teashop next to the trails

As the state increases the policing on cross-border marriages, it seemed like Tibetans and Indigenous peoples in the region, who felt ignored by the state, are now finding themselves acutely under the scrutiny of the state. But it might be untrue to state that people in the region are in constant, objective surveillance from the state as communities find novel ways in which to move about space and create place. Even though Walungnga and Ghunsali peoples have talked about local-global connections and the importance of mobility, they are able to do so because of their status as highly mobile citizens of the borderlands. However, Tibetan refugees in Phale do not have access to the same privileges of mobility as Ghunsali and Walung peoples. For Phale Tibetans, to carve a refugee place in a state territory is to reiterate through cultural and religious placemaking practices the sanctity of the place itself through rituals that ensure territorial deities protect their current home village. And although similar practices are performed in Walung and Ghunsa, these practices do not take precedence over defining their ethnic and Indigenous political identity. It is not to say however that these villages are so disparate from one another that there are no commonalities. Ghunsali and Walung villagers (and people from other villages in the region including Phale, Yangma, and Gyabla) share intimate pasts and presents. Locals have inter-married for many generations because of which many have familial relations throughout the region, including across the border. Up until recently, this practice was common. However, the securitization of the border as part of the larger Nepal-China geopolitics and the criminalization of unwarranted border crossings have made these marriages illegal rupturing kinship and temporal connections across the border.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

China's growing role in international development is realized most acutely through the establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with an initial operational budget of 100 billion USD. AIIB's goals are materialized through the BRI Initiative that seeks to connect China with other regions of Asia, Europe, and Africa through land and maritime routes. The BRI foregrounds the possibility of mobility of peoples, capital, resources, and commodities at the expense of local dynamics. This dissertation examines the geopolitical costs of Chinese development in Nepal for the Tibetan refugee population and Indigenous Himalayan communities, particularly living at or near the Nepal-China border.

At a macro-scale, Nepal seeks to integrate itself into the vast networks of capital and resources made possible through China's Belt and Road Initiative. This gives Nepal an opportunity to move away from Indian dominance on trade, capital, and politics. The 2015 earthquakes in Nepal produced geologic effects of a great magnitude killing approximately 9000 people. As much as large earthquakes produce shockwaves, this geological event produced new shifts in Nepali politics. For most of the twentieth century, Nepali trade and import of materials was monopolized by the Indian state and markets. Immediately after the earthquakes, in response to and in support of the Madhesi opposition to the Nepali constitution, India blockaded its border with Nepal. Nepal was economically locked in from the south, east, and west where it shares borders with India. In response, political leaders in Kathmandu looked towards China to assist with resource shortages even though the earthquake had damaged the two roads that connected Nepal with China. Foregrounding these geopolitical and geoeconomic processes, I study how

new forms of Chinese influence in security and development create new political subjectivities for Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how, based on the Muluki Ain, the idea of the Nepali nation is founded on Hindu cosmologies and hierarchies that privilege Bahun-Chhetri populations while politically marginalizing Indigenous peoples. Moreover, the Nepali state fails to recognize the diversity of Himalayan Indigenous communities, and negates centuries of disparate place-based histories, dialects and languages, cultures, and their ways of being in the world. This gets complicated when the state surveils Tibetans in their everyday mobilities as a form of proxy policing to appease Chinese pressures, and at times sees Himalayan Indigenous practices as inherently Tibetan or as communities who participate in "Free Tibet" practices. So, while previously Tibetan and Himalayan Indigenous communities shared a form of solidarity with one another, in recent times there have been many calls from within the community for place-based politics of Indigeneity that mark Himalayan Indigenous identities as distinctly non-Tibetan identities.

I further discuss how Tibetans fall in-between the discourse of development, as Nepali politicians seek the need to better relations with China for Nepal's future. In doing so, politicians see any form of Tibetan political action as hindrances to the process of Chinese development in Nepal. Chinese-funded media including TV, radio, and magazines, and heritage preservation – especially after the 2015 earthquakes that created an image of benevolence in Nepal for foreign states donating technical and monetary assistance for reconstruction of heritage sites – convey a particular discourse of development. Such discourses of development, narrated through "success stories" of Chinese emancipation and development in Tibet, seek to create a desire for Chinese

development in Nepal. Most importantly, at the scale of national politics, this desire to secure Chinese development by integrating into the BRI creates an alternative economy and politics so that the Nepali state is no longer dependent and reliant on India.

As scholars studying the nexus of development and security make clear, I argue that in sustaining Nepal's interests in *securing* Chinese development, the Nepali state agreed to secure Tibetan refugees by following the directives of the One China Policy, among other geopolitical expectations including greater surveillance and policing of exiled Tibetans in Nepal. China is supportive of, and has funded, the Nepal's Armed Police Force, whose presence in securing the northern border through new bordering practices has created anxieties for Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous peoples.

In Chapter 3, I argue that the Nepali state security apparatus uses visual markers to identify the seemingly illegible forms of Tibetan-ness into neatly understandable and legible categories through forms of surveillance and policing. I discuss how such forms of surveillance and policing are practiced and realized in Boudha and Jawalakhel in the Kathmandu valley. The Nepali state views particular Tibetan events and activities of remembrance and commemorations as non-events that are not allowed to be celebrated in public because of their perceived potential to initiate protests and garner the ire of the Chinese Embassy. Similarly, non-Tibetan research participants see the need to separate the sacred space of Boudha from Tibetan politics. This rhetoric draws from a similar duality of sacred/profane that the Boudha police, Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi, and other local stakeholders employ to police and restrict activities in Boudha.

Even with the intensification of policing and surveillance in Boudha, the complexities, and nuances of multiple local-global interactions in Boudha remain illegible to the Nepali state due to an often-hollow understanding of Tibetan-ness, which are reduced to simplistic readings of corporeality and visual markers of otherness. In these surveilled spaces, bodies and symbols that are labeled as deviant include wearing or carrying the Tibetan flag, clothing and bags with "Free Tibet" or illegible Tibetan scripts inscribed on them, and posters and clothing with the Dalai Lama's portrait. While a technological discourse of surveillance places the importance of cctv cameras in deciphering the illegible and coding them into neatly legible categories, the police are unable to always translate illegible markers to visual cues of legibility. Because of these corporeal confusions, in many instances, the surveillance apparatus has brought not only Tibetans refugees but Himalayan Indigenous peoples who are citizens into the security apparatus. Tibetans employ caution and self-discipline in these spaces even though it is not clear who is watching from the other side of the surveillance cameras.

Territorial narratives as such are enmeshed with emotions, affects, fears, anxieties, and economic calculations (Smith 2012). Racialized bodies become violently thrown into the calculations of nationalist directives that reconfigure relations between everyday practices, the body, and wider scale geopolitical projects (Smith et al. 2016). Through the discussion on surveillance, I discuss how political violence through surveillance and policing is heightened for Tibetan refugees whose bodies are enmeshed in larger geopolitical projects of Chinese influence and Nepali state making practices.

Are you kidding me? It is not only impossible, but also dangerous too. They already take in active Tibetan political leaders in the community for questioning on important Tibetan days. They are outside our schools and community centers, patrolling the streets and looking out for us. These days we cannot do anything, we do nothing. I was only talking to my Tibetan friends a few days ago that in recent years, this country is being built on top of our bodies.

As Jigme, a male Tibetan activist from Boudha notes, Tibetan bodies then become sites where territory is in the making. Police presence in public spaces and neighborhoods with significant Tibetan populations make it difficult to organize a protest or even a small public gathering of Tibetans in these spaces. It is now uncommon to see Tibetan protests in Kathmandu.

In Chapter 4, I argue that Tibetan refugees make do in securitized and surveilled spaces through forms of placemaking that counter, navigate, and ignore securitization by reimagining their presents and futures in their communities. As the Nepali state views public events of Tibetan remembrance and commemorations as deviant, Tibetans are forced to relegate such important days into private and secret spheres. To secure Chinese development, I note how acute attention by the Nepali state places the social worlds of Tibetan refugees at the disposal of state power. However, through collective action, Tibetans make do and communicate the time-space of state neglect in their communities. Alluding to questions of national belonging, when Tibetans clean and fix roads in their neighborhood, they humorously find commonality with the Nepali people – that of the Nepali state's inability to mend roads (regardless of citizenship) and ensure infrastructural needs are met.

I further emphasize the need to understand displacement and refugee experiences by underscoring memory making and placemaking practices. Exile Tibetans sustain a sense of belonging and inter-generational memory making through engagements with *objects of flight*. Objects that they brought along with them from Tibet help them sustain memories of time and space. *Objects of flight* carry the material potentialities to engender forms of intimate sociality. For many first-generation Tibetans, it ensures that Tibetan everyday lives are sustained in particular ways when the future of returning to the Tibetan homeland is realized or when their stories are passed onto future generations of Tibetans. Intimately tied to practices of memory, I discuss how Tibetan refugees negotiate place-based belonging through a multifocal sense of home that emphasize the multiple ways in which they experience and make meaning of the worlds around them.

In Chapter 5, I discuss Tibetan relations with Himalayan Indigenous peoples – specifically, Ghunsali and Walungnga - at the northeastern borderlands of Nepal. I discuss how Tibetans carve out and sustain a territory for themselves in this region through memory, placemaking, and continued spatial interactions with territorial deities. Here, kinship ties among these three communities – and with other nearby villages - are strong and interlinked.

However, China's growing influence at the borderlands and Nepal's subsequent interests in securitizing the borders have created cartographic anxieties for Tibetans, and Ghunsali and Walungna peoples. Increased security at the borders and the need for Himalayan Indigenous peoples to navigate Nepali statemaking practices at multiple scales has created new ruptures among the Ghunsali, Walungnga, and Phale Tibetans. In response to the materiality of the border

and its effects on the community, Tashi, a Phale Tibetan noted evocatively, "*We are the same people. The border came between us*".

Until recently, it was common for families in Walung and Ghunsa to bring brides from Tibet. As the case of extradition makes clear, I argue that cross-border matrimonial practices become sites where intimate geopolitics are realized at the scale of the body. Nepal and China have rendered cross-border marriages as illegal, particularly when they violate state authority, border managements, and the control and containment of Tibetans. The dispossession of the Tibetan body and the policing of intermarriage between Nepali citizens and Tibetans are further complicated by the inherently patriarchal citizenship laws in Nepal. Nepali women cannot pass on Nepali citizenship to their children if their husband is a non-Nepali. For Pema and Tashi, as is the case for numerous other families in the region and elsewhere in Nepal, the gendered citizenship laws prohibit their daughters from receiving Nepali citizenship even if their mother, Pema, is a Nepali citizen.

Through these interventions, I illustrate that Nepali nationalist discourse is constructed and reified to categorize its populations based on corporeal markers and socially constructed, pro-Hindu hierarchies. Similar ways of framing minoritized populations exist across Nepal's borders. While in recent decades, both China and India have public facing images of technological prowess that emphasize a future of innovation, infrastructural development, and global connections, both Chinese and Indian nationalist discourses operate in similar ways to reimagine the population within their territories. India has seen its fair share of populist, right-wing politics that relies on the political ideology of Hindutva, because of which violence is enacted on non-

Hindu and Dalit bodies. China has increasingly surveilled and incarcerated its ethnic minority populations including Tibetans and Uyghurs. While the borders are securitized, the effects of marginalization and persecution of particular communities (Tibetans in both China and Nepal; Dalits and non-Hindu in both India and Nepal) are easily felt across territorial borders.

Through these discussions and interventions, this dissertation: underscores the disruptions and negation of social and political life of Tibetan refugees as Nepal seeks to *secure* its development needs with China; argues that border logics present contradictions to political and social belonging for Tibetans and Himalayan Indigenous peoples; and highlights the multiple ways in which people make do in the backdrop of heightened political control, securitization, and state-based marginalization. In the next section, I outline the ways in I will continue engagements with my research participants in the future.

Future Thoughts: Boudha and the Melamchi Ghyang Guthi

The lineage holders of the Boudha-Melamchi Ghyang Guthi trace their "royal" authority over Boudha to the Rana regime when the Rana rulers granted the ancestors of the current *Chiniya Lama* (literally translates as the "Chinese monk") as the caretakers of Boudha in return for their help in negotiating with the Tibetans during and after the 1855-1856 Nepal-Tibet War. Local accounts vary but Taifo Sing, the first Chiniya Lama was either from Sichuan or Xining (in Amdo), China. In 1859, through a royal decree, Taifo Sing was ordered to marry and settle in Nepal, and to run a Chinese language school. In return, through an endowment from the *Raj guthi* (state trust), the Chiniya Lama was given land in Boudha and the authority to control the space through Boudha in the winter months and during the summer from Melamchi Ghyang in

Hyolmo (Helambu in Nepali). However, local accounts on the history and authority of the Chiniya Lama vary considerably.

Lars Rodseth (1998) uses the analogy of *Rashomon* to understand the competing histories in Boudha. By the early 1990s, when Rodseth was conducting research in Boudha, he noted local criticism against the Chiniya Lama. Two decades later, when I was conversing with monks and locals, there were heightened tensions over the newly initiated Chiniya Lama's blatant use of force and authority in Boudha, his involvement in the smuggling of ancient statues, and the use of Chinese security rather than Nepali security personnel. Local criticism of the Chiniya Lama comes from numerous activities that he was involved in recently. First, Tamang, Newa, and Hyolmo residents of Boudha argue that the Guthi has tapped into the police's virtual and on-the-ground surveillance network to use it to their own benefit. Second, locals protest Chiniya Lama's use of gang members and support from China to maintain authority in and around Boudha. Third, community members are opposed to the Chiniya Lama's self-defined claim that he is the reincarnation and the lineage holder of Padmasambhāva. In an interview in a popular talk show hosted by Rishi Dhamala, Pasang Temba Lama, a monk, and a social activist from Hyolmo, criticized the corruption of the Chiniya Lama: *"He [Chiniya Lama] is operated from China. Why was the need for the Chinese Ambassador to go to his enthronement ceremony? What is the reason for the Chinese Ambassador to visit a mere priest's initiation?"* ("चिनियाँ लामालाई देश निकाला गर्ने पासाङ तेम्बा लामाको सनसनीपूर्ण खुलासा: बौद्धमा खबौँको घोटाला" 2021). A vocal dissident of the Chiniya Lama, Pasang Temba Lama notes that he himself was a "servant" for the family of Chiniya Lama for twelve years working for them in Boudha and Melamchi Ghyang in

Hyolmo. He is now determined to take control of Boudha away from Chiniya Lama's control that is not only "unconstitutional but remarkably anti-national".

On December 10, 2018, volunteers from the Nepal chapter of Amnesty International set up a small table outside the Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi. Next to them were two dozen APF personnel stationed to monitor Tibetan activities (as discussed in Chapter 3). The Amnesty volunteers were handing out flyers and brochures to people passing by to raise awareness of human rights violations globally. Curious to know more, after the taking a few photographs (see Figure 6.1) from the second floor of the Boudha Ghyang monastery, I started making my way down towards their booth.

Figure 6.1. APF and Amnesty International in front of the Boudha Ghyang Monastery

By the time I reached behind the booth, tensions were in the air and a couple of Boudha male residents were vividly angry over the Amnesty's presence in Boudha. One of the middle-aged men was angrily speaking to the volunteers but also simultaneously with the people who had now gathered around him:

> *Is there anything more sacred than Boudhanath, in any country? You tell me [about] your human rights. We have gone through so much difficulty and sorrow. Some people don't have anything to eat or wear. And here you are talking about human rights giving us more pain…No one speaks here. People say nothing will happen to this country. Why will it not happen? We were the ones who carried the weight of the salt. But who will look after our sorrow? There are so many people donating money here [in the booth] and we did not know about it. But what about the support to us?*

I was confused on how so much discussion had occurred while I was coming down just a few flights of stairs. After a few moments, with the request of the APF, the man and his friends left and continued their kora. I asked a man who was resting in the shade behind the large bell:

Author: *What happened? Who was he and why was he so angry?*

He replied: *Eh, he is from here, lives inside there [pointing to the alley that leads to Phulbari]. He got it wrong. These guys [the Amnesty volunteers] were telling him about the refugees around the world. But he thought they were talking about Tibetan refugees [laughs].*

It was perplexing to watch the discourse on Tibetan refugees in Nepal play out so publicly in that moment. That day, there were already many APF and police personnel patrolling and surveilling the space to stop Tibetan activities. In addition, the interactions at the Amnesty's table illustrated the common disapproval and anger that many people – in Boudha and elsewhere - share over what they perceive as the widespread financial and government support Tibetan refugees receive in Nepal.

There are competing Guthi or socio-religious associations that claim authority over Boudha. The discourse that is common among them is the need to restrict Tibetan activities in Boudha. Ngawang, a male Tibetan interlocutor, remembers when a Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi monk and official once remarked to him:

> *Is this your house? This is no place for your drama. This is a public and sacred space for all, and not your private space. This is not a place for you to protest and practice politics. Do not destroy the holiness of this site.*

When the host in the TV program asked Pasang Temba Lama, if he is a representative of the Dalai Lama in Nepal and supports anti-China activities, Pasang replied,

> *If I want to protest China, I would be walking around with the flag of Tibet. I haven't done that. I just consider the Dalai Lama my guru. If the Dalai Lama wants a Free Tibet, I won't know about it, I don't care about it. I just consider him my [religious] guru."* He

further noted that *"the rule of governance in Nepal is such that if you are Free Tibet*[32]*, then you will be jailed.*

Pasang Temba Lama separates the religious from the political while making a comment on how the support for the Dalai Lama and Tibetan politics are not the same and must be separated. However, many locals and the Nepali state do not see any distinction between the two. All non-Tibetan social and political associations in Boudha mark "Free Tibet politics" as a private affair and not something that can, and should, be performed in the sanctity of the public space. Both the Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi and the Boudha police work closely to curtail Tibetan political action in the space by arguing that Boudha is not a space of politics but that of religion and worship. However, to do so, the Guthi operate under the same security logics as the APF in categorizing who can participate in the space and which activities are allowed. The state and multiple competing stakeholders separate the sacred from the profane by labeling Tibetan celebrations as profane rather than understanding them as something that is inherently incorporated into Tibetan religious praxis. Through this project, I plan to continue working in Boudha to study the diverse and disparate ways in which multiple stakeholders claim authority over Boudha, and to examine how a discourse of securitizing Tibetans came to be realized as a common narrative among these stakeholders. I discuss further future projects in the Appendix.

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[32] It is common to refer to any form of Tibetan politics in Nepal with a generic yet politically weighted terminology of "Free Tibet" activities.

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Appendix

Future Thoughts II: Aid and Dialogue

Phale, September 2018. It was evening and the heavy rain started draining on a small walkway that cuts the village in two uneven halves. Inside Tashi's home, we were seated around the kitchen fire. Rain spluttered on the tin roof above us. Tashi said how his house had a sound that reverberated differently in the rain than the day before. Curious as he was, he stood up from next to the kitchen stove and walked to the door. Outside, he realized that the new aural, sensory effect was from the new solar panel donated by the CTA to all refugees in the village. Later that evening, while the rain continued, we crossed the walkway to Pema's house to pick up some foodstuff. Inside Pema's house, the sound that reverberated on his roof was different – here, it was the sound of rain hitting wood and plastic tarp.

A few days before, Jampa Dhondhup, Settlement Officer for shar-wa-ra, and Dhondup Tashi, *Chithue* (Member of the Parliament of the CTA) were in their tour of settlements in the northeastern Nepal borderlands. Before arriving in Phale, they decided to make stops in Walung and Yangma. This angered many Phale Tibetans since they thought it to be illogical that the officials first visited Walung, since Phale is the official settlement and not Walung. While in Phale, the officials observed local elections for village and monastery committees in addition to distributing Indian solar panels to all Tibetan refugee households. The few Ghunsali homes in Phale however did not receive the solar panels. On a previous occasion when the CTA distributed new tin roofs for houses in Phale, non-Tibetans were not eligible to receive them either. Who is a refugee and who is a citizen then can easily be identified through satellite imagery because of the presence of blue tinned roofs in Phale (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Seeing aid from space[33]

While solidarities have created many possibilities in the past and in the contemporary moment among Phale Tibetans, Walungnga, and Ghunsali peoples, development projects - even those that are led by the CTA - are met with identity politics. This has led to increased social friction between Ghunsali and Phale Tibetans. Maila Sir, a Ghunsali teacher in the local school resorted to anger and noted: *"We must work hard to make a living and develop our village, but they [Tibetans in Phale] get gifts and money from the government. You tell me if that is fair!".* Maila Sir's frustration highlights how some Ghunsali villagers, especially those living in Phale, perceive their inability to receive aid as an unfair development practice. Reversely, when talking

[33] Imagery captured from Google Maps; Imagery Copyright 2021 CNES / Airbus

to Phale Tibetans, they argue that Ghunsali and Walungnga people hold privileged positions through Nepali citizenship that creates extended possibilities for them in trade and mobilities in and across the Nepal-Tibet borderlands. While Walung and Ghunsali peoples emphasize local-global connections and the importance of mobility, they are able to do so because of their status as highly mobile citizens of the borderlands. However, Tibetan refugees in Phale do not have access to the same privileges of mobility as Ghunsali and Walung peoples do. For Tibetan refugees in Phale, Boudha, and Jawalakhel – arguably like the experiences of exile Tibetans elsewhere in Nepal - to carve a refugee place in a state territory is to continuously reimagine and reconfigure their places through cultural, social, and religious placemaking practices.

I present the above excerpt to think through how aid eroded a sense of belonging and community at the scale of the local. I had multiple conversations with the shar-wa-ra Settlement Officer and noted the need to incorporate Ghunsali households as aid recipients in the future to avert further divisions in the community. Similarly, a major task for myself lies in working with Phale Tibetans in translating knowledge produced in the making of this research into conversations that can be initiated in the community itself through informal and formal dialogues to imagine just futures.

Future Thoughts III: Citizenship and Belonging at the Nepal/India/Tibet borderlands

On a warm November day in 2018, Nyima Dorjee and I met at G Cafe in Boudha and ordered a couple cappuccinos. Because of his vast networks in the region, and that he himself is a Walungnga, he was helping me meet key people in the Walung community for my research. That

day, we were meeting Sonam Walung, a local leader, then vice-chairman of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), and the chairperson for Walung Upliftment Society.

We walked down towards Naya Bazaar, a new settlement where most homeowners and renters are Tamang, Tibetan, and Himalayan Indigenous peoples. Inside a small alley was a tea shop with a wooden table placed between two long benches. On either side were four men all in t-shirts, except for one who wore a light-black jacket, reminiscent of a lawyer, and round dark glasses. One of the men stood up to make room for me and sat on the bench behind us. We sit closely with another - each with strong milk tea on hand. Sonam Walung spoke with political fervor. In the background, the other two men are playing PUBG, a viral Chinese game that took the youth of Nepal by storm, and so popular in India that it was later banned by the Indian state.

Sonam argued that Indigeneity is tied to territory. He recalls making a map of Walung that he submitted through Walung Upliftment Society to the Nepal government. He did not continue to discuss how the map came to be and if he consulted the villages in the region before making the map. This is crucial, as I discussed earlier, because for political claims making it made sense for Walungnga people to have a larger, coherent population. To do so, Sonam argues that Walung identity encompasses villages including Ghunsa, Yangma, Khangbachen, Phale, Gyabla, and Lungthung. However, as discussed in the dissertation, people from the other villagers have moved away from their classification as Walungnga and now maintain their own identities tied to history and place.

Even though Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans share memories of kinship and intimate partnerships, Walungnga and Ghunsali people are trying to distance themselves from Tibetan refugee politics to be included rather than marginalized from recent transboundary trades and agreements between Nepal and China.

Despite the growing divisions associated between these groups spurred by national and international geopolitics and development, kinship relations through marriage and social organizations between groups continue both at and across the Nepal-China borders. In this dissertation, I illustrated how these groups interpret geopolitical disruptions to their intimate lives as manifested by the border, which Tibetans conceptualized as something that has come between them to create divergent expectations for the future.

Transnational mobility to Sikkim, New Delhi, and across continents to Queens, New York where a large population of Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans now reside, has become one avenue for realizing a common and intimately intertwined future. In my future research, I will study Walung and Tibetan modes of making do in places that they call home by reconfiguring intimate relationships. These globally intimate entanglements make mobility and political life possible for Tibetans, Ghunsali, and Walungnga peoples, especially when citizenship and belonging are questioned in the name of ethno-nationalism.

Future Thoughts IV: Politics of Citizenship in the US

Contemporary border crossings are increasingly violent, hypervisible, and politically fraught, which increases fear and despair among migrants. States and formal political institutions

construct realms and realities of citizenship through the disciplining of bodies. Despite these challenges, migrant futurities remain grounded in hope tied to the potentialities of immigrating to a new country. Transnational mobility to Queens, New York where a large population of Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans now reside, has become one avenue for realizing a common and intimately intertwined future for the communities from the northeastern Nepal borderlands. I will study Walung, Ghunsali, and Tibetan modes of making do in a place that they both equally call home by reconfiguring intimate relationships with one another. These globally-intimate entanglements make mobility and political life possible for Walungnga and Tibetans, especially when citizenship and belonging in the US are met with dispossession and new political and social challenges for immigrants.

The central tenet of this research lies at the myriad workings of borders and citizenship. I will research with Phale Tibetans, Walungnga, and Ghunsali diasporic communities in New York City, where they have developed their "new homes". Individual and collective experiences of this "new home" are fraught with new complications and contradictions that demonstrate the struggles and opportunities associated with mobility, citizenship, and placemaking, and what it means to be an Asian immigrant in the United States. The framework for this research is based on preliminary research that I conducted in Kathmandu on Walung and Tibetan refugee experiences of mobilities from Nepal to the United States through the US/Mexico border.

In 2018, a Tibetan woman based in Jackson Heights, Queens was seeking to find ways to get her nephew out of an immigration detention center, located at an unknown location in Texas. The aunt is the blood sister of Tenzin, a Phale Tibetan and owner of an eatery in Boudha - the one

who I start this dissertation with. His son, now caught in the US-Mexico borderlands, has become a mere number in the statistics for US border policing and securitization (Southwest Border Migration FY 2018). In pursuit of a hopeful future, he became a "victim" of US immigration policy and policing. The cost of his mobility was $35,000. His family handed the money to a Walungnga man in Nepal, who ensured them that the funds reached all the different stakeholders at multiple locations around the world for safe passage up until the nephew reached the US/Mexico border. Seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border has become the new route for Tibetans and Nepali people to enter the US, along with countless other asylum seekers from Cameroon, Myanmar, Eritrea…

"Their job was done [at the border]" - Tenzin spoke of the ordeal with a shroud of obscurity. For his father, "they" were as incongruous as the informal routes of global mobility that his son took to get to the US/Mexico border. Starting in Kathmandu, his son walked, took multiple planes, got on trains, took boats, and swam to finally present himself to a US Customs and Border Protection Officer as an asylum seeker. Within the country, yet outside of it - in a space with no juridical protection or legal representation. His only hope is to wait for his aunt in Queens to help ensure he received adequate legal representation. Once released, he will join his aunt and many others from Phale, Walung, and Ghunsa in Jackson Heights, where these diasporic communities await his arrival. In light of these narratives of mobilities, my research will ethnographically study (1) how Walungnga, Ghunsali, and Phale Tibetans engage in the politics of citizenship while creating new social worlds in Queens, New York; and (2) how mobility across the geography of US/Mexico borderlands shapes their everyday lived experiences as immigrants.

Photographs

BOUDHA

The practice of kora

Walung Hotel

Tenzin's restaurant

Inside the monastery adjacent to the Boudha stupa

Butter lamps on the window of the Sakya monastery

The "big bell" - a space for rest during kora

Lhosar (New Year) celebrations at the Walung Kyiduk building complex

Illegibility

"Free Tibet" at the Tibetan Refugee Clinic

A China Aid tractor in Buddha Park

Signage of the Boudhanath Development Committee

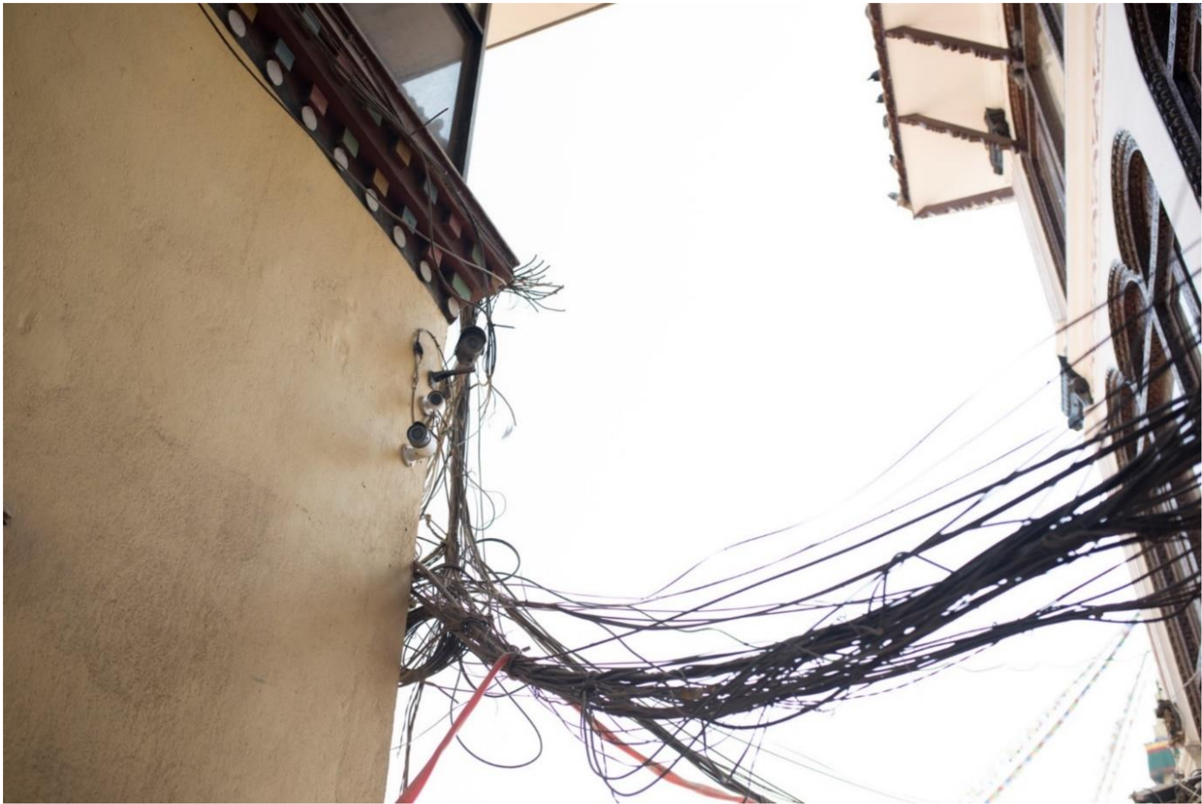
Signage of the Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi

APF outside the Boudha Melamchi Ghyang Guthi

Policing the Boudha kora

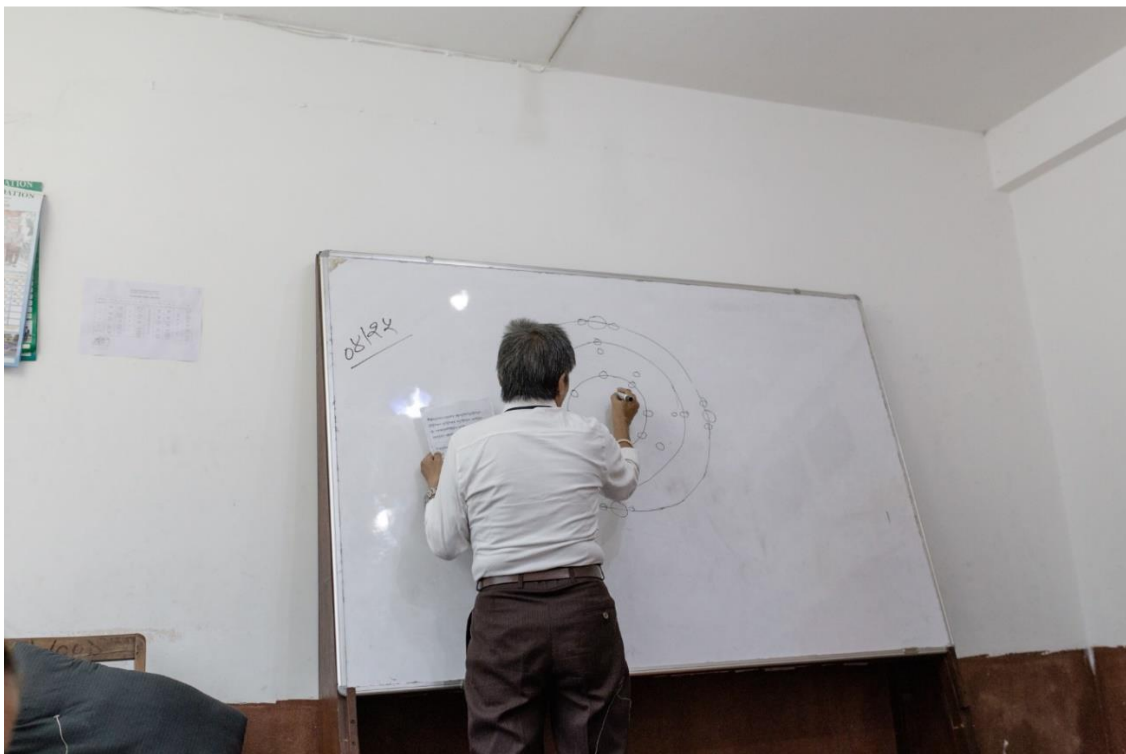
APF stationed at an alley (left) and inside a monastery (right)

Surveillance cameras at the main entrance to Boudha



surveillance cameras at the north entrance to Boudha

Kora in the local monastery



Tsering Dorje leading evening dharma teachings

Policing the settlement

TJ and crew cleaning the settlement road

Tsering Dorje at the monastery

Karma's objects of flight: teacups

Tsering Dorje's Tibetan note

Tsering Dorje's ink pot and pen (above) and yak-leather bag (below)

Amala from Gyabla gathering wood

Drolma in her walks around the village of Phale

Animals of Phale and Ghunsa

Pema making flatbread

Phale Tibetans cleaning the trails

The village of Phale

The spot on the hill on Nango La pass that receives CDMA coverage

Election of village and monastery committees in Phale

CTA officials with Phale Tibetans and a few villagers from Ghunsa and Yangma

Two groups, each with a mix of Ghunsali and Phale Tibetans, compete in archery in Ghunsa

An evening gathering at Tashi and Pema's house

Tashi constructing a teashop along the trekking trail in Phale

Prayers for the territorial deity in Phale

Prayers and preparations for the rituals for the death of Tashi's father in Phale

On the way from Phale to Walung

On the way to Tapethok, starting point for the walking trail to Phale and Ghunsa

Road construction to continue the motor road from Tapethok to Lelep (and eventually to Walung)

The village of Walung

The road from Walung that leads to the Nepal/China borders

Pasang, Tashi’s cousin, weaving Tibetan rugs at her home in Phale

The celebration of Pasang’s daughter’s wedding with a Ghunsali man in Ghunsa

Limbu porters calculating their earnings for the day in Phale

Construction of a new tourist lodge in Gyabla

School in Ghunsa

Jampa Dhondup, Tibetan Settlement Officer, distributing solar panels in Phale