Lauren Gawne*, Gerald Roche and Ruth Gamble

"The bus doesn't stop for us": Multilingualism, attitudes and identity in songs of a Tibetic community of Nepal

Abstract: This paper draws on song texts from two corpora of Syuba, a Southern Tibetic language of Nepal. The songs have rich, interlinking themes relevant to language, identity and the situated context of Syuba people. We draw upon the texts to illustrate themes of identity, relationship, language, development and space. This analysis is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach bringing together linguistic, anthropological and historical perspectives. Through these themes, we come to a nuanced account of a minority language group, who see themselves as Syuba, Yolmo, Tibetan and Nepali, and how these multiple identities co-exist.

Keywords: Nepal, Tibetic, language attitudes, songs, multilingualism, identity

1 Introduction

Kabire Tamang sits in a field, on a blue-sky day that allows you to see the snow-capped, high Himalayan peaks rising behind the 2500-m-high 'hills' in which his village is situated. He looks directly at the camera. "Now," he says, "I'm going to sing a song." But before he sings, he pauses, and leans forward. "Now," he continues, "we remember".[1] On this sunny January morning, he has gathered with a group of other men, and they sing songs; songs about their lives as farmers in the hills of east-central Nepal, about hardship, about family, travel, and language.

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Kabire's song was recorded and made available as part of on-going documentation of his language, which has also recorded over two dozen other songs. These songs span singers, decades and genres, but show consistent themes that offer insights into small-scale multilingualism, attitudes and identity in a Tibetic community of Nepal.

This article contributes to a growing body of literature examining what is variously referred to as 'small-scale' (Lüpke 2016), 'Indigenous' (Vaughan and Singer 2018), or 'pre-colonial' (Canagarajah and Liyanage 2012) multilingualism. Literature in this emerging field examines the practices and ideologies that have maintained high levels of linguistic diversity outside and before both nation-states and colonial empires (see also Aikhenvald 2002, 2008; Cobbinah 2010; Di Carlo 2016; Di Carlo and Good 2014; Epps and Stenzel 2013; Fançois 2012; Lüpke 2010; Singer and Harris 2016). It is founded in increasing awareness of the inadequacy of classical sociolinguistic studies of multilingualism to account for the maintenance of many languages in contexts of durable diversity.[2]

Our contribution to this field is made through an exploration of language ideologies present in song texts from the Syuba people of Nepal (introduced below). Language ideologies are encoded in these texts both in their language and content: they are commentary and metacommentary, discourse and meta-discourse. The songs are significant in being performed predominantly in the local language, in a region where 'singua-francas' (Roche 2020) are commonly used (see Roche 2017 for Northeast Tibet, and van Driem 2001 for Bhutan as examples). The content of the texts is significant in dealing with a range of topics that are pertinent to the connection between language and identity, including relationships between community members, reflections on identity and language, and the affective dimensions of poverty and development. Syuba-speakers demonstrate complex identities as simultaneously Syuba, Yolmo, Buddhists and Nepali. They navigate these identities and their relationships in a world that is experiencing rapid, but unequal, development. New transport routes that pass near the villages connect them to major cities like Kathmandu, but the buses on these new roads still do not come to the Syuba villages.

This article contributes broadly to the literature by exploring language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998) and 'small-scale' multilingualism

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2 Heller and McElhinny (2017) trace the roots of contemporary sociolinguistics to post-WWII North America and Europe. They argue that in both contexts, the discipline has tended to solve problems from the perspective of the state, often associated with issues of integration, modernization, and development. Implicit in the emerging literature on pre-colonial multilingualism is a critique of this form of sociolinguistics that recognizes how the discipline's state-centric and technocratic nature have limited its capacity to describe and theorize pre- and non-state multilingualism.

in the Himalaya. More specifically, we make two contributions to research in the field. First, the site in which we explore small-scale multilingualism is unique in the existing literature, insofar as it is home to high linguistic diversity but low multilingualism. Our analysis contrasts with the tendency to examine small-scale multilingualism in locations where both diversity and multilingualism are high, such as the Amazon, Northern Australia, and West Africa. The article's second contribution to the emerging field of small-scale multilingualism is an exploration of how development works to destabilize small-scale multilingualism, and in particular the destabilizing contribution of the subjective, rather than institutional or material, manifestations of development. Development changes the Syubas' intertwined linguistic and cultural geographies, the way they express their environments through language and culture. This shift, in turn, changes their linguistic and cultural identities, and their language use.

2 Syuba, Yolmo, Buddhist, Nepali: Multi-faceted Syuba identities

Syuba is a language of the Tibeto-Burman family, spoken by around 1500 people, mostly in the Ramechhap district of Nepal (Mitchell and Eichentopf 2013). The language and ethnic group are referred to as 'Kagate' in the Nepali language and earlier academic literature. Syuba is part of the Tibetic group (Tournadre 2014), which includes languages that share a common ancestor in Written Tibetan, including Yolmo, Sherpa and other modern varieties.[3]

Syuba speakers still predominantly live in Syuba-speaking villages in Ramechhap district, which is located in the eastern part of central Nepal. There are around nine Syuba villages, all within a day's walk of each other. Syuba villages are generally towards the top of the ridges, on which they are situated, sitting at altitudes between 2000 and 2700 m. Given Nepal's vertiginous topography, this area is called the 'hills'. The snow-capped Himalaya peaks on the horizon overshadow these 'hills', which would elsewhere be regarded as high mountains. Syuba speakers in the villages mostly work in subsistence agriculture, which at that altitude consists predominantly of corn, wheat and potato cultivation.

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3 In this background, we focus specifically on the features of the social context in which Syuba is spoken that are relevant to a discussion of linguistic identity. Gawne (2017) provides a broader overview of the historical and contemporary context of the Syuba language and its speakers.

Village lives and livelihoods have changed rapidly in the last two decades, primarily because of improvements to Nepal's transport networks. People undertaking temporary or permanent out-migration to Kathmandu or overseas for work or education send back remittances to the village. Most young men, and many young women, leave to work overseas for several years, usually before marriage. Infrastructure and development in the villages have mostly come through the community's work with NGOs and other organisations, rather than government support. In Phedi village, for example, the community built water taps near each house with materials and support from the Gurkha Welfare Trust,[4] and the Himalayan Light Foundation installed a solar power generator and water purifier.[5] As well as receiving aid, the community distributes it through the Syuba Welfare Society Nepal, which collects funds from the villagers. Through this organisation, they raised funds to build a basic, dirt road that connects their village and others nearby to the market towns of Belauri and Dhobi. The 2015 earthquakes damaged much of the villages' physical infrastructure. Since then, villagers have used international donations to replace the old stone school buildings in Phedi with concrete and wooden structures.[6]

Syuba is most closely related to Yolmo, and from a linguistic perspective can be considered a dialect of Yolmo (Hari 2010). Syuba speakers migrated east from the Yolmo area in the Melamchi and Helambu Valleys of central Nepal around one to two centuries ago (Höhlig and Hari 1976; Hari 2010). There are some distinct features of the grammar and lexicon, but most importantly, as we discuss below, Syuba speakers have a strong self-identity and see themselves as a group that is related to, but distinct from, the larger Yolmo language speaking group. In songs, speakers sometimes evoke Yolmo identity as a manifestation of a Buddhist identity larger than their specific Syuba community. At other times, they refer to themselves by other identifiers.

Although many Syuba speakers, including some quoted in this article, have the surname 'Tamang', Syuba speakers do not consider themselves to be Tamang (Gawne 2016 provides more detail on the relationship between Syuba, Yolmo and Tamang). The Tamang are a separate group with their own Tibeto-Burman language that is not mutually intelligible with Syuba or other Yolmo languages. Historically, the government has given almost every Syuba speaker in Ramechhap the surname Tamang on their national registration, but this is slowly changing. Some speakers are choosing to use the surname 'Syuba' or 'Lama'. The government's subsumption of Syuba speakers within the Tamang ethnic group through

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4 www.gwt.org.uk.

5 www.hlf.org.np.

6 Gawne (2017) provided more details on the changes to village life in the aftermath of the quakes.

the use of the 'Tamang' surname for them is a manifestation of the state's tendency to lump together proximal Buddhist ethnic groups with the larger Tamang group (Tamang 2009: 273). This tendency is part of the Nepali government's systemic practise of under-recognizing smaller communities. This lack of recognition encourages Syuba and other small-community members to co-opt the identity of larger ethnic groups when dealing with government officials who have constrained ideas and expectations of ethnic categories (Shneiderman and Turin 2006: 103).

Like the Yolmo and the majority of other Tibetic speakers, Syuba speakers predominantly follow the traditions of Tibetan Buddhists, and more specifically one of its major traditions, the Nyingma (Tib. *Rnying ma*, "old ones"). This school is known for its focus on rituals, its openness to syncretize with non-Buddhist traditions, and the network of sacred sites associated with its mythical founder, Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava that stretch out across the Himalaya and Tibet (Quintman 2008). Syuba-speaking Tibetan Buddhists understand themselves to be positioned within this sacred geography and the cosmography that it intersects. Their immersion in this worldview manifests socially through their participation in pilgrimage to sacred sites and their geographically extended relationships to co-religionists through tantric and monastic lineage transmissions (Gamble 2018). The Syuba community's connection with these networks give them access not only to a broader religious community, but also to the trans-Himalaya trade routes along which the religion spread, and which have supported its continuity (Harris 2013). Although economic circumstances and geographic isolation from other Nyingma Tibetan communities have limited their active participation in these networks, the song texts indicate the sacred geography is still central to their culture and identity.

Along with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Syuba speakers engage religious practitioners known as *pòmpo,* who act as local healers and who are similar to practitioners amongst the Yolmo of the Melamchi Valley area (Desjarlais 1992, 2003; Torri 2014, 2016). This local tradition of the *pòmpo* is not directly linked to the *Bon* religion of Tibet, but shares similarities with it and the widespread interwoven practices of animism and shamanism across the Himalaya (Dhungana and Yamphu 2016). Desjarlais (1992) and Torri (2014) note that these practices have long co-existed with local Buddhist traditions, although as Torri (2016) documents, this is shifting as Yolmo people begin to assert a Buddhist identity that forgoes some practices like blood sacrifices.

Syuba speakers' also see themselves as Nepali, members of a nation that has been a federal republic since the end of the monarchy in 2008. Various practices and features of daily life reflect Syuba speakers' Nepali identity. Some Syuba speakers celebrate, for example, the Hindu holiday of Dasain, but adapt the holiday's rituals to suit their cultural preferences. One example of this is the way they

often give white tikka, rather than red (a mix of rice and curd placed on the forehead). Along with the celebration of specific holidays, Syuba speakers have adapted many standard Nepali practices in their daily lives, in terms of food, clothing and language.

While Syuba is the primary language of village life, spoken across all generations, all Syuba speakers are, at least minimally, functionally bilingual in Nepali. Nepali is the national language, which they use in education and most interactions with non-Syuba people. Three of the Syuba villages have primary schools, and most students attend until fifth grade. From there, the 3-h round trip down the mountain for secondary school sees a generally high attrition rate before the completion of the School Leaving Certificate in year 10. Families send some children to live with relatives in the capital Kathmandu or other large cities to continue their education.

The nine Syuba-speaking villages in Ramechhap are surrounded by other villages in which Tamang and Sunwar speakers (non mutually-intelligible Tibeto-Burman languages), Hindu Brahmin and Hindu Chettri communities live. Syuba speakers do not speak Tamang or Sunwar, and nobody outside of the Syuba community speaks Syuba. They conduct trade using Nepali. In this linguistically diverse area, multilingualism typically extends to speaking Nepali in addition to a community-specific language. We thus describe this context as one with high linguistic diversity but low multilingualism.

Syuba has traditionally been a language of oral communication, but the community is enthusiastic about the development of a new orthography. The community consensus through workshops with Mother Tongue Centre (MTC Nepal 2013) was to model the writing system on Devanagari, the script used to write Nepali. Some modifications were made to account for features of Syuba that are not found in Nepali, such as lexical tone to distinguish words. The decision to use Devanagari, rather than the U-chen (Tib. *dbu can*) script used to write Tibetan, was based on the fact that the majority of literate Syuba speakers are familiar with Devanagari, and it offers children the chance to learn literacy in their own language before transitioning that literacy to Nepali at school.[7]

2.1 Data used in this paper

The songs on which this paper is based are part of two Syuba corpora, archived as open access collections online. When referenced, each of the songs is cited with a

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[7] For more on the use of the Tibetan script for minority languages across the region, see Chamberlain 2008.

file name and, where specific lines are quoted, a starting time code. The file name can be used to retrieve the original recordings, including video (where available), and transcripts. All recordings are available through PARADISEC.[8]

The majority of songs come from the Gawne (2009) corpus (citation prefix SUY1) (for more details see Gawne 2018). There are 11 song recordings in Syuba in the SUY1 collection, made with seven participants.[9] These include traditional folk songs, Buddhist chants, and songs authored by their singers. Seven additional original compositions and traditional folk songs come from a corpus of Syuba recordings made by the Mother Tongue Centre (Nepal) (2013) (citation prefix MTC1). There is only one song performed by the same singer in both collections, but as he includes different verses in each rendition, we include both (Pasang Lama: SUY1-140126-03 and MTC1-AY17).

In both archives, songs are transcribed and translated, and ELAN[10] (Lausberg and Sloetjes 2009) transcription files are available. Some transcripts include translation into English, and others into Nepali. A small handful of the MTC1 songs do not have written transcriptions. Instead, they have been transcribed using the Basic Oral Language Documentation (BOLD) methodology (Reiman 2010), with Syuba translators recording careful respeakings and Nepali translations. Supplementally, we draw on Monika Höhlig's collection, recorded between 1972 and 1980 (Höhlig 1972). This collection has 10 song recordings, which remain untranslated, but we draw on them to explore what types of songs were performed 40 years ago. A full list of the songs used in this paper, and the archive in which they are located, is given in Appendix A.

2.2 About the songs

The songs in these recordings fall into three genres: individual compositions, traditional folk songs and Buddhist prayers.

The first genre includes those songs that individuals create and sing themselves. These songs are often composed as people go about daily tasks. Some of the songs Gawne, such as those performed by Pasang Maya Lama, show careful structuring, while others, such as Kabire Tamang's song, demonstrate a degree of improvisation in the performance.

The second genre of songs is folk songs. The term Syuba speakers use to describe folk songs is *shipru* (Yolmo 2018, 15). These are known by mostly older

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8 http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/.

9 There are two additional songs in the corpus from Larkel Syuba, both sung in Nepali: SUY1-141010-03 & SUY1-141010-05.

10 http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/ Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Syuba speakers, to varying degrees of proficiency. These songs are traditionally sung by with accompanying dance groups at festivals and events, accompanied by the *tamyang* (Tib. *sgra snyan*), a stringed wooden instrument. No one still plays the tamyang in Syuba villages. We know that the instrument was available in the village in the 1970s, thanks to a single historical recording of a man playing the instrument in accompaniment to his own singing (Höhlig 1972, MH1-T001-17). *Shipru* have lyrics, but these can vary from performance to performance. For example, in two recordings of Pasang Tamang singing a particular song (SUY1-140126-03, MTC1-AY17) the lyrics and the order in which they appear are different. When a group of women came together to sing another song, three of the four were clearly following the lead of the women who knew the song the best (SUY1-140129-03).

Within the broader Tibetan Buddhist tradition, folk songs are often divided into those that approach religious topics (often designated by the honorific term *mgur* or *gur*) and those that deal with secular topics (which are called a broader variety of names including *glu* or *lu*, *bshad* or *shè*, and *dbyangs* or *yang*). In practice, however, there is much crossover between these two groups; nominally designated religious songs contain secular themes and humour, and secular songs contain religious themes (Gamble 2018, 77–80). The tradition of singing folk songs at large gatherings has a long history across the Himalaya. Historical records suggest that they were promoted during the Tibetan Empire during the sixth to ninth centuries (Dotson 2013). These songs were primarily oral compositions, composed to be sung by groups, and included memorisation aids such as repetition and rhyming. The use of folk songs within the religious tradition—and particularly during religious gatherings—was encouraged by the Tibetans' Indian tantric gurus during the tenth to twelfth centuries and is most associated with the famous poet-saint Milarepa (Quintman 2008). The singing of folk songs on religious topics was one of the ways that Buddhist teachers used to adapt teachings to local contexts, and this adaptation meant that the songs often included local references, interactions with subaltern interlocutors, localized vocab, and non-standard language (Gamble 2018, 77–80).

The third genre includes both prayers composed for specific purposes within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and those taken from rituals that are repeated in daily life (roughly covered by the term *molam*, Tib. *smon lam*). Like elsewhere across the mountains and Inner Asia, these prayers are all said with accompanying tunes. Their frequent recitation is a result of the focus within the Buddhist tradition on orality, with transmission from a qualified teacher and the repeated recitation of prayers as a way to attain merit (Klein 2003). The focus on orality is shared with other parts of the broader Sanskrit cultural tradition, including Hinduism, and derives from these traditions' pre-literate roots (Taylor 2012). The emphasis within this broader tradition

is to repeat faithfully the sounds that were handed down to the practitioner from their guru, in the belief that the mere utterance of this sound carries metaphysical power (Ellingson 1979; Klein 2003). Within this belief system, understanding of the words is secondary. With a lack of focus on meaning, songs are often performed in a form of Tibetan that is incomprehensible to those performing it (Ramble 2007 discusses a similar case from another community in Nepal).

In this paper, we mostly focus on the themes that emerge in songs that people have composed themselves, to understand best what Subya speakers value and perform. We also draw on the traditional songs as these show similarities and differences to the songs composed by individuals, and Buddhist ritual songs as they reflect the centrality of Buddhist practice in Syuba life.

Syuba speakers recognize the centrality of songs to the documentation process. Tsiring Lama, who gave an oral history of the Syuba community, mentions songs and stories as part of the way to maintain language use:

(1) dì   ɕùba tám tór-tɕu-dʑe   mè-òŋ-ge
     this Syuba talk lost-cause-INF NEG-come-NON.PST
     làpti   lú   katha   thámdʑer ùu-i
     speak-PFV songs stories all   1PL.INCL-GEN
     'this Syuba language will not be lost, (we) tell all of our songs, stories.'
     (Tsiring Lama SUY1-140126-06: 43–46)

(2) ùu-i   tám làm-leŋ   tɕhól-ga   lú   lén-gendi
     1PL.INCL talk from-EMPH search-HORT song sing-NMLZ
     'let's search for songs to sing in our language.'
     (Tsiring Lama, continued in a later recording SUY1-140126-07: 41)

The Syuba songs recorded to date cover a range of themes. None of the recorded songs touch on romantic love. Romantic love is, by contrast, a common feature of the nationally popular *dohori* genre, which is the most common Nepali-language genre in Syuba communities (Stirr 2017).

Dohori and the Syuba songs do, however, share some commonalities. Stirr (2017) observes that sad Dohori songs show "the poignancy and bittersweet nature of villagers' hard lives in the hills of Nepal" (p. 116), which parallel the themes of hardship and suffering in the Syuba songs. This song type is part of a larger genre of *dukha ko katha* 'suffering stories' in Nepal (in narratives see Jacobson 1999: 40–48; Hutt 2009: 32, in songs see Yolmo (2018: 20–24); Skinner et al. 1994: 265; Stirr 2017: 4; March 2002: 61). The tradition of suffering songs has, furthermore, a corollary in the Tibetic language oral song and literary traditions. Many of the oldest extant central Tibetan songs are laments (Dotson 2013; Uray 1972), and even

contemporary Tibetan pop songs deal with themes of sorrow (Warner 2013) and nostalgia (Makley 2007).

In the Syuba songs, foregrounding suffering is a way to establish your authenticity and your ability to survive. We not only see it in the song texts but also in narrative and discourse.

(3) tùkpu   ɲùŋ-di   tè-kyok
     suffering trouble-PFV reside-PFV.PST
     'pain troubles (us) here'
     (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-10: 284)

Even though people speak of suffering and sing about it—as discussed below—this does not mean that Syuba-speaking people are always unhappy. By contrast, within the Buddhist tradition, recognizing the suffering inherent in life is said to be the way to develop contentment and even happiness (McRae 2018). The same recording demonstrates this when Jit Bahadur acknowledge that the village is a good place to live (Jit Bahadur code-switched into Nepali for the segment in square brackets, Sangbu Syuba provided a Syuba translation *tèsa tɕòɲra yàabu*):

(4) tàa yùl   khím-gi   [tau   ansarki bes gungi]
     now village house-GEN   [reside.place   like   good]
     'now, the village houses are a good place to live'
     (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-10: 174–176)

It is with this understanding of Syuba speaker's nuanced attitude to their cultural identity, their language, and their relationship to the hardships in their lives that we look at the content of the song texts.

3 Syuba attitudes/themes in song content

In this section, we look at the thematic content across songs, noting some key similarities, and also some features that may appear to be contradictions without a nuanced approach to identity construction. We begin with a discussion of attitudes towards identity, in which Syuba speakers present themselves as Syuba, Yolmo, Tibetan and Nepali in various ways. We then look at how relationships between Syuba speakers are constructed, before examining the relationship to linguistic identity and language use that the songs suggest. Finally, we ground this analysis in the speakers' attitudes to development.

3.1 Identity

As discussed above, Syuba speakers see themselves as Nepali citizens, practising Buddhists of the Tibetan tradition, and Syuba speakers who are aware of their Yolmo heritage. This multilayered identity is apparent in the song texts.

In his song about life in the village, Kabire Tamang frames the hardship of daily life (discussed in more detail below), with reference to the Syuba's identity as Tibetan people or *pèepa* (SUY1-140127-04: 030), the Syuba cognate with the Tibetan term *Bod*. In the recent past, this term referred primarily to Central Tibetans, but in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it has been more commonly used to describe a pan-Tibetan identity. In the same song, Kabire refers to the village as being Yolmo (line 078). The only identity term that Kabire —or anyone in the lyrics of any of the songs—does not regularly evoke is *Syuba*. They only use this word in conversations before songs or with specific reference to their language.

The Syuba speakers are keenly aware of the general lack of awareness about the Syuba language amongst people outside their community. As Norpu Tamang notes in the preamble to his song:

(5)   *ùui   támla   ɕùba   tám là-gendi sú-aŋ   ŋò   mè-ɕée*
       1PL.INCL language-LOC Syuba talk say-NMLZ who-also know NEG-know
       'if you say 'our language is Syuba language' no one knows'
       (Norpu Tamang SUY1-140127-07: 82)

Suyba speakers are increasingly focused on a Syuba identity, as evidenced by Jit Bahadur's observation:

(6)   *tàa   ɕúba-ni   ɕúba   làp-koi   ìŋe*
       now Syuba-FOC   Syuba say-NON.PST COP
       pèepal   tòŋbo-ni gìkra ìŋe tàa
       pipal.tree tree-FOC only COP now
       dzat   gìkra ìŋe ɕúba   làp-kendi ɕúba   ràŋi   dzat   gìkra ìŋe
       tribe(Nep) only COP Syuba say-NMLZ Syuba own-GEN tribe(Nep) only COP
       'now, the Syuba say '(we) are Syuba', there's is just one big peepal tree
       (full of Syuba people), there is only one tribe of Syuba, Syuba speak
       Syuba it is its own tribe.'
       (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-10: 165, 168, 172)

This focus on the Syuba identity is in part due to local discussions about identity and reconnection with linguists (Gawne 2016). It is also, however, part of the larger janajāti movement in Nepal, which emphasizes local identities (Shneiderman 2015).

Although people spend a lot of time talking about being Syuba, there are scant direct references to this identity in the songs. By contrast, there is a strong grounding in Tibetan religious identity in the lyrics. One traditional song text (SUY1-140129-03) is full of Buddhist imagery, including a reliquary stupa or *chorten* (028), a monastery or *gompa* (056), *Tashi Lama's* ceremonial scarf or *katha* (064) and more figurative Tibetan imagery such as a golden bridge (022), an image that is often used to designate the journey from one life to the next (Rig 'dzin bstan srung 2006).

Both Karbire (SUY1-140127-04, 70-77) and Jit Bahadur (SUY1-140127-05) sing of the role of the *pòmpo* in village life. The *pòmpo* in these songs is mentioned particularly in his role as a village healer. In Kabire's song, he is paid in rice for his attendance and the healing he brings. Throughout Jit Bahadur's song, the *pòmpo* is there with his drum, helping cure people and talking with the villagers. In both songs, the *pòmpo* is identified as the main healer in the village in the absence of a medical clinic or doctor. Neither man is a member of one of the village Lama households, and Jit Bahadur does practice a small amount of the medicine associated with this tradition. Songs composed by individuals contain either references to *pòmpo* or Buddhism, but never both. Although neither Karbite nor Jit Bahadur's songs refer to Buddhism, as mentioned above, Karbire does identify the people in his song as Tibetans, indicating that the *pòmpo* practice is not, for him at least, in tension with his Tibetan Buddhist identity.

Syuba identity also includes their place as Nepali citizens, as expressed through geography. One of the points of intersection is in Syuba speakers' relationship to Kathmandu, which is both the capital of Nepal and a venerable Buddhist pilgrimage site. Kabire Tamang (SUY1-140127-04: 027), Jit Bahadur Tamang (SUY1-140127-02: 37 and SUY1-140127-05: 081), Bhaire Lama (MTC1-BA06) and Pasang Maya Lama (SUY1-140128-05: 01) all mention travelling to Kathmandu. For many villagers, Kathmandu represents a site of consumption; it is the place from which people can obtain goods that are not obtainable in the village. It is, furthermore, viewed as a site in which they can connect with wider society.

Bhaire Lama includes a description of his visit to Boudhanath Stupa in his song. Boudhanath Stupa is situated in the suburbs of Kathmandu and is one of the most important sacred sites in the Himalaya. It has a long history; there has been a building on the site since the middle of the fifth century CE, and the building has been repeatedly enlarged and repaired (Ehrhard 1990). The stupa was supported by and acted as a terminus for the trans-Himalaya trade network (Ehrhard 1990), and the nearby carpet trade (O'Neil 2005). Visitors to the stupa usually circumambulate it, which Bhaire Lama mentions, and light candles at its base. In the song, Bhaire Lama lights candles for his deceased parents. The inclusion of Boudhanath Stupa and the visit to family members means that Kathmandu is not imagined as hostile or unrelatable, but as part of their Buddhist cultural landscape.

Even within those songs that are in the traditional Tibetan *shipru* style, Kathmandu is a focal point. In the *shipru* sung by a group of women, which—as discussed above—is full of Tibetan lyrical imagery, there is the following line:

(7) *ɖò-na-ni   yàmbu   ɖò kò   ɖò-na-ni   yàmbu   ɖò kò*
     go-COND-FOC kathmandu go need go-COND-FOC kathmandu go need
     'go to Kathmandu if you need to go, go to Kathmandu if you need to go.'
     (Group song SUY1-140129-03 025)

We also see mention of Kathmandu in both versions of a traditional song sung by Pasang Lama (SUY1-140126-03 and MTC1-AY17). Kathmandu is presented as a place of contrast, where there is a different, unequal, kind of suffering compared to life in the village:

(8) *ɲìi-ki   yàmbu   nàŋla   èputsen-gi sà-sa   thúŋ-sa*
     2PL-GEN Kathmandu inside rich-GEN   eat-LOC.NMLZ drink-LOC.NMLZ
     mèaputsen-gi tá-sa
     poor-GEN   look-place
     'in our Kathmandu the rich have places to eat and drink, the poor have places to look.'
     (Pasang Lama MTC1-AY17: 00:03:15)

Kathmandu is almost always oriented 'down' in the song texts. Hill-dwelling Syuba speakers see themselves oriented within a vertical relationship to the Kathmandu valley:

(9) *màrla   yàmbu   ɖò-suna*
     downwards kathmandu go-at.the.time
     'when going down to Kathmandu'
     (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-05: 80)

(10) *màrla ɖò -kendi yàmbu-la*
      downwards go-NMLZ kathmandu-LOC
      'going down to Kathmandu'
      (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-02: 37)

In the traditional songs, this slope-based orientation is reoriented to a larger focus on east/west:

(11) *ɕár-ki   mì-ŋ   dzùm-suŋ nùp-ki mì-ŋ   dzùm-suŋ*
      east-GEN person-also gather-SUFF west-GEN person-also gather-SUFF
      'people from the east gather, people from the west gather'
      (Group song SUY1-140129-03: 4)

That these songs demonstrate less of a vertical orientation and more of a cardinal focus may illustrate their position as part of a larger Tibetan areal song tradition.

The only clear geographical reference to anywhere north of the Syuba villages is in a song composed by two young women in their late teens (SUY1-140127-14), who sing about the historical trade in wool and salt between Tibet and the flatlands of Nepal's Terai region.

(12)   *kyàgar ɖò-ue   tshóŋ pè-ue   pèe-la   ɖòue*
       plains go-NON.PST trade do-NON.PST Tibet-DAT go-NON.PST
       tshóŋ pè-ue   tsá rá   lùk   pú   khyóŋ-di ní
       trade do-NON.PST salt and sheep wool bring-PFV EMPH
       'let's go to the Terai and trade, let's go to Tibet and trade, bring salt and sheep's wool.'
       (Sabina Lama & Muna Lama SUY1-140127-14, lines 05–07)

This song references a historical trade that existed between Nepali wool and Tibetan salt as part of the same trans-Himalayan trade system that supported Boudhanath Stupa. The villages in this area and many others across Nepal did graze sheep historically; the Tibetan name for Nepal is *pè yùl* (bal yul), the 'land of wool'. Tibetan traders would collect salt from dried lakes across the Plateau and carry the salt down to Kathmandu to exchange for wool (Harris 2013: 107).

Like the song about travelling to Kathmandu, this song combines several geographical imaginaries. It includes the economic geographies of trade routes that underpin the nationalist geography of Nepal, and these geographical imaginaries intersect with the wider, Tibet-centred religio-cultural sphere to which the Syuba speakers belong.

3.2 Relationships

As mentioned above, there is a lack of overt reference to a Syuba identity in these songs. The individual compositions are, however, grounded in the sense of coherent group identity, negotiated through constant reference to relationships. Both Jit Bahadur (SUY1-140127-05: 62) and Kabire (SUY1-140127-04: 34) refer to the villages as *ɲìi yùl* 'our village'. Within many of the songs are references to kin relationships, on which most aspects of village life, obligation and interaction are predicated. The narrator often aligns these relationships with the relationship between them and their audiences, or participants in the songs' actions. For example:

(13)   *ádʑi   nòmo   ába   ní*
         sister.older sister.younger father EMPH
         nòmo   nòo-kya   kòptar-la
         sister.younger   brother.younger-PL all-DAT
         'older sister, younger sister, father too, younger sisters, younger
         brothers, to all'
         (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-05: 59–60)

(14)   *áma-i   pòmo   ádʑi   nòmo*
         mother-GEN daughter sister.older sister.younger
         'mother's daughters, sisters'
         (Pasang Maya Lama SUY1-140128-04 003, SUY1-140128-05 007)

(15)   *ŋà-gi   táa   ádʑi   nòmo*
         1SG-GEN now   older.sister younger.sister
         'now my sisters'
         (Bibi Tamang MTC1-SR14 10)

Several of the songs also make reference to *rò* 'friends', in the context of people
who are pleasing work companions:

(16)   *tsá-la   ɖò-dze hói   rò-kya*
         grass-DAT go-INF hey   friend-PL
         '(we) go to (cut) grass, hey friends'
         (MTC1-TB12: 05)

(17)   *hói   rò-kya   hói   rò-kya*
         hey   friend-PL   hey   friend-PL
         'hey friends, hey friends!'
         (Norphendo Tamang & Sharki Tamang SUY1-140127-14: 03)

These friends are still drawn from the extended network of familial relation-
ships but provide a contrasting and larger group than those evoked in kinship
networks.

    The landscape, furthermore, mediates relationships. The songs all evoke a
consistent geography. It is part of affirming their identity as hill-dwellers, and their
evocation of the mountains in the songs blends the region's physical geography
with their cultural geographies. The broader, intersecting physical and cultural
geographies they evoke in the songs link them into their other identities as Nepali
citizens and Tibetan Buddhist practitioners. The hilliness of the terrain is a
recurrent theme:

(18) *phárken dèp-la tɕí pè-dʑe khèɕa ɕé-ti khyóŋ-si lée*
opposite slop-LOC what do-INF deer kill-IPFV bring-PST PART
'on the other side, what to do? kill and bring back a deer'
(Kabire Tamang SUY1-140127-04 83-84)

(19) *yùu kàŋ-la kàl-di ká phárken tsùrken tá-ga*
up.high ridge-LOC go.PST-PFV EMPH opposite near see-HORT
'go up high on the ridge, near and far, yes, look'
(Pasang Maya Lama SUY1-140128-04: 6–7)

(20) *phár-la-ni tá-si rí rá rí*
across-LOC-FOC look-PST forest and forest
màr-la-ni tá-si yùl khím è
down-LOC-FOC look-PST village house COP
'look across, forest and forest, look down at the houses'
(Sabina Lama & Muna Lama SUY1-140127-14: 12)

Further, Pasang Maya Lama sings about the path stretching above and below (SUY1-140128-05: 2) and Jit Bahadur Lama sings about the sandy rivers in the lowlands that only move through valleys, not high up in the hills (SUY1-140127-02: 28). Jacobsen (1999, ch 2) notes the pervasiveness of the landscape in the narratives of Tamang and Sherpa speakers with whom she worked, not just as a material terrain to be navigated, but as a poetic tool. We read this as an articulation of cultural geography. The landscape is not merely the songs' setting. Instead, the singers incorporate the landscape into their songs as a character. They have a relationship with it, and it operates within people's lives to shape their relationships with each other.

Several of the Syuba songs mention marital relationships, and the negotiation of these, both by the individuals and families. Families generally arrange marriages, but these days, the individuals who are to be married are actively involved in this process. Syuba speakers have patrilineal groups, with women marrying outside of their group and moving into their new husband's house.[11] As in many cultures 'cross-cousin' marriage is considered the ideal, although these days direct-cousin marriage is not common. The line in MTC1-BA07 in which Norpu Tamang sings about negotiating marriage refers to this practice:

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11 See the recording SUY1-141011-02 for an extended description of how marriages are negotiated, which is reflected in the content of the songs.

(21)   *áɕaŋ-gi   pòmo   yìn   láp-na*
        uncle.maternal daughter COP   say-COND
        'if uncle has a daughter'
        (Norpu Tamang MTC1-BA07: 12)

Syuba speakers overwhelmingly state their preference is for marriage within their own linguistic and cultural group. Mitchell and Eichentopf's (2013: 13–14) survey of linguistic vitality and community attitudes amongst Syuba speakers found that three-quarters of the 49 participants preferred not to marry out of the Syuba-speaking community. Only three of the participants had done so, with the overwhelming majority married to, or intending to marry, another Syuba speaker. Karma Tamang describes the ideal marriage partner as fitting within these patterns and being from a nearby village. There are, however, other elements of the songs that place these marriages within broader Nepali ideals such as the wearing of bangles and gold earrings at the marriage ceremony (MTC1-AY01: 05).

     Conversation is key in the negotiation of a marriage, with the families exchanging multiple visits to establish an engagement and marriage:

(22)   *tshúrtɕo-la   ɕó   ná   tám   làp-ka*
        near-LOC   come.IMP PART conversation speak-HORT
        'come here, let's have a conversation'
        (Norpu Tamang MTC1-BA07: 15)

Sabina and Muna Lama sing about the courtship process from the perspective of the potential bride (SUY1-140127-14). They sing about walking through the forest with close female relatives as they do necessary domestic tasks like gathering firewood. As they walk, they see men from another village looking at them (lines 12–17). This song reflects a growing awareness that younger members of the community prefer to discreetly negotiate their own feelings before the formal negotiations between families occur. They still know, however, that this attention only has meaning if the men from the forest come to talk with their family:

(23)   *ràmbu ní   mì   yìŋge là-na*
        worthy PART person COP   say-COND
        ɕó   hói   khímla   tám   là-ka
        come   hey   house-LOC   conversation speak-HORT
        'if he is a worthy man, come to the house, let us talk'
        (Sabina Lama & Muna Lama SUY1-140127-14: 18)

Studies of Indigenous multilingualism have shown that the relationship between marriage, exogamy, and language maintenance is far from straightforward. In some cases, linguistic exogamy is integral to maintaining linguistic diversity

(Aikhenvald 2002). But in the Syuba case, the ongoing vitality of Syuba language is likely, in part, attributable to the maintenance of communal and familial relationships through marriage.

The importance of talk and language more generally, is discussed in the next section.

3.3 Language

Using discussion to establish mutual trust in the negotiation of a marriage is only one of the roles that conversation plays in these songs. The importance of talk is pervasive in many of the songs. Within the theme of language, we begin by looking at the ways Syuba use talk to demonstrate social cohesion and shared thoughts and feelings, before turning to the way people specifically discuss the Syuba language.

When Bhaire Lama (MTC1-BA06) sings of travelling to Kathmandu, he reflects on how his brother-in-law enquires after life in the village:

(24) *ɕàŋbu-i   kháŋba-la   ŋà lép-si*
      brother.in.law-GEN house-DAT 1SG arrive-PST
      ɕàŋbu   ɲímu tám   láp-si
      brother.in.law with conversation talk-PST
      ɕàŋbui   ʈì-si   yùlgi   tám
      brother.in.law ask-PST village-GEN conversation
      ŋà yàbu-raŋ   yè là-si   ŋài-ni-le
      1SG good-EMPH COP say-PST 1SG-EMPH-ALL
      'arrive at my brother-in-law's house, talk with him. He asks about
      village topics, I say "it's good."'
      (Bhaire Lama MTC1-BA06: 90)

Sharing news from the village is how his urban-living family can stay connected to the community. There are multiple other examples from these songs in which sitting and talking are seen as a positive way to spend time together with close friends and relatives, even in difficult times.

(25) *ɲìi-ni nàktsuk-la tè-ti   tám   láp-ti   yè*
      2PL-FOC dark-LOC   sit-IPFV conversation talk-IPFV COP
      'in the dark we sit and talk'
      (Kabire Tamang SUY1-140127-04: 55)

(26) *tò   khála tè-ti   tám làp-ka*
      stone on.top sit-IPFV talk speak-HORT
      'let's sit on a boulder and talk'
      (Pasang Maya Lama SUY1-140128-04: 10)

Along with talking, the songs show singing as an act of companionability as well. We see Subina and Muna Lama describe companions singing while working, while in another brief song, Kamichhiring Tamang depicts a group of men who want to sing after a day of labour:

(27)   *tsá-la   ḍò-ge   lú   léŋ-ge*
        grass-DAT go-NON.PST   song   sing-NON.PST
        'sing while going to (cut) grass'
        (Sabina Lama & Muna Lama SUY1-140127-14: 25)

(28)   *tsá   túp-timara   òŋ-si   òole   ŋà-di-la   òŋ-kyok   òole   ɕó   ée*
        grass   cut-IPFV   come-PST   then   1SG-FOC-DAT   come-PFV.PST   then   come PART
        áta   nòokya   ùu-i   tám-le   lú   lèn-ga
        older.brother younger.brother 2SG-GEN   language-ALL   song   sing-HORT
        'after cutting grass, (they) came, to me (they) came. And then 'come brothers, let us sing songs in our language.'
        (Kamichhiring Tamang MTC1-AY03: 6–7)

Although the singers do not mention explicitly the language in which these conversations and songs occur, the implication is that it is Syuba (*tám* means both 'talk' and 'language', which enforces this implication). It is, in other words, naturalized and, therefore, not worthy of comment. The Syuba's articulated relationship with their Syuba identity follows a similar expressive paradigm; it too is naturalized and not worth passing comment on like the other identities which are overtly mentioned and reinforced.

There are a handful of instances in which the songs pivot into more direct meta-commentary about language. These instances are not as frequent as the more implicit theme of the centrality of in-language conversation, but they provide an insight into speaker attitudes that builds on explicit interviews about language attitudes. These meta-commentaries are particularly evident in individual compositions, in which the singer is free to improvise and tailor the song to a specific audience. Towards the end of one of his songs, for example, Jit Bahadur Tamang sings:

(29)   *tɕhàame   tɕhàame   dì   lú-la*
        small   small   this   song LOC
        lú   làp-tiraŋ   táŋ-kyok   ɲìi
        song   speak-IPFV   send-PERF.PST   1PL.EXCL
        'this small small song, we sing this song and send it'
        (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-02: 51–52)

He is aware that this song will only be understood by people outside of the Syuba community with the intervention of translation, but he is keen to share his experiences of the challenges of daily village life.

In the second half of a song, which begins by describing marriage negotiations, Norpu Tamang sings directly about the transmission of language to children. The transmission of language, he sings, leads to the singing of songs.

(30) *tá   kyè-gendi   pù   pòmo-i   ŋà-i   àba   rá   àma*
      now born-NMLZ son daughter-ERG 1SG-GEN father and mother
      tàm   lòp   dù   ènɖule   lú   léŋ-dʑe   dù
      language learn COP like.this song sing-IFV COP
      láp-ti   thámdzer-gi kòdʑe   ní
      speak-PFV all-ERG   listen-INF EMPH
      'the children that are born now learn my parents tongue well. In
      this way songs are sung, everyone listens.'
      (Norpu Tamang MTC1-BA07: 45–46)

These songs demonstrate that Syuba speakers generally have highly positive attitudes towards their language and strong desire for intergenerational transfer of language to children. This supports from a 2013 language usage and attitudes survey (Mitchell and Eichentopf 2013), which found generally positive attitudes towards Syuba language use.

The speakers also discuss the importance of language in some of the preambles to their songs. In the examples below, Jit Bahadur and Norpu Tamang both discuss the importance of documentation.

(31) *táŋ-ɕi   là-na   tíŋla pìza-kya-ŋ   khúŋ-kya-ŋ   ɕée-ge*
      send-PST say-COND after child-PL-EMPH 3PL-PL-EMPH know-NON.PST
      'if our talk was sent (to the recording) after, the children, they will
      know (our language).'
      (Jit Bahadur Lama SUY1-140127-10: 246–248)

(32) *yàabu pè   kò-ɕi   là-ti   tòŋla saɖti-dimara*
      good do need-PST speak-PFV before decay(Nep)-IPFV
      tíŋ   tíŋla dì khó lèelamgi-di   yárla   pè   khú-na   là-ti
      after after this work.talk-FOC upward do can-COND say-PFV
      'we need to do good language work before the language decays.
      After, after this language work we can improve (our language).'
      (Norpu Tamang SUY1-140127-07: 34–36, 54–55)

The Syuba speakers are aware, through their NGO connections, that this kind of language development work is also happening in other communities across Nepal.

(33) *mì   màŋbu-raŋ ràŋ-ràŋ-gi dì   dzòsiŋ   dù*
      person many-EMPH self-self-GEN this make-PST COP

      íɕaŋadi-ŋ   dzò dù kèndalakidi-ŋ dzò dù thápkendi-ŋ dzò dù
      Tamang-EMPH make COP Magar-EMPH   make COP Sunwar-EMPH make COP

      'many people are doing this for themselves. Tamangs are doing it, Magar are doing it, Sunwar are doing it.'
      (Sangbu Syuba SUY1-141022-01: 25–28)

The use of language, through talk and song, is central to Syuba relationships. In these song texts, Syuba speakers construct their identities as Nepali nationals, Tibetan Buddhists, ethnically Yolmo and linguistically Syuba, but even more centrally they see themselves as members of a tightly-knit smaller, more intimate, home community.

3.4 Development

Unlike the positive representation of conversation and language the song texts suggest a more complicated relationship between the Subya and development. For Karbire and Jit Bahadur, a lack of development is the primary reason for suffering in the village. In their songs, they both observe the lack of health clinics in the area, while Karbire also despairs the lack of roads, buses and electricity. They both reflect on the difficulties of ploughing by using the traditional agricultural practices that the inaccessible terraced terrain still requires.

(34) *ɲìi   tùkpu-ni kàl-si   ná*
      1PL.EXCL pain-FOC go.PST-PST PART

      íibi   mème   dìla-ni   dìla-raŋ khyóŋ-di zàa-suna
      grandmother grandfather here-FOC here-also bring-IPFV put-at.the.time

      màŋbu-raŋ ɲìi-la   tùkpu-la
      much-also 1PL.EXCL-DAT pain-LOC

      'hardship comes to us, when grandparents settled here there was hardship'
      (Jit Bahadur Tamang SUY1-140127-02: 60, 62–63)

(35) *ɲìi-di   yùl   road   mè-aŋ   gardi   òŋ-ga   là-na*
      1PL.EXCL-FOC village road COP.NEG-also bus(NEP) come-HORT speak-COND

      gardi mè-aŋ   ɲìi-di   làp-timaraŋ
      bus   COP.NEG-also 1PL.EXCL-FOC speak-ASP

> ɲìi   lú   lén-si   dì   khó-ra   òo   khó-raŋ   ìɲe
> 1PL.EXCL song sing-PST this 3SG.M-also that 3SG.M-also COP
> 'in our village there are no roads, if buses come they don't come for us, we sing this song this way.'
> (Kabire Tamang SUY1-140127-04: 34–37)

Bhaire Lama's song (MTC1-BA06) provides us with a detailed illustration of the isolation of Syuba villages from Kathmandu; the whole of Bhaire's narrative is about travelling to, staying in, and returning from Kathmandu. In this song, the narrator takes the bus to Kathmandu and clearly identifies the stops they take on the way. This is not an imagined journey, but the route all Syuba speakers take when travelling to the city. They must first walk to Delauri and try to get a ticket. From there, they take the bus along treacherous mountain roads through Dhobi and Mude before arriving at the Bhote Kosi river, and then Koteshwar in the Kathmandu Valley. In the song, when Bhaire arrives in Kathmandu, he stays with members of his family, other Syuba people who have made a permanent move to Kathmandu. Bhaire contrasts the lack of development in the village with the impressive state of his brother-in-law's house in Kathmandu. When he had last visited his brother-in-law, his house had only one floor, but now it has three.

(36)   thala súm-gi   khím kàl   dù
        story three-GEN house go.PST COP
        'brother-in-law's house has three stories.'
        (Bhaire Lama MTC1-BA06: 148)

This example does not mean that development has a single narrative in these songs. Kathmandu is seen as a place of opportunity for some, but not for all. Pasang Lama's discussion of Kathmandu as being a place of un-equal opportunity (MTC1-AY17)—discussed above—makes this clear. Kabire also sings:

(37)   yàmbu   nàŋla kàl-dimara ɲìi
        Kathmandu inside go.PST-IPFV 1PL.EXCL
        tàa yàmbu-la   lèega mà-dʐòr   ɲìi
        now kathmandu-DAT work NEG-available 1PL.EXCL
        'we went to Kathmandu, now in Kathmandu there is no work for us.'
        (Kabire Tamang SUY1-140127-04: 27–28)

Pasang Maya's two songs suggests that it is the life without development that provides an idealized world in which groups of women can sit on a ridge, watch the goats graze and chat:

(38) *tàse yàabu tám-la   làp-si   sém-la   ʈík*
      now   good   language-DAT speak-PST heart.mind-LOC well(Nep)
      'speak well and all is good in your heart.'
      (Pasang Maya Lama SUY1-140128-04: 18)

In contrast, a journey to Kathmandu involves tears and pain (SUY1-140128-05). In
these songs, development and suffering go hand in hand. This focus on devel-
opment is a thematic link with Jacobson's (1999) analysis of Tamang and Sherpa
texts from two decades earlier. Jacobson (1999: 153) also observes that Nepali hill
villages are acknowledged to be a place without development, and that this lack of
development is part of the suffering of village life. Development arrives incre-
mentally and is always aspirational.

4 Discussion

These song texts demonstrate that Syuba speakers maintain a complex set of
identities that express their linguistic, cultural and national realities, while also
centring the importance of immediate familial relationships. These identities and
linguistic practices are embedded in a complex web of relationships, between kin
and friends, and between people and their physical environment. The song texts
make frequent reference to these relationships, demonstrating their affective
salience to Syuba speakers. These relationships are both vertical, across genera-
tions, and horizontal, between members of the same generation, and connections
in both directions tie the members of the Syuba community together and connect
them to members of other communities.

    The identities, relationships, and desires expressed in these songs provide
insights into how multilingualism has been maintained in the local context, and
how it may be transforming. An important aspect of this seems to be the way in
which identities are maintained that are complex, multiple, and scalar: the
singers are simultaneously, and without contradiction, Syuba, Yolmo, Tibetan,
and Nepali. The singers—and by extension their audiences—can shift between
identities according to not only context but also sentiment. There is no doubt that
this ability has been important in maintaining Syuba over time and particularly
in the face of recent rapid socioeconomic changes. This construction of identity is
very different from that for Tibetan communities on the other side of the Hima-
layan mountains, where local identities are more immediately subsumed under

the macro-category of Tibetan-ness (Sonam Lhundrop et al. 2019), and also from the sense of Tibetanness promoted by the Central Tibetan Administration, which increasingly emphasizes unity at the expense of diversity (Brox 2016).

This multiplicity of identities is reflected not only in explicit statements but also in linguistic practices. Most Syuba speakers sing in their language, and some individuals sing in Tibetan too. They write their language in a script associated with Nepali, to facilitate literacy in the nation-state's dominant language. They not only participate in, but value, translation and multilingualism, to the extent that it connects them to their Buddhist and Nepali identities, but they do not connect with other minority languages in their immediate neighbourhood. All of these practices indicate that the community is multilingual in complex ways that are not reducible to 'speaking multiple languages,' (as is often assumed in the literature on small-scale multilingualism) and which are perhaps better captured by the concept of *translanguaging* (García and Li 2012; Lewis et al. 2012; Williams 1994, see also De Meulder et al. 2019 for a recent critical review of the concept). These translanguaging practices, combined with the complex, multiple identities of Syuba speakers, combine to create a place for Syuba language in the world, to give it salience while also connecting it to a broader language ecology and cultural geography.

The features of identity represented in these songs are not static and may strengthen or weaken over time. Linkage with the more substantial Yolmo ethnic identity has grown in recent decades as more Syuba speakers have moved to Kathmandu and made connections with Yolmo from other regions. But neither this nor other more recently developed features of identity are expressed in the song text. They may, however, be expressed in future Syuba songs.

The rapid shifts in identity that are expressed in these songs are a characteristic of development. The songs show how Syuba speakers' cultural geographies position them as hill-dwelling Tibetan people living within Nepal and travelling 'down' to Kathmandu. Some speakers express a desire for development, but this desire exists in tension with an idealized representation of agricultural life, and this traditional cultural geography. The mid- and long-term outlook for the Syuba language is not only dependent on the positive outlook of the speakers but also how development changes the physical and cultural landscape of their daily lives.

The central question is whether these identities, linguistic practices, and relationships can be maintained in light of the clear desire for development within the Syuba community. Kabire laments that the buses do not come to Syuba speakers, that development is happening in places other than their own, but it is

worth asking what happens when the buses do stop for them. As infrastructure improves and Syuba speakers' mobility increases, life in the now-remote Syuba homelands is increasingly seen not only as one of belonging, but also hardship and deprivation. The songs above express evident tensions between the desire for development, and nostalgia for a world that was homely, localized, dense with relationships, and 'undeveloped'. The critical question here is to what extent the desire for development will supplant and transform the desire to maintain the ideologies and practices which have sustained Syuba. To what extent will the desire for development bring Syuba speakers into contact with ideologies and practices that are hostile to their complex identities and the translanguaging practices that have sustained their language? Syuba speakers will have to rene-gotiate the complex multiple-layered and non-competing identities expressed in these songs in a rapidly developing region that is experiencing rising geopolitical tensions (Davis et al. 2020).

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we have analysed the content of songs in Syuba to understand better how Syuba speakers talk about their own identities and what insights this might offer into their changing languages, beliefs, cultural geographies and practices. These songs have shown that Syuba speakers construct a complex, multi-layered identity for themselves tying in Syuba, Yolmo, Buddhist, Tibetan and Napali dimensions.

Songs provide a particularly useful lens through which to explore identity. The deliberate and performative nature of songs means that within their texts, Syuba speakers are aware that they are sharing a constructed represen-tation of themselves. This conscious construction allows them to depict themselves as they wish to be seen, including features of their lives that they wish to have expressed. Syuba speakers' multilingualism is dynamic and sit-uated in a complex multicultural environment. These songs represent a specific moment in Syuba identity; Syuba speakers are looking outward, asserting their unique identity, while also reasserting links to Yolmo and larger Tibetan ethnic groups in the context of multicultural Nepal. These songs are performed against a background of rapid development and the social changes that accompany it.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ALL	allative
COND	conditional
COP	copula
DAT	dative
EMPH	emphasis
ERG	ergative
EXCL	exclusive
FOC	focus
GEN	genetive
HORT	hortative
IMP	imperative
INCL	inclusive
INF	infinitive
IPFV	imperfective
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NEG	negative
(Nep)	Nepali loan word
NMLZ	nominalizer
NON.PST	non-past
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PST	past
SG	singular
SUFF	suffix not yet fully analysed

Competing interests: Gawne would like to acknowledge that any money from the sale of the Stories and Songs from Kagate volume are used to purchase new copies of the book for Syuba speakers in Nepal. No other financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct applications of this research.

Data availability statement

All data supporting this paper are available as part of two Syuba corpora, archived as open access collections online.[12] More detail on the data is given in the article, and a full list of the songs used in this paper, and the archive they are located in, is given in Appendix A.

Appendix A

This appendix includes a list of all of the songs available in both the SUY1 and MTC1 corpora, both available through PARADISEC.[13] The name of the performer is given, and the genre is indicated. The corpus that the recording is drawn from is also indicated, and the song file name citation allows the reader to go to the corpus to listen to the song and access a transcript.

Table A: Songs from the SUY1 and MTC1 collections, used for the thematic analysis in this paper.

Item Identifier	Singer	Genre	Archive
SUY1-140126-03	Pasang Lama (This is the same song and singer as MTC1-AY17 below)	Traditional song	SUY1
SUY1-140126-10	Pasang Lama	Lamistic chant	SUY1
SUY1-140126-13	Sabina Lama & Muna Lama	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140127-02	Jit Bahadur Tamang	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140127-04	Kabire Tamang	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140127-05	Jit Bahadur Tamang	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140127-07	Norpu Tamang	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140127-14	Sabina Lama & Muna Lama	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140128-04	Pasang Maya Lama	Original song	SUY1

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12 http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SUY1 and http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/MTC1.
13 http://catalog.paradisec.org.au.

Table A: (continued)

Item Identifier	Singer	Genre	Archive
SUY1-140128-05	Pasang Maya Lama	Original song	SUY1
SUY1-140129-03	Various	Traditional song	SUY1
SUY1-160428-04	Ringjin Lama	Lamistic chant	SUY1
MTC1-AY01	Karma Tamang	Original song	MTC1
MTC1-AY03	Kamichhiring Tamang	Original song	MTC1
MTC1-AY17	Pasang Lama (see SUY1-140126-03 above)	Traditional song	MTC1
MTC1-BA06	Bhaire Lama	Original song	MTC1
MTC1-BA07	Norpu Tamang	Original song	MTC1
MTC1-SR14	Bibi Tamang	Original song	MTC1
MTC1-TB12	Norphendo Tamang & Sharki Tamang	Original song	MTC1

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