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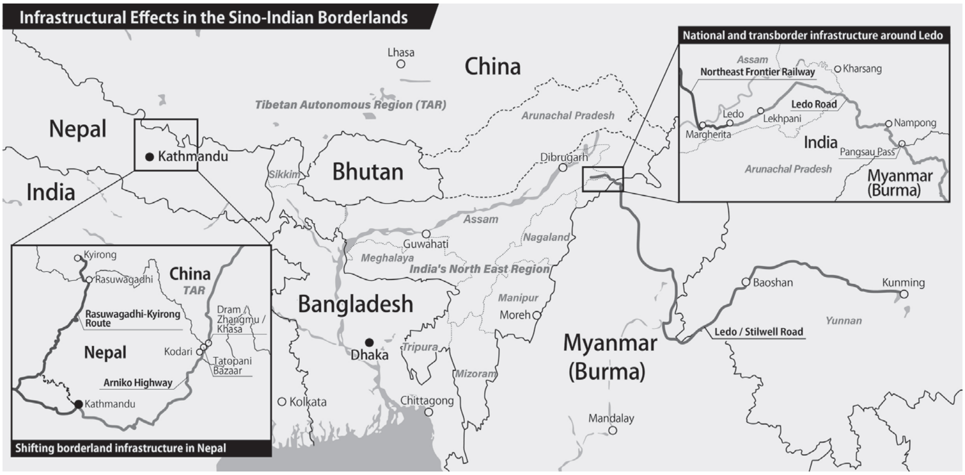
EDWARD BOYLE AND SARA SHNEIDERMAN

Redundancy, Resilience, Repair: Infrastructural Effects in Borderland Spaces

THE SMALL TOWN OF LEDO, in India's northeastern state of Assam, appears an unlikely place to examine infrastructural development in contemporary Asia. The Northeast Frontier Railway's broad gauge line ends here, having slowly and shakily traversed its route from the provincial capital of Guwahati to the far reaches of Upper Assam. The town itself appears worn down by the journey. The tea plantations and open-cast coal mines dotting the surrounding area explain the continued operation of the railway, as an infrastructural channel for extracting resources from what has consistently been designated a remote frontier region, its socioeconomic pattern little changed for more than a century. While it is the terminus of this particular communication link, however, Ledo is also the starting point of another. The town marks the start of the famous Stilwell Road—also known as the Ledo Road—which was completed toward the end of the Second World War to supply Chinese forces fighting the Japanese. The road ran for more than one thousand miles through northern Burma and China's Yunnan province to the city of Kunming. Unlike the resolutely national route of the Northeast Frontier Railway, the Ledo Road connects a series of places spanning three distinct state spaces. The continued social and political presence of this route, despite its material disintegration, demonstrates the varied temporalities that, together with spatiality and materiality, constitute the effects of infrastructure.

Ledo's paradoxical role as an infrastructural beginning and end serves as the starting point for our contribution, which likewise brings into connection two distinct bodies of scholarship: the emerging literature on Asian borderlands and the increasing attention to a renewed and reenergized Sino-Indian competition as an important feature of Asian


Infrastructural Effects in the Sino-Indian Borderlands
Lhasa
China
Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)
Arunachal Pradesh
Nepal
Kathmandu
India
Sikkim
Bhutan
Dibrugarh
Assam
Nagaland
Guwahati
Meghalaya
India's North East Region
Bangladesh
Manipur
Moreh
Dhaka
Tripura
Mizoram
Kolkata
Chittagong
Myanmar (Burma)
Mandalay
Baoshan
Kunming
Yunnan
Ledo / Stilwell Road
National and transborder infrastructure around Ledo
Assam
Northeast Frontier Railway
Kharsang
Ledo Road
Ledo
Lekhpani
Margherita
Nampong
India
Pangsau Pass
Arunachal Pradesh
Myanmar (Burma)
Kyirong
Rasuwagadhi
China
TAR
Rasuwagadhi-Kyirong Route
Dram / Zhangmu / Khasa
Nepal
Kodari
Tatopani Bazaar
Arniko Highway
Kathmandu
Shifting borderland infrastructure in Nepal

Map 1. Northeast India, Nepal, and the Sino-Indian borderlands, indicating how variegated and bordered this space is. The examples of the region's borderland infrastructure focused on in this article, and the places we discuss, are detailed in the two inset maps. The status of Arunachal Pradesh is disputed; administered by India, most of its area is also claimed by China. Map produced by Megumi Sasaya, in collaboration with Edward Boyle.

geopolitics. We argue that attending to infrastructure as an interface between the material and the social helps describe the contours of the terrain on which this interstate contestation is taking place. This terrain, both ideational and material, can be conceptualized as an uneven borderland between these two Asian states, which also encompasses several others, including Nepal and Bhutan. This borderland space both connects and separates China and India, whose respective aspirations become mediated in relation to each other, as well as to and through the Himalayan nation-states that define their limits.

We develop our argument through a trio of concepts: redundancy, resilience, and repair. These polyvalent words serve as organizing tropes for our analysis of the relations between temporality, materiality, and spatiality, which constitute the discourses and practices of infrastructure in the space between India and China. In this endeavor, we follow Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox (2016) in defining infrastructures as, "above all else, relational systems with generative capacity" that "provide the conditions of possibility for other relational practices or circulations beyond those that are constitutive of the infrastructure in question." We therefore do not limit ourselves to a specific site of infrastructure, or even a specific infrastructural form (i.e., bridge, road, waterworks, building), but rather seek to understand how networks of infrastructural forms across borderland spaces create “open-ended and emergent” possibilities (Harvey and Knox 2016). Reflecting on infrastructure in this fashion reveals its role in the process of boundary delimitation taking place between these two Asian giants. Our open-ended perspective, thus, applies both to infrastructures and to borders, showing how each is constantly materialized in new and always incomplete forms.

Within international relations and political science, it remains common to treat China and India as unitary state formations existing within different worlds or “areas.” From the outset of the Cold War, scholarly engagement with Asia has relied on the categorizing rubrics—which are not merely geographical—of East, South, and Southeast Asia. These formulations separate China and India and, more broadly, East and South Asia, hiding the connections that historically existed between these two heterogeneous and polyglot areas as well as between them and the states and peoples distinguished from them as belonging to Southeast Asia (van Schendel 2002). This history, together with political antipathy between the two countries, has generated distinct scholarly spheres of inquiry, leading to some methodological uncertainty when we find China and India interacting and being considered in relation to each other. Overwhelmingly, the response to this uncertainty is to explicitly position them in opposition to one another and to analyze the geopolitical imperatives behind their simmering zero-sum territorial disputes. The brief invocation of a complementary formation of “Chindia” in the early 2000s reads today as a figment of the imagination (Wang 2011). More recently, most studies that engage with China and India together focus on either their economic competition or their border disputes, usually from the perspective of international relations or security studies (Acharya 2017; Brewster 2018; Freeman 2018; Paul 2018). These approaches share an understanding of the two states of China and India as singular political units engaged in a global game for influence: a game whose players are the integrated sovereign states of modern political theory (for a critique, see Hameiri and Jones 2016). The comfort blanket of methodological nationalism has allowed the two nations to be analyzed in these terms at the cost of eliding both the historical connections between them (Sen 2017) and the complex and variegated Himalayan space that historically mediated much of their relationship and through which it continues to be negotiated today.

By contrast, in recent years, an “Asian borderlands” approach has emerged from anthropology, geography, and history, particularly in reference to these Himalayan spaces (Gellner 2013; Cons and Sanyal 2013; van

Schendel and De Maaker 2014; Pachuau and van Schendel 2016; Saxer and Zhang 2017; Yü and Michaud 2018; Horstmann, Saxer, and Rippa 2018). This work often builds on van Schendel's (2002) and Scott's (2009) articulations of "Zomia" as an alternative geographical zone, encompassing much of what had earlier been referred to as "High Asia" or the Southeast Asian and Himalayan Massifs (Michaud 2010; Shneiderman 2010, 2013).

Here we wish to draw on the geographical connectivity of the borderlands concept as a means to comprehend the space between India and China, especially where infrastructure brings these two states into contact with one another. Our approach bears some resemblance to the "convergent comparisons" called for by Duara and Perry (2018), which similarly look to move beyond national territoriality as the "sole carrier and container of change." Here we focus on grounding "circulatory global forces" and "subnational currents" within specific sites of infrastructure, thus allowing for full account to be taken of how "long-term connections" (Duara and Perry 2018, 2) come to be materially mediated in the present.

We begin by elaborating a framework for understanding infrastructure and borders *in relation to each other* across space and time, a multidimensional approach that is central to the claims of this piece. Our understanding of infrastructure makes reference to its function as a sociomaterial interface that alters relationships between people and the world that they experience. At the same time, because of the overdetermined role of infrastructure in state building and economic development, we propose that the "infrastructural effect" is more significant than any actual material presence of infrastructure. This effect can extend beyond the spatial and temporal constraints of the physical structures themselves. In advancing the idea of the infrastructural effect, we build on David Mosse's (2005, 19) articulation of the "project effect," which describes how development projects leave unanticipated traces in the material and political worlds of both planners and their subjects, as well as upon other people and places far beyond their intended scope. Mosse's arguments operate in tandem with Timothy Mitchell's (1991) now classic description of the state itself as the structural effect of distributed and displaced practices and disciplines. This approach reveals how state policies exceed their presumed container, often being articulated within ordinary "social" practices, showing that any definition of the boundary between state and society is an ideological rather than empirical exercise. The idea of "infrastructural effects" itself emerges from our own tracing of infrastructural practices in borderland spaces, which both exceed the boundaries of any single state or project and yet link them together.

This essay is primarily conceptual in nature and is premised on an ongoing conversation between the two coauthors that spans disciplines and geographical expertise. Our empirical material emerges from fieldwork conducted exclusively on the South Asian side of this borderland space, in Nepal and Northeast India, and highlights perspectives from these two regions. We draw on ongoing research conducted by both authors in a synthetic manner, emphasizing points of commonality and comparison across our sites of engagement. In so doing, we hope to initiate two intersecting conversations: one that brings insights from different locales along the Sino-Indian borderland into a shared analytical framework and another that traverses that borderland and its disciplinary representations. We do not claim to be comprehensive, instead aiming to open up a space where the intersections between China and India; infrastructure and borders; and materiality, spatiality, and temporality can be further explored.

INFRASTRUCTURES AND BORDERS

As noted, much of the discussion on Asian borderlands either explicitly or implicitly calls attention to specific infrastructural projects, attending to such obvious markers of state space as border fencing (Sur 2019) or cross-border markets (Boyle and Rahman 2018), as well as the large-scale construction projects—roads, bridges, hydropower projects—located within these liminal spaces (Nyíri and Breidenbach 2008; Pedersen and Bunkenborg 2012; Rahman 2014; Murton 2016; Reeves 2017; Joniak-Lüthi 2019; Boyle and Rahman 2019b; Gohain 2019). Nevertheless, much of this work struggles to escape a certain oppositional logic in its analysis, with infrastructure interpreted as a top-down imposition on borderland societies.

At the same time, recent anthropological work in various global contexts has sought to conceptualize “infrastructure” as a sociotechnical interface (Anand 2017; Björkman 2015b; Elyachar 2014; Harvey 2010; Larkin 2013; Mains 2012). This offers a pathway for social scientists to reengage with materiality while seeming to escape the limitations of earlier “structuralist” approaches that reified the state–society dichotomy, associated infrastructures with statist intentions, and often ignored other spatialities produced within or alongside the same installations. That is, infrastructures have become important sites of inquiry because they connect top-down geopolitics with ground-up aspirations and enable engaged analyses of negotiations between these scales. However, most of the empirically rich existing studies of infrastructure are situated within clearly delineated nation-state spaces, and in largely urban contexts, where infrastructural projects are understood as sites through which the negotiation between citizens and states may be observed (on this see also Collier, Schnitzler, and Mizes 2016).

While it is often presented as the result of decisions taken and resources channeled from a distant and dominant political center, infrastructural development in borderland spaces should not only be understood as the material outcome of negotiations between central and local political forces. Specific infrastructural forms, whether made real or conceived, are constitutive of the borders drawn around states and "their" societies, but while such infrastructures embody a series of claims through which "order and meaning in complex sociotechnical systems are maintained and transformed" (Jackson 2014, 222), these claims are not necessarily reducible to the inflexible borderlines of nation-state singularities. Infrastructures in borderland spaces exist as monuments to processes that engage actors from far beyond, as well as within, the boundaries of a single state.

Applying a borderlands approach to infrastructure brings into focus further vectors of negotiation across scales and helps show how apparently singularly produced infrastructural forms are actually products of complex negotiations that work to materialize varied spatialities—economic, political, and social. These negotiations give rise to what we call *infrastructural effects,* demonstrating the "simultaneity of the social and the material in the coming-into-being of infrastructural forms" (Reeves 2017, 713), while also incorporating their "affective life" (Reeves 2014, 2017). Understanding connections *between* various forms of infrastructure in borderland spaces helps move beyond treating specific infrastructural forms as closed ontological systems in themselves. Here we emphasize the open-endedness of the practical ontologies produced in and through various infrastructural connections (Jensen and Morita 2017, 617) and explore infrastructures of different types and scales—railway station, road, bridge, wall, house—through the effects that they generate in spatially and politically expansive borderland contexts.

In such contexts, instead of the state's claims to border fixity and unitary understandings, we encounter dynamic processes of social and spatial transformation, with borders and the terrain they cut across shaped by ongoing processes of assembly (Cons and Eilenberg 2019). Our approach allows for particular attention to be paid to the following. First, research on Asian borderlands emphasizes that state authority is not exercised evenly across the territory claimed on the map but is materialized in particular places. The official infrastructure of border crossings, with their paraphernalia of flags, guards, customs posts, and checkpoints, serves to locate the often arbitrary authority of the state at its own edges. At other points along the borderline, state authority remains far more ethereal and slipshod in its application (Boyle 2020). This inherent limitation to the reach and power of the state accounts for the current obsession with “walling up” borders—as with the “fencing” of India’s borders with Bangladesh. This is an imaginary infrastructural fix to a “problem” that far exceeds such containment (Sur 2019; Ghosh 2019). Second, the borderlands approach allows a much greater attention to the complex spatiality of border areas (Johnson et al. 2011; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009). Recent studies of national boundaries reveal not a border wall but a border sprawl (Longo 2018, 49), with the space of the border extending both out beyond the state and deep within its interior (Rumford 2006). It is within this broader border zone that infrastructure provides a means of channeling state authority to the borderline, thereby connecting the “discontinuous dots” of the nation’s edge together (Bonditti, cited in Amilhat Szary 2017). Third, our focus on infrastructure itself at and across borders, and not the claims of sovereignty and security that justify and underpin its presence, “enables an analysis of politics that is less constrained by juridico-political concepts and focused, instead, on the technopolitical terrain” (von Schnitzler 2015). Finally, we join scholars theorizing rubble (Gordillo 2014) and ruins (Chettri and Eilenberg 2019) to consider how infrastructure may have multiple lives that challenge us to think beyond the linear historico-political trajectories with which it is usually associated. This will prove crucial to our examination of the place of infrastructure in the India–China borderlands, which we conduct in the three registers of redundancy, resilience, and repair in what follows.

REDUNDANCY

In the farthest reaches of Upper Assam, a few miles beyond Ledo toward the Myanmar border, a curious painted monolith with a red gable roof–like top stands on a weathered concrete base in a lonely field. A panel situated beneath the structure’s roof provides information on “Historic Lekhapani Station,” satisfying the curiosity of the (hardly numerous) travelers who chance across it. Lekhapani Station was, prior to its closing in 1993, the easternmost railway station in India, and the monument is to “Railway’s Last Frontier.” The monument is listed on Google Maps as “Historic Lekhapani Station Tomb”—a fitting designation for a memorial marking the final resting place of this now defunct stretch of transport infrastructure. While railway tracks without trains can be understood as “the social and material afterlife” of infrastructure (Stoler 2008, 194), they don’t necessarily die, for the site retains historical significance. The presence of this memorial and its freshly painted state point to its position within an infrastructure of a different sort, one that commemorates and celebrates the state's material presence toward the demarcated edges of the national body. The monument's invocation of the frontier, redolent of the status of both this region within the Northeast and the Northeast within India, indicates that while the infrastructure channel memorialized here is redundant, it can still be deployed in a process of meaning making.

The commemoration of this station brings our first lens, of redundancy, to bear upon the concept of infrastructure. To be made redundant denotes that something was once useful but is no longer, either because it has been supplemented or it has become superannuated: a fitting description for a railway line rendered uneconomic by declining coal production and the improvement of Highway 315 alongside it. Yet, despite redundancy, the site's materiality is neither extinguished nor yet exhausted. Its staying power is only partially because of the potential for reactivating and extending the line through to Kharsing in Arunachal Pradesh.[1] Memorialization of infrastructure here has repurposed materiality through preservation. In 2009, the Lekhapani Station building was reconstructed, sixteen years after the last train had run on its line. This preservation, indeed, rematerialization, was justified because of the station's connection with the Ledo Road—the historical thoroughfare connecting India to Burma and China, as described in the introduction to this article.[2] The social and material afterlife of this redundant railway line does not merely narrate the Northeast as India's frontier but also celebrates its role in a connectivity that stretches beyond the boundaries of the state.

Northeast India is notably rife with such paradoxes, brought into focus today by the relentless invocation of connectivity as *the* solution to the region's manifold problems: ongoing insurgencies, political instability, and economic woes (Baruah 2020). This connectivity appears at cross-purposes to the fencing at the region's borders, and yet the two work together, simultaneously opening and closing up the region. The roots of this paradox lie in the history of the Northeast, stemming from Partition and the burdening of this new region with "a bizarre and unmanageable geobody" (van Schendel 2018, 273): one almost entirely defined by borders with the neighboring states of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and China (see Map 1). The imposition of these newly national borders at Partition severed vibrant trade and migration channels that stretched beyond the boundaries of today's Northeast. At least, they were severed as far as the state was concerned. In many cases, official censure concealed the continued use of (now) cross-border routes as corridors for movement and trade, including in forged currency, weapons, drugs, and people. The last two decades have seen confidence-building measures between the states that neighbor India's Northeast—Myanmar, China, and Bangladesh—leading to gradual efforts to reopen, or at least relegitimize, such patterns of cross-border connectivity (Boyle and Rahman 2018).

The result is cycles of redundancy and reanimation, as particular routes are rendered impassable or open by shifts in state relations and their border regimes. Here we see the infrastructural effect in action: the continued presence of redundant infrastructure and the commemoration of past connectivity compel action from the otherwise reluctant state to develop new forms of cross-border connection. This process is analogous to Lisa Björkman's (2015a) description of the work that "forgotten pipes" do in Mumbai. Older pipes become redundant once new pipes have been put in place, but by remaining materially present, they compel new forms of remembrance that lead to action: "the origins of these 'forgotten pipes' and the routes that they follow become the stuff of myth, speculation and political possibility" (27). Material remnants of the past function across temporal horizons to provoke future reimagining by new actors, who may no longer remember why infrastructural traces are present in particular spaces, yet are prompted by them to experiment with new configurations of connectivity.

This interplay of political, physical, material, and social dynamics can also be seen in the recent transformations in infrastructure between China and Nepal. Above the border town of Dram/Khasa/Zhangmu[3] on the Arniko Highway between China's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Nepal, ruins of an older settlement known as Gosa were visible during field research conducted by one of the coauthors (Shneiderman 2013). Half an hour's steep walk uphill from bustling Dram, one could wander through a field of fallen stone walls and overgrown building foundations, imagining earlier layers of border infrastructure. One of the lamas from the monastery in Dram recounted how the original settlement of only one hundred or so people was located at Gosa—until the border was demarcated in the early 1960s, a process intextricably entangled with the building of the border road. This road led to the so-called Friendship Bridge, and quickly everyone shifted residence from Gosa to the roadside location that became Dram, to take advantage of this new cross-border infrastructural passage. Within just a few quick decades, the only traces of the original settlement were these ruins, which to the naked eye were impossible to date.

In 2005, when these observations were made, Dram was a key customs depot for trans-Himalayan trade, with hundreds of trucks moving in both directions every day (Shneiderman 2013). Ten years later, in 2015, the Friendship Bridge was destroyed by the earthquake of April 25 and its large aftershock of May 12. The town of Dram completely disappeared. After the earthquake, while the devastation in the towns of Kodari and Tatopani on the Nepali side of the border was well documented, it became impossible to get news from the Chinese side. There was deafening silence for nearly four years, with initial whispers just becoming audible at the time of writing, for instance, in a media piece stating that the border was reopened in May 2019, but that only goods may cross the border, while people are no longer allowed to do so (*Himalayan Times* 2019). In the blink of an eye, Dram and the chain of border towns that led up to it on the Nepali side—Tatopani, Kodari, Liping—had been made redundant. The seismic damage to existing border infrastructure led to its decommissioning, leading to a different kind of infrastructural effect as the material destruction of infrastructure transformed the terrain on which it had once stood. The Friendship Bridge and the last half century of border infrastructure, connections, and relations that it encapsulated were gone, just like that.

Yet this transformation created incentives for experimenting with new forms of border connectivity. Drawing on experience gained after the 2008 earthquakes in Sichuan (cf. Sorace 2017), Chinese state actors quickly mobilized to fill the infrastructural vacuum. After the earthquakes, the border crossing shifted westward to the Nepali district of Rasuwa, adjoining the county of Kyirong (Kerung) in the TAR (Lord and Murton 2020; Murton 2016; Murton et al. 2016; Paudel and Le Billon 2018). In addition, a new apparatus of Chinese influence soon took shape *inside* Nepal, one based on new forms of political infrastructure. For instance, as part of a series of six agreements signed between Nepal and China in April 2019, China was granted permission to establish fifteen so-called development capitals in Nepal's border regions (Giri 2018). This expansion of Chinese interests into Nepali state space occurred in tandem with a shift in India's relationship with its northern neighbor that was due in part to the effects of a protracted border blockade in 2015. The blockade, by Nepal's Madhesi plains population to agitate for long-sought territorial autonomy within the new postconflict constitution that was promulgated in September 2015 through a "fast-track" process spurred by the disaster, deprived the earthquake-shattered economy of key staples and supplies (Paudel and Le Billon 2018; Tripathi 2019). India's tacit, if not overt, support meant the blockade itself constituted an Indian experiment at reconfiguring this borderland space.

Through such details, we can observe how, over time, the repeated ruination of existing border infrastructures—first at Gosa, then at Dram—has made ways for new forms of borderland engagement far beyond the political border itself. To some observers in Nepal, these transitions are evidence of the country's empowerment through its newly brazen ability to turn away from India. But to others, such shifts make manifest the ever-present threat of geopolitical redundancy for Nepal, in which its room for maneuver is increasingly squeezed between a traditionally overbearing India on one side and a rising China on the other. As Lord and Murton (2020, 5) emphasize, "since the crises of 2015, there has been a rapid escalation of statements, protocols, and agreements between Nepal and China that recenters their geopolitical relationship around international infrastructure development."

The role of infrastructure in the Sino-Indian relationship, and the relationships between both of these powers and Nepal, is granted not only through its capacity for connectivity but in the way in which such infrastructure comes to be slotted into wider circuits of meaning. It is within these circuits that infrastructure can both erect and transgress border materialities, which then perversely shape the specific forms of infrastructure (roads, bridges, trade agreements, etc.) through which states are able to believe in and conceive of the future. Material infrastructure builds redundancy and long-lived materiality into these circuits, serving as another pathway through which state presence in the borderlands becomes not merely desirable but necessary.

RESILIENCE

Nepal's experience with postearthquake reconstruction also demonstrates how we may jump scale between the notion of resilience as conceptualized at the level of the individual (often conceived of as a "householder" in the reconstruction context) and the notion of resilience in geopolitical terms for a country like Nepal. After the National Reconstruction Authority was established in December 2015, the government of Nepal and its donors settled on an "owner-driven" model of household reconstruction for more than eight hundred thousand destroyed homes.[4] It then set about identifying so-called beneficiaries, to whom subsidies would be offered to reconstruct their own homes according to a series of predetermined design plans. Rather than bringing in corporate contractors to build blocks of homes that no one would live in, as has happened in many other disaster contexts (Simpson 2014), the owner-driven model was touted as putting householders in control of their own futures. Yet, in reality, this model was significantly constrained at the level of implementation: the Authority offered a fixed subsidy of approximately US$3,000 for each household, regardless of size (in terms of either square footage or kinship network); a limited number of earthquake-resilient designs were available, and householders were told they had to comply with approved designs in building their new homes within tight deadlines to qualify for subsidies. There were bureaucratic backlogs at the government offices where "beneficiaries" had to enroll and at the banks where they had to collect their funds (Asia Foundation 2016; Limbu et al. 2019; Suji et al. 2020; Le Billon et al. 2020; Shneiderman et al., forthcoming).

Visions of a self-sufficient Nepal rest on an "infrastructure of hope" in which "elite ideological visions and vernacular desires" are entangled in collective anticipation (Reeves 2017, 718). Yet the mismatch between vision and reality serves as a metaphor for Nepal as a nation-state, while underlining the distinct practices that can interact under the rubric of "resilience." Nepal's state actors desire control of its own future as a sovereign state that can meet its citizens' expectations through infrastructural efforts, yet they are severely constrained by the geopolitical relations in which the state and its agencies are entangled. Meanwhile, many Nepali citizens see their government as primarily good for infrastructural provision. For instance, in the 2017 Survey of the Nepali People, 40 percent of respondents answered an open-ended question about their greatest cause for optimism at the local level in the past year with statements about "roads being better" (Asia Foundation 2018, 17); the next most popular reason was "electricity supply is improving." Along with reconstruction and road building, hydropower completes the Nepali vision of what "resilience" should look like—in other words, self-sufficiency without intervention from India, China, or anyone else. Yet Nepal remains dependent on Indian, Chinese, and other external resources to implement these infrastructural imaginaries, demonstrating how such entanglements are not necessarily contained within national borders.

India was the largest donor to the US$4.4 billion pledge made at the June 2015 donors' conference that initiated Nepal's postearthquake reconstruction; China came in second "but chose to allocate a reported $767 million in grants to its own projects. . . . Unlike India, China thus did not have to rely on Nepalese reconstruction authorities to implement its pledges, most of which would be implemented by Chinese contractors" (Paudel and Le Billon 2018, 15). Such arrangements have at best led to concern and at worst outright street protests on the ground—for example, in response to the Chinese-funded Ring Road expansion around Kathmandu throughout 2018 (*Himalayan Times* 2018). While Chinese media represents projects like these with glowing headlines—"China-aided road project brings happiness to Nepali people" (Kafle and Zhou 2019)—Nepali sentiments are clearly more complicated, reflecting how infrastructure becomes entangled with a variety of local, yet politically consequential, "hopes, desires, fears and contestations" (Reeves 2017, 716).

At both the level of the household and that of the nation of Nepal, these infrastructurally based visions of self-sufficiency and resilience remain aspirational. To turn to our other site, the way both hopes and contestation play out in Northeast India further suggests that notions of self-sufficiency do not necessarily map onto those of resilience or that either must be singularly associated with one scale of local, regional, or national development. The long-term history of the Northeast's infrastructure has been overwhelmingly shaped by the making of new borders over time, which rendered traditional channels of infrastructure unusable. States, meanwhile, have prioritized the construction and maintenance of new border infrastructure over improving connectivity within the region. The paradigmatic status of borders was accentuated by India's war with China in 1962 and then by the carving out of new ethnolinguistic states within India's federal structure—Nagaland, Manipur, Maghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh—between the early 1960s and mid-1980s. A regional politics obsessed with the establishment and preservation of boundaries therefore reflects both regional and national priorities (Baruah 1999), and the borders of the Northeast retain a particular resilience of their own in the imagination of this space.

It is only recently, because of a relative improvement of the security situation and the looming shadow of China, that the Indian state has turned to the infrastructure of connectivity rather than security in recent years. In fits and starts, the post–Cold War "liberalization" of the Indian economy has found expression in policies that have sought to transform the isolated Northeast region into a zone of connectivity, facilitating links with China and Southeast Asia. The region is now central to India's determination to Look and Act East and to renew connections beyond its borders, materialized through large-scale infrastructure projects. A former secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has noted that "the 'Look East Policy' envisages the northeastern region not as the periphery of India, but as the center of a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region" (quoted in Sarma 2018, 36). Since the 1990s, the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), Kunming to Kolkata Initiative (K2K), Kaladan Multi Modal Transport Corridor, Asian Highway, and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation have provided a veritable alphabet soup of connectivity initiatives, all premised on infrastructural investment developing the region. As in Nepal's desire for self-sufficiency, infrastructure is understood as a developmental panacea, with the future defined through infrastructural dreams in the present.

Nevertheless, for all the recent focus on connectivity, and the state's determination to open up this securitized space, the linear boundaries of Northeast India's geobody demonstrate a resilient elasticity, springing back into shape in response to security concerns. India appears unable to free itself from the prison house of its own national imagining. The Doklam standoff of July 2017, in which Chinese troops built a road that ran toward a disputed area of the China–Bhutan boundary (near the triborder point between the three countries), illustrates the dilemma, for the conflict was presented as an existential matter for the region. Competition over infrastructure has long been central to the performance of stateness here, with India and China "shadowing" one another after 1950 in their attempts to encourage local populations to accept their systems of rule, frequently by promising infrastructural development (Guyot-Réchard 2016, 20–28). After 1962, the Indian government adopted a policy of halting infrastructural development near the northeastern border from fear it would facilitate a Chinese invasion. Perceptions of the zero-sum nature of India and China's relations continue to hamper efforts to connect them, as shown by the collapse of both the BCIM-EC and K2K initiatives following China's announcement of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.

While the connectivity dream implied by India's turn toward Looking and Acting East is very much alive, therefore, in the Northeast, this is accompanied by not only mismanagement and state insecurity, which results in the frequent "pickling" of infrastructure (Rahman 2019), but also a certain existential fear. Even as the government has sought to push connectivity as the means to develop the Northeast, its message is constantly undermined by an acute sensitivity to Chinese activity. With earlier dreams of Chinese participation in Act East stymied by the BRI, the result is a focus on absence, heard in lamentations for lost minerals of Lhunze (*Economic Times* 2018) and concerns over "India's yet-to-be-connected places" (Kalita 2018). This is infrastructure fetishized as not only "desire and fantasy" (Larkin 2013, 329) but also threat, contributing to the acute sense of ontological insecurity felt in New Delhi regarding the Northeast. This sensitivity means that not only the material forms but also the national locations of borderland infrastructure are always "exceeded by the hopes and fears invested" in them (Reeves 2017, 713), resulting in the resilience of the border in imaginations of India's Northeast.

■ REPAIR

In a speech to a crowd in Kathmandu in April 2018, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi exclaimed that "since the earthquake, there had been a transformation of not just Nepal's infrastructure, but of the country and its people. I congratulate you on this" (HT Correspondent 2018). Modi's choice of expression reiterates the perceived power of infrastructure: its ability to transform not just the economy or sections of society but the people themselves and, consequently, the nation.[5] What his speech elided was the source of this transformation: the bulk of the technology and financing for infrastructural development, as well as the movement of goods it facilitates, is now flowing into Nepal from China in the north rather than from India (to the south), dramatically reversing the traditional direction of travel. The March 2016 agreement between Nepal and China to extend the Qinghai Tibetan railway to the border and Kathmandu by 2022 is only the most obvious manifestation of this new reality.[6]

What appears as the growing redundancy of the Indian connection, however, may merely be an expanded spatial fix that builds on an earlier transformation within Nepal itself. As Martin Saxer (2017, 73) has noted, "over the past decade, fervent road construction on the Tibetan Plateau has led to a situation in which access to many of Nepal's Himalayan border regions is now far easier from the Tibetan side than from Nepal's urban centres in the south." Accelerated by the necessity of earthquake recovery, these infrastructural channels from China are now being extended southward, emphasizing the uneven and contingent ways in which "transportation collapses space and time by altering the positionality of places relative to one another" (Cidell and Lechtenberg, cited in Murton 2017, 5). But this shift in the relative positions of places occurs not only in temporal terms, through the ability of specific infrastructural channels to move material faster and more freely, but also through changes in how they are thought about in relation to one another.

This is most apparent if we return once again to Ledo and the road to which the town grants its name. The construction of the Ledo, or Stilwell, Road over the course of two years in the midst of the Second World War is celebrated as a historic achievement, but the first convoy only wound torturously up to Kunming in January 1945. By August, the war was over, and the road was rapidly rendered redundant by decolonization and Communist victory in China. It was only in the 1990s that the road began once again to attract attention, when the Chinese section was rediscovered. Since that time, there have been periodic calls for the road's repair, with China upgrading its own section of the road running from Kunming to the border and urging India to reopen the route.

In India, invocations of connectivity have had some impact. Since 2013, those sections of the road in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are now good, and it is possible to reach the border with Myanmar at the Pangsau Pass. However, trade across the border itself remains heavily circumscribed and open only to locals, and the road itself disintegrates the moment it crosses into Myanmar. Despite construction of a border market, there appears little interest there in upgrading connectivity to the border area on the Myanmar side. India's Border Roads Organization (BRO) constructed the highway from India's primary border crossing point at Moreh into Myanmar back in 2001,[7] but there are no plans for a Ledo Road reprise. As neither international trade nor travel is permitted over the border, except for locals engaging in cross-border trade,[8] the customhouse India has built at Nampong is perfectly "pickled," constructed and manned by spectacularly bored officials, yet rendered redundant by the absence of any goods to inspect.

The road encapsulates the state's practice of connectivity in the Northeast, maintained up to the border to allow military access to the pass, and with no interest in connections with anything beyond. The push to repair the road beyond India's borders instead comes from more local sources. The nearby Tai-Khamti, Tai-Phakey, and Singpho communities in Arunachal Pradesh and Upper Assam speak of their family connections in Myanmar and emphasize their inability to visit, pointing out that connectivity projects in the region do not serve their aspirations unless linked with northern Myanmar via the Ledo Road. However, the Arunachal Pradesh government was traditionally reluctant to push for the road's opening, concerned about a number of insurgent groups operating from its own Naga-dominated districts. Repair of the road has instead been advocated by political parties in Assam, while being actively discouraged by New Delhi. In 1998, Pradyut Bordoloi, member of the Legislative Assembly of Assam from nearby Margherita, began to erect signs both memorializing and fantasizing earlier connectivity. Illustrating the Stilwell (Ledo) Road's course through Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Myanmar, and China, the signs implored for its repair as a means to "Rejuvenate our life line, Revitalize our relationship, Reach out beyond the border."

The central government's trumpeting of connectivity remains a state-led enterprise, with the real and imagined limits this implies. It was a surprise, therefore, when, on December 30, 2015, a Chinese truck emerged from Myanmar at the Pangsau Pass and descended to the customhouse and border trading post at Nampong. Accompanied by two other vehicles, the truck was carrying goods intended for Chinese participants at the third Assam International Agri-Horti Show 2016 in Guwahati. It had set off from the town of Baoshan in China's Yunnan province four days earlier, following the Stilwell Road to arrive in India's Northeast (see, e.g., *Eastern Today* 2015). The incident created something of a stir, with policy commentators left unsure if this signified a shift in Delhi toward the region or merely a lack of central oversight over security. Although the Indian authorities appeared nonplussed, others were inspired by the prospects of the route's repair after a seventy-year hiatus. Arunachal Pradesh's then director of trade and commerce Tokong Pertin commented that the truck's arrival provided "a ray of hope for a better future," while others pointed to the symbolic significance of the "historic moment" (Pisharoty 2016).

The truck's arrival has not yet led to a shift in the government's stance on the road, despite China's urgings (Hindu 2016). However, propitiously, in early 2016, the sign commemorating the route of the "Stilwell Road" was renewed and installed in a little park beside Highway 315, between Ledo and Lekhapani. Tina Harris (2013, 19) has written that the "experience of travelling across borderlands is not particularly unique, but it is certainly much more telling about what it means to cross borders than what a cartographic map will represent." In this instance, however, the truck's passage through India's Northeast and the map on the Stilwell Road sign work in the same manner: rather than speaking to the fear engendered by China's infrastructural development, they instead reference the promise and possibilities for rejuvenation, revitalization, and reaching out implicit in the repair of the Ledo Road. This envisaged role for the road, of course, has nothing to do with the original reasons for its construction. However, the focus on repair, on the restoration of a better situation, indicates "that the loop between infrastructure, value, and meaning is never fully closed at points of design, but represents an ongoing and sometimes fragile accomplishment" (Jackson 2015). This peculiar form of repair does in fact transform the politics of the Ledo Road, but not through material reconstruction. Deployment of this long-redundant road in broader narratives has made the restoration of cross-border connectivity a political imperative for sections of the population. The transformation in meaning is sufficient to reinvent the road's future: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Myanmar, and China repairing together to the promised uplands of development. New configurations of "security" become visible through the gloriously fetishized specter of infrastructural connectivity, whether this is glimpsed in the sight of a Chinese truck bouncing out of Myanmar's hills or by tracing the course of the Ledo Road as it crosses provincial and national borders on the map.

CONCLUSION

In April and May 2018, Prime Minister Modi and the newly elected prime minister of Nepal, KP Sharma Oli, undertook reciprocal visits. These visits highlighted the possibility of Modi taking steps to repair the relationship between Nepal and India, which had been badly damaged by the blockade in late 2015. Indeed, the joint statement emerging from the first of these visits, Oli's trip to Delhi, made great play out of the infrastructural carrots being offered by India: a rail link from Bihar to Kathmandu and Nepali use of Indian waterways to access the sea. Infrastructural cooperation was presented as a proxy for improved relations between the two countries. By contrast, on the occasion of Modi's visit to Nepal a month later, he was roundly criticized for offering no concrete proposals to Nepal, despite waxing lyrical about the need to "strengthen connectivity" between the two nations (Jaiswal 2018). A year later, when Chinese leader Xi Jinping visited Kathmandu in October 2019, there was great fanfare in the Nepali media about the twenty agreements signed, largely focusing on transit and other infrastructural development (Nepal 2019). Yet, by December 2019, the Nepali media was keen to note (in reference to earlier agreements) that "three years of inaction have led to doubts if the transit agreement with China will ever materialise" (Giri 2019b).

Whether or not it is ever actually built, infrastructure and its effects serve as a means to embody the political relations between multiple constituencies. This is not only because infrastructure serves as a metaphor or channel for these relationships, granting them representation. Infrastructure, both in material forms and institutional arrangements, also molds these relationships themselves. This process serves to define the ways in which people in borderland regions view their counterparts on the other side, who are at once geographically and socially near yet politically distant. Particular infrastructures generate particular effects, which come to provide material definition to the borders between political and social groups, including those associated with the historically connected yet interpretively divergent poles of China and India on which we have focused here.

The embodiment of such abstracted interactions within concrete infrastructural forms allows for relationships between groups to exist across political difference and for the infrastructural effect to repeatedly reinscribe borders over time—but never in quite the same way twice. A borderlands approach to infrastructure that focuses on notions of redundancy, resilience, and repair reveals how relationships between erstwhile separate political spheres, and the people who live in them, are recursively rematerialized across space and time through infrastructure and its variegated effects.

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NOTES

1. For which surveys were conducted in 2012.

2. "Significantly, the station marks the beginning of the famous Stilwell Road constructed up to Kunming in China through India and Burma by the Allied Army between 1942 and 1945" (*Assam Tribune* 2010).

3. The town has different names in Tibetan (Dram), Nepali (Khasa), and Chinese (Zhangmu). Hereinafter it will be referred to as Dram.

4. http://www.nra.gov.np/en.

5. Modi was no newcomer to the political opportunities presented by earthquakes—see Simpson (2014) for an account of how Modi himself rose to power in the wake of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake.

6. Though it appears unlikely that an actual railway will materialize by this date (see Giri 2019a).

7. This is the 160-kilometer- (99-mile-) long India–Myanmar Friendship Road, which links Moreh on the border with Kalewa. This road was upgraded, again by BRO, in 2012.

8. For more on such cross-border trade and how state authority is practiced and flouted through it, see Boyle and Rahman (2019a).

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