Chapter Five

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES BETWEEN ERASURE AND DISINVENTION

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The New York metropolitan area is widely acknowledged to be one of the most linguistically diverse in the world, but there has never been a focused attempt to take full stock of that diversity. Before the arrival of European settlers, what may have been quite distinct varieties of the Indigenous Algonquian language known today as Lenape were spoken in dozens of independent settlements. The establishment of New Amsterdam in the seventeenth century resulted not in a Dutch colony but in an entrepôt consisting of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans, where the Jesuit Father Isaac Jogues reported in 1646 that "there may well be four or five hundred men of different sects and nations . . . [including] men of eighteen different languages."[1] By the early twentieth century, New York had absorbed massive waves of immigration from every corner of Europe, with small but growing communities from the Caribbean, Latin America, and western and southern Asia. Now, in the early twenty-first century, New York City is "hyperdiverse," with communities from every corner of the globe, notably including newer arrivals from zones of deep linguistic diversity such as Mexico, Central America, and the Himalaya, in addition to West Africa, South Asia, China, and island Southeast Asia.

Until 1890, when the U.S. Census Bureau first asked about language, no information was collected systematically about the languages spoken in New York or any other American city. From then until 1970, various

questions were asked about language use, typically about the "mother tongue" of non-English speakers or the foreign-born. Since the 1970 Census, a relatively stable set of questions has been asked—transferred in recent years from the decennial to the more detailed, sample-based, annual American Community Survey (ACS):

- Does this person speak a language other than English at home? (Yes/No)
- What is this language? ________ (For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)
- How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?

This method of obtaining language data, despite the reach and resources of the Census Bureau, has consistently failed to do justice to the full breadth of linguistic diversity in the United States—and nowhere more so than in cities like New York. Indeed, any information gathered by the Census about linguistic diversity is perhaps best understood as almost incidental, with the main intent coded in the first and third parts of the question: to gauge segments of the population with low English proficiency. The five-year 2009–2013 ACS release, a particularly deep dive representing "the most comprehensive data ever released by the Census Bureau on languages," estimated "at least 192 languages" spoken at home in the New York metropolitan area. More typical in terms of granularity are the most recent five-year ACS data available (2015–2019), which break out and tabulate just over a hundred "languages." Of these, around one-fifth are groupings such as "Other Specified Native American," with no further information available.

As of 2021, mapping efforts at the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), a New York–based nonprofit with a mission to document endangered languages and support linguistic diversity,[2] have confirmed at least three times that number: that is, over seven hundred languages spoken at least by one individual in the metro area, a sample of which can be seen in figure 5.1.[3]

In the majority of cases, these languages are spoken by substantial communities, though those communities vary enormously in terms of size, settlement patterns, and degree of organization. Moreover, cross comparison between ELA and census data suggests that the latter is consistently reliable and recognizable for only approximately sixty languages, almost all of which are major national languages.

FIGURE 5.1. ELA's *Languages of New York City* map. Ross Perlin and Daniel Kaufman, eds., *Languages of New York City*, map, 3rd ed. (New York: Endangered Language Alliance, 2020).

What is the significance of this gap between Census Bureau data and the kind of data collected by linguists and communities working in partnership? We argue that it is not just an issue of effort and focus; rather, Indigenous, minority, and primarily oral languages are systematically undercounted due to both historical reasons and aspects of the survey instrument itself, with major implications for those who speak them. Although the Census is supposed to enumerate every individual living in the country and the ACS is supposed to provide a reasonable sample of the same, there are many reasons why recent, undocumented, and non-English-speaking immigrants, in particular, might not be aware of or able or willing to take the Census. There is in fact significant overlap between areas of consistent undercount—in 2020, the response rate in New York City was approximately 62 percent—and areas of high ethnic and linguistic diversity, with ethnolinguistic communities in New York known to number in the thousands not taking the Census at all, not identifying themselves as such, or being lumped in with other groups.

An obvious factor is that the census instrument itself is available only in the languages with the most speakers. The 2020 Census, the best supported so far in terms of language access, was available in only thirteen major languages, though short guides were provided in fifty-nine languages. The question of how responses are collected is also significant. Whether online (advocated for strongly in 2020), by phone, by mail, or with an enumerator, the means at the Census Bureau's disposal have not inspired confidence among vulnerable and marginalized populations. During the lead-up to the 2020 Census, the Trump administration's attempt to insert a citizenship question, at a time of accelerating activity against undocumented immigrants, led to a further erosion of trust. It may be unsurprising that an instrument like the Census, with its roots in the political establishment, creates the appearance of a largely monoglot population speaking a set of official, national languages, so authority is thus creating diversity in its own image. Varied ideas in immigrant communities about what constitutes a *language* or a *dialect*, drawing on colonial and noncolonial ideologies, further complicate the picture. Perhaps most surprising is how academic critiques of such basic categories as *language* and *speaker*, though in some cases with a view toward social justice, also expose language communities to the consequences of invisibility.

What does it mean for a speech variety to be considered a language—in particular, for the surveyed? The first two language-related questions asked by the Census Bureau appear innocent enough: "Does this person speak a language other than English at home? What is this language?" Yet the word *language* itself and its various translations are loaded terms for many segments of the population. Though the terminology may vary, colonial notions of *language* (official, standardized, and written) versus *dialect* (no official status, unstandardized, primarily oral) are very much alive in many of New York's immigrant communities. While possibly finding some support in the way these terms are used in American contexts, these notions seem to draw most readily on distinctions made in immigrants' societies of origin: e.g., *lengua/lenguaje* versus *dialecto* in Mexico, *lingua* versus *dialetto* in Italy, 语言 *yǔyán* versus 方言 *fāngyán* (and sometimes 土话 *tǔhuà*) in China. The linguistic criterion of mutual intelligibility often plays little or no role in these distinctions. In Italian and Chinese cases, for instance, where language shift from one variety to another linguistically related variety may be taking place, such a distinction may be difficult to operationalize in the

first place. In the Latin American context, the lack of mutual intelligibility is clear to any speaker but may not prevent them from using the term *dialecto* for what any linguist would term an Indigenous language.

In other cases, there may not be widespread use of dyadic terminology that can be mapped onto English language/dialect, but a fundamental diglossia may nonetheless drive language ideologies, similarly polarizing varieties into a "high" and a "low." In the Tibetan case, what is sometimes called "the Tibetan language" is now considered to be a family of at least some fifty distinct Tibetic languages descended from Old Tibetan, on the order of the Germanic or Romance subgroup within Indo-European.[4] In Tibetan itself, although there are terms for *language* and *dialect* (*skad rigs* and *yul skad*), individual speech varieties are usually named for a locality (of any size), such that the distinction between all of Tibet and the small Nyagchu River valley is at least somewhat obscured with the terms of *bod skad* (Tibet speech) and *nyag skad* (Nyagchu speech).[5] Nonetheless, the Tibetic languages are still often referred to in English, by both community members and non-specialist outsiders, as Tibetan dialects or simply as Tibetan because they share both an alphabet and Classical Tibetan as a literary/religious language.

For most speakers of distinct Tibetic languages whom we have interviewed, the power of the Standard Tibetan written tradition clearly outweighs concerns of mutual intelligibility in deciding what is a language and what is a dialect. In some ways parallel, the Italian-American case shows that home-region language ideologies were just as apt to come over with a different immigrant group half a century ago as they are now. The vast majority of Italian migrants to New York were speakers of the often very different Italo-Romance languages (*dialetti*) from Sicily, Naples, and elsewhere, sometimes with limited knowledge of Italian. Nevertheless, undergoing a process of "Italianization" both in Italy and in the Italian diaspora, "most individuals, regardless of regional origin or age, were in favor of continuing to cultivate Italian," as opposed to their own *dialetti*.[6] In particular, first-generation immigrants (born in Italy) were "more purist oriented, favoring Standard languages"—they "experienced the social stigmas of being deprived of a functional standard, and they are more willing to deemphasize the need for dialect." In contrast, "those born in America, by now fully fluent in English, feel no more the potential limitations of dialects, and in fact view dialectal speech and the hybrid variety as positive

symbols of ethnicity, varieties which allow bonding between family members of different generations." Many support a tacit trilingualism: dialect at home, Italian for trips back to Italy, and English for the American context, but Herman Haller describes the emergence of a fourth variety, a "dialectal lingua franca" particular to contexts like New York (but not unlike the "regiolects" simultaneously developing back in Italy), where speakers from dialect backgrounds communicate with each other by aiming for Italian.[7] The result in the Italian case is that those New Yorkers who are most fluent in forms of Sicilian, Neapolitan, and other dialects are precisely those who might be the most motivated to disguise this fact in the ACS by claiming to only speak Italian. At the same time, those who might be most motivated to write in Sicilian, Neapolitan, or another dialect feel insufficiently fluent to do so.

In the most extreme cases, which we can exemplify with the Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups of Mexico, the divide between *lengua/lenguaje* and *dialecto* can be so strong as to dissuade speakers from considering their mother tongues within the same ontological category as the examples given by the Census Bureau (specifically, Korean, Italian, Spanish, and Vietnamese as of the most recent ACS). We have heard speakers of Indigenous Mexican languages tell us that, in contrast to Spanish, their language "has no rules" and cannot be written (despite having an orthography), thus reproducing colonial views of their languages. On this basis, and simply by virtue of being Indigenous, the label *dialecto* is applied, whereas *lengua/lenguaje* is applied to Spanish and state languages of other countries. Recently, the Mexican state has attempted to counter these notions with an ad campaign aimed at replacing *dialecto*, as a term of belittlement, with *lenguaje*, an effort amplified by intellectuals and public figures in various Indigenous communities as well.[8] Nonetheless, for the average speaker of a Mexican Indigenous language in New York who is not aware of these campaigns, the term *lenguaje* evokes national language, contributing further to the erasure of Mexican Indigenous languages not only in New York but also throughout the United States.

The linguistic erasure of Indigenous Latin Americans in the United States has real consequences for health and human rights, and, thus, we see it as far more pernicious than the epistemic violence of essentialization. A study on medical attention received by immigrants detained at the U.S.-Mexican border showed that Mexican migrants who were identified

as speakers of Indigenous languages received care less often than did those who were identified as Spanish speakers: 24 percent of the former were given care versus 36 percent of the latter.[9] The study came in the wake of the 2018 death of seven-year-old Jakelin Caal, a Q'eq'chi Maya girl from Guatemala, who was denied medical attention and whose father was made to sign papers in a language he did not understand to absolve the authorities from responsibility.[10] The struggles do not abate for Indigenous migrants who have made it to safety; Rachel Nolan describes in detail the daunting obstacles faced by Mayan interpreters working in the courts to provide justice to asylum seekers.[11] It has only been through sustained advocacy on the part of groups like the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations in California that city agencies, including the police, have begun to understand and address the linguistic realities of Indigenous Latin Americans.[12]

NAMED LANGUAGES: TO ENUMERATE OR DISINVENT?

Regardless of the perceived status of a speech variety within social hierarchies, there are well-known, deeper problems involved in treating languages as discrete, bounded entities—just as there are problems (detailed throughout this volume) with treating languages as individuated tools of communication divorced from interlocking political and social processes that put them in close and constant relation with other speech varieties. Some linguists adopt the view that discrete boundaries, in toto, are social constructions, typically imposed from above. Suzanne Romaine summarizes this position neatly: "The very concept of discrete languages is probably a European cultural artifact fostered by procedures such as literacy and standardization. Any attempt to count distinct languages will be an artifact of classificatory procedures rather than a reflection of communicative practices."[13] This stands in contrast to the more traditional position, in which speech varieties, despite contact effects, dialect differentiation, and other types of variation, can nonetheless be successfully categorized into discrete languages. In this latter view, truly mixed languages with multiple origins, such as Media Lingua, Michif, and Chavacano, are outliers, and varieties that blend seamlessly into each other are given a special treatment as "dialect continua."[14]

The understanding of *named* languages as individuated, describable entities that can be abstracted away from particular language contexts

and users reflects a process of reification. One logical conclusion of this view, which is held by the majority of contemporary linguists, is that an individual's language can in theory be comprehensively described (or even generated algorithmically, as in Chomskyan approaches) and that, once described, any utterance can be objectively evaluated as being a possible or an impossible expression of its grammar. This view is clearly fundamental to any attempts toward standardization, and in practice, it underlies mainstream practices in language pedagogy and multilingual education as well. This approach, however, has come under critique from various angles. It is possible to summarize these critiques, some of which might be leveled not only against contemporary linguists but also against the design of most census instruments, as follows:

- The borders between named languages are often arbitrary;
- The names, descriptions, and borders of many languages have been imposed externally;
- The "standard language" represents but one register in a spectrum of language practices;
- There exists massive mixing and intermingling of codes in much actual language use; and
- Self-assessments of competency in a language are fluid and subjective.

In the purest instantiation of these critiques, what we can call *language skepticism* seeks to overcome the concept of language existing in the abstract altogether, instead opting for the position that each individual possesses a unique linguistic repertoire, constituted by features of potentially various origins.[15] Speakers, signers, and writers select linguistic features from their repertoire on the fly based on social context. In this view, the only scale at which language can be truly understood is the idiolect, the unique repertoire and usage of an individual; named languages are a cognitive illusion imposed by various institutions from above. This fluid, individual-oriented conception of language finds increasing support among scholars in the fields of multilingual education and language pedagogy under the rubric of *translanguaging*, a term coined by Cen Williams (originally in Welsh: *trawsieithu*) to describe multilingual practices in the Welsh classroom.[16] Translanguaging, as developed more recently, is defined as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful

adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages."[17] The framework is envisioned first as a corrective to traditional practices in bilingual education, where bilingual children are still too often seen as an amalgamation of two deficient monolinguals.[18] Consequently, one of the main thrusts of translanguaging in education has been the recasting of bilingual learners as possessing a single repertoire of equal size and potential as their monolingual peers, an effort that requires reconceiving assessments without reliance on monoglot named languages.

Clearly, doing away with the concept of named languages has wider implications beyond the education of multilingual children. In Otheguy et al.'s view, the translanguaging framework "helps to disrupt the socially constructed language hierarchies that are responsible for the suppression of the languages of many minoritized peoples," a goal that they see as aligned with language maintenance and revitalization:[19]

> The concepts of translanguaging and idiolect allow us to more clearly connect our efforts on behalf of minoritized communities with the charge of essentialism that we have leveled against the notion of the named languages; for once we stop focusing on the task of preserving or strengthening an essentialist set of lexical and grammatical features that has been given the name Euskara or Māori or Hawaiian (or English, French, or Spanish, or whatever), we can more clearly see the object of our advocacy. The struggle is not to preserve a pure, well-bounded and essential collection of lexical and structural features, but rather a cultural-linguistic complex of multiple idiolects and translanguaging practices that the community finds valuable. It is toward the affirmation and preservation of these complexes, and not of named essentialist objects, that maintenance and revitalization efforts are properly directed.[20]

Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook stake out an even broader project—namely, the *disinvention* of languages rather than the mere transgression of their boundaries: "Unless we actively engage with the history of invention of languages, the processes by which these inventions are maintained, and the political imperative to work towards their disinvention, we will continue to do damage to speech communities and educational possibilities."[21] Together with Salikoko Mufwene, they view

the promotion and revitalization of any named language as a naive and misguided enterprise.[22] In this view, the promotion of multilingualism, language rights, and linguistic diversity is also all inherently backward due to their reliance on the colonial language concept. Disinvention requires the abolition not only of language categories and fixed descriptions but also all that is contained by named languages, whose promotion now "constitutes a retrospective justification of colonial structures," as if such named languages cannot be liberated from their state-imposed definitions once they are contaminated by colonialism.[23]

We must emphasize here the critical distinction between languages that are named and promulgated by political fiat and those that are demarcated by linguistic criteria. The linguistic definition of language, which is based solely on mutual intelligibility, aims to free us from political considerations. Simply put, if two speech varieties can be understood mutually by their speakers, these varieties are considered to belong to the same language. If mutual intelligibility does not hold, they are considered independent languages. There are well-known caveats here that have long been recognized by linguists, principally having to do with the gradient nature of comprehension between related varieties, the asymmetrically wide dissemination of prestige varieties, and the interference of language attitudes. Despite these caveats, mutual intelligibility remains the bedrock of all linguistically grounded attempts to classify and enumerate languages and must be kept apart from state-engineered attempts to classify and enumerate languages based on political, ethnic, or other social criteria.

But let us put aside the fraught question of whether the languages of the world can be identified and enumerated objectively and scientifically. What is still sorely missing from this discourse is an account of Indigenous views on language identification. When we do expand our scope to include non-Western perspectives, we quickly encounter clear cases of language reification throughout the world. Northeast Amazonia, for instance, is well-known for the practice of linguistic exogamy, an entirely Indigenous institution in which spouses must be selected from outside the language group.[24] In this same area, code mixing is frowned on and in fact policed during child-rearing.[25] Luke Fleming further notes how Nheengatú speakers in this same region are viewed by neighboring Tukanoans as having lost their ethnicity because of their language mixing and borrowing, an attitude that has developed independent of the influence of any

nation-state.[26] Jeffrey Heath describes a similar situation in Arnhem Land, Australia, where Aboriginal languages are "assigned by the dreamtime cult totems, and are inherited patrilineally as part of clan identity."[27] He goes on to explain that "among the Yuulngu groups, including the Ritharngu, this pattern was reinforced by a strong normative insistence that the child use his father's language as his principal medium of communications, at least after a certain age."[28]

Paul Kroskrity's extensive work on Tewa linguistic purism provides a Native American analogue from the Southwest.[29] After hundreds of years of intensive contact with Spanish, Hopi, and English, including long-standing Hopi-Tewa bilingualism, the Tewa language shows extremely few signs of that contact. Kroskrity attributes this to an emblematic extension of the ritual kiva space, where various types of purity are required, to the society as a whole. Regardless of the inferred cause, Kroskrity's description of Arizona Tewa language ideology provides a relatively straightforward example of Indigenous purism, which William Foley compares to the Herderian formula—Language = Culture = Nation.[30] Miki Makihara discusses a different type of scenario among the Polynesian Rapa Nui, the Indigenous people of Easter Island, who were colonized by the Chilean state.[31] While the colloquial language is a syncretic mix of native Rapa Nui and Spanish, a de-Hispanicized, purist register has come into existence and is deployed for political purposes to demarcate the border between the Rapa Nui and non-Indigenous Chileans. Makihara presents the example of a fully bilingual Rapa Nui leader who gives a speech to a visiting Chilean politician in the purist register with subsequent Spanish interpretation, the goal here being to assert autonomy by highlighting difference.

Even this brief review should make clear that the totalizing generalizations that lead us to posit purism, naming, and reification strictly as colonial artifacts do not withstand scrutiny once we look beyond state ideologies. By the same token, portraying language description and analysis as a colonial invention further obscures the pioneering contributions of non-Western linguists such as Sībawayhi, who described the intricacies of the Arabic language in the eighth century, and Pāṇini, who codified much of Sanskrit grammar using complex interacting rules, presaging generative grammar by over two thousand years.

We are in agreement with the translanguaging literature that the full embrace of a multilingualism that breaks the traditional boundaries

of named languages is long overdue and goes hand in hand with undoing racist language ideologies and policies, especially as enacted in the education system.[32] At the same time, it seems the solution to the unilateral imposition of categories and labels cannot be the unilateral removal of these categories and labels, which at best amounts to a kind of postcolonial factory recall. Rather, an honest decolonization should demand that outsiders relinquish the power of naming *and* unnaming, invention *and* disinvention. As Gerald Roche points out, current critiques of language revitalization and language rights advocacy as hopelessly essentialist offer no alternative path to those fighting for what they envision as cultural continuity.[33] *Strategic essentialism*, to borrow Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term,[34] in fact continues to be recruited by disenfranchised groups in rebuilding solidarity, countering negative ideologies, and providing "stable ground for further social action."[35] Ironically, language disinvention, which takes an approach polemically opposed to that of the problematic normative ideology underlying the ACS, seems to march toward the same deleterious erasure of Indigenous languages by denying their historical unity as named entities, a unity that in some cases is the primary bond for a community of speakers or signers.

THE *LANGUAGES OF NEW YORK CITY* MAP

We have sought to overcome some of the theoretical dilemmas just discussed by producing a working model of New York City's linguistic diversity through iterative design. Our model began with ELA's Queens-focused contribution to Solnit and Jelly-Shapiro's *Nonstop Metropolis* (figure 5.2), developed into an all-city map[36] (figure 5.1), and now exists as a multilayered, interactive digital map (figure 5.3) that attempts to represent every distinct communalect in the city geographically.[37] The map is based on an effort beginning in 2010 to draw on all available sources, including thousands of interviews and sometimes in-depth discussions with community leaders, speakers, and other experts, to tell the continuing story of the city's many languages and cultures.

In particular, ELA is committed to representing the Indigenous, minority, and primarily oral language varieties that have neither public visibility nor official support. By design, "larger" languages are underrepresented in our map, applying to language mapping the spirit of *counter-mapping*, which

FIGURE 5.2. ELA's initial *Mother Tongues and Queens* map. Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Shapiro, *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 194.

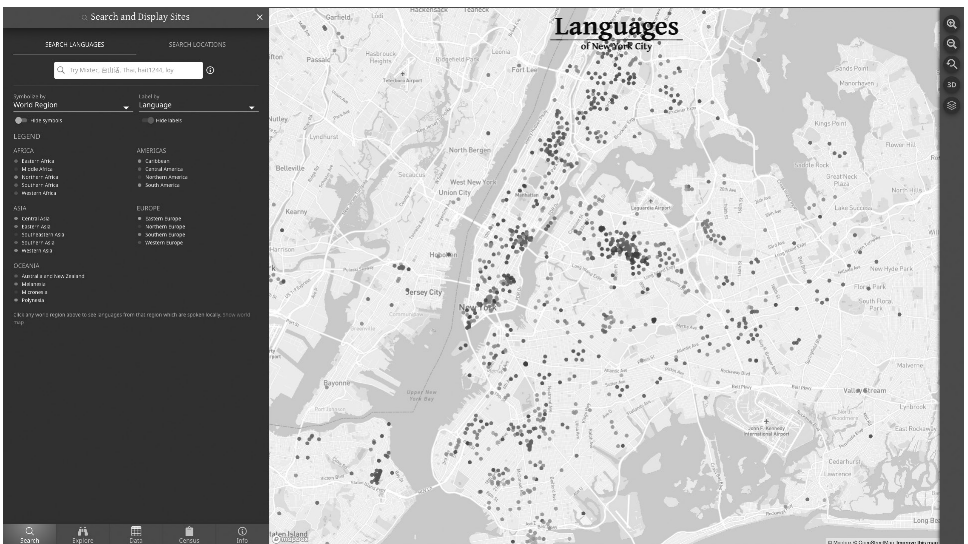

FIGURE 5.3. ELA's multilayered, interactive digital *Languages of New York* map. ELA, https://languagemap.nyc.

resists and inverts the cartographic practices of dominant cultures.[38] Instead of attempting to enumerate the number of speakers of major languages in every census tract, the ELA database maps significant sites, including residential clusters, community centers, religious institutions, restaurants, and other gathering places where community members affirm that their language is frequently spoken. Any private locations were "fuzzed" to protect speakers' privacy. In addition, community members posit an estimate for the size of the community as well as other information about its history, its present-day makeup, and its language practices—contributing to short descriptions that are included in the digital map for every language group, or at least for every macrolinguistic group.[39] Unlike the Census, the ELA database foregrounds endonyms, the names most commonly accepted by the speakers themselves (in the appropriate orthography) as well as English names, ISO codes, and glottocodes (https://glottolog.org) for the use of researchers and the public. This incidentally exposes an interesting diversity of names as well as clashing perceptions. A Hispanophone Puerto Rican hearing the ancestral language of the Sephardic Jews of the Balkans or Morocco would almost certainly recognize their language as Spanish, albeit with a few unfamiliar words and odd features. Yet the Balkan Jews would identify it as their own unique language called Ladino, while the Moroccan Jews would call their language Haketia, derived simply from the Arabic word for "talk." All three forms of speech—Caribbean Spanish, Ladino, and Haketia derive from a single source and are for the most part mutually intelligible. However, they correlate with vastly different identities and may be considered by their speakers as independent languages with unrelated names. Conversely, there are a multitude of languages in New York City referred to by their own speakers as some variation of the name *creole* or *patois*, both of which index a shared social history of these languages rather than a common origin. In this case, we find communities sharing a similar name for languages that are far from mutually intelligible. Differences in endonym and exonym may also reveal layers of history that many might consider long buried. In the case of many Indigenous Mexican languages, we find the exonyms still consistently reflect the Nahuatl names bestowed on them by their Aztec conquerors prior to European colonization. The (Hispanicized) Nahuatl language names Mixteco and Amuzgo, for instance, are referred to as Tu'un Savi (the language of the rain) and Ñomndaa (the language of water) by their own speakers. Yet the Nahuatl

names are the ones with official currency and the only ones used by service providers, interpretation agencies, and others in the United States. While recognizing the problems inherent in language names and named languages, the map attempts to offer an enriched view that reveals these kinds of insights, among others.

As noted earlier, the disparity between ELA's mapping work and the census count, in nearly every respect, is too large to ignore, especially when the two data sets can be superimposed on each other in the digital version. A single category in the census data like Mande, referring to a large group of related languages spoken across West Africa with varying degrees of mutual intelligibility, is reflected when filtering the ELA data set as twenty distinct languages, including both widely spoken languages such as Bambara and Dyula and those with much more limited distribution such as Marka and Vai, which nonetheless have speakers or even substantial communities in New York. Census categories that speakers would hardly recognize, such as Niger-Congo (a language family with over fifty thousand "speakers" in New York), can be analyzed visually, by comparison with ELA data, as potentially involving dozens of languages but almost certainly featuring Akan, Igbo, Wolof, and Yoruba as major components.

In geographic terms, approximately 38 percent of the languages in the ELA database are from Asia, 24 percent from Africa, 19 percent from Europe, 16 percent from the Americas, and the rest from Oceania and the Pacific. Some of the patterns revealed—the dense clustering of West African languages in Harlem and the Bronx, the presence of Indigenous languages in areas usually just considered "Spanish-speaking," and the deep and multifaceted Asian language diversity of Queens, to name a few—at least hint at the complexity of the city's linguistic diversity in ways that Census Bureau data miss or distort. Communities undergoing language shift and likely to have large numbers of semispeakers, rememberers, etc. are shown as such, albeit with precedence given to the heritage language. The ELA database also contains information about over a dozen liturgical languages used by communities today (e.g., Latin, Coptic, and Ge'ez), several ongoing cases of (especially Indigenous) language revival such as Lenape and Taíno, and numerous ethnolects and dialects as well as a few dozen languages used historically by communities but never officially recorded as such. By no means does the map attempt to be comprehensive, and it, too, surely represents an undercount, a snapshot of Babel, and a

crude reification of linguistic realities that are much more complex on the ground—though accompanying descriptions and media bring us closer to an accurate and representative understanding of the linguistic complexity of New York City.

The map makes visible not only hundreds of speech communities missed by the Census but also a whole range of settlement patterns and interaction zones that are integral to the city's linguistic ecology. Where residential concentrations exist, there may not be just one but several with important linguistic differences. Where the Census simply identifies Arabic-speaking tracts in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, the ELA map makes clear (as community members know) that those in Brooklyn are somewhat more likely to speak forms of Levantine Arabic, those in Queens speak more Moroccan and Egyptian Arabic, and those in the Bronx mostly speak forms of Yemeni Arabic. Coterritorial settlement patterns highlight the ways in which one group, for a variety of reasons, tends to settle (sometimes in a kind of succession pattern) with or near another one to which it has linguistic, historical, cultural, religious, or other connections. For example, throughout the city Albanian neighborhoods have formed in Italian areas in large part because many Albanians are proficient, for historical reasons, in Italian—which the New York settlement pattern only strengthens. In other cases, whole microcosms of world regions can form, as in the post-Soviet world of south Brooklyn, where Russophones from across the Soviet Union (especially central Asia) may find themselves using Russian more than either Uzbek (for instance) or English. In some cases, we find no pattern at all, with individuals simply settling where they can or wish for reasons of work, convenience, cost, etc. In others, communities that had initial nodes in the first generation experience dispersal, especially with suburbanization, and this may be associated with a shift to English and absorption into the wider society.

Patterns of language shift and change already under way in a home region often continue or accelerate with migration (itself often a multistop process that involves linguistic adjustments). Much depends on how movement and settlement bring speakers into contact with other groups, but the map makes clear that Indigenous Mexicans are within a Spanish-speaking matrix even in New York, just as Fujianese are within a Mandarin matrix and Mustangis are surrounded by Nepali and Tibetan, not to mention Urdu and Bengali. Far from a traditional model representing Americanization as

a straightforward intergenerational shift from a mother language to English, we find a complex patchwork of multiple assimilations, based on differential settlement patterns in the city, often leading at least initially to high degrees of multilingualism and mixing.

A PLACE ON THE MAP, A PLACE IN THE CITY

Despite all the caveats applied, a professionally designed map, whether analog or digital, is an artifact that carries an apparently self-evident authority. Over several years of "road testing" the map, we have consistently found that people look for their language(s) where they think they should be. Overwhelmingly, the initial response from speakers of small languages is satisfaction at being represented, especially at seeing a name, particularly an endonym, which in many cases they have never seen printed (at least outside the community), put on the same plane as languages like English, Spanish, and Chinese. There is strong resonance here with Tommaso Manfredini's description (in this volume) of working with an asylum seeker to pinpoint the latter's hometown with Google Maps and being unable to do so—thus registering "absence of presence, absence of proof" that made his story "already a step removed from being entirely verifiable." We, too, have frequently had this experience and see the New York language map as a kind of response, providing proof of presence, albeit in the migrant's destination rather than their point of origin.

In some cases, visibility and recognition can come almost as something of a shock. While displaying a blown-up version of the map at a festival in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, we were approached by a young Senegalese-French man who had recently moved to the area and was visibly astonished to find his heritage language, Baïnounk, shown in the very first place on the map he looked, among the Senegalese languages spoken in the Bronx. He eagerly called over his wife, telling us that she was a speaker of Monokutuba from the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville—a language not then on the map but one that both were happy to see added, even if she was the only speaker they knew of in the city. There was no small irony in it being a speaker of Baïnounk who searched for and found his language community on the map that day, as Baïnounk has been held up as a particularly thorny case of sociolinguistic complexity, where defining the language itself is a

challenge due to the extreme multilingualism and language contact found in Casamance, Senegal (as can be noted from the very title of Freiderike Lüpke's "Language and Identity in Flux: In Search of Baïnounk"[40]). But this betrays an important truth: while linguists and other specialists have been anxiously pondering the definition, demarcation, invention, and disinvention of languages, the labels in question, whatever their provenance, gain significant traction "on the ground" in the meantime. Both the linguist and the speaker are in search of Baïnounk in their own ways. Linguists may try to document and describe a language by sorting through layers of multilingualism, while native speakers may be more concerned with locating themselves in the multilingual diaspora city.[41]

In another public exposition of the map, this time on a street corner in the South Bronx, a child, roughly ten years old, approached and began scanning the language names intently. He was trying to remember the name of his parents' language, he told us. "It begins with a *G*," he said, starting to look in the section of the map representing where we stood (a major center for Garifuna people) and coming upon the name with the force of discovery: "Garifuna!" In this case, the map had unexpectedly served as both reminder and validation of a buried heritage language.

These are not outliers. A group of Indigenous Latin American language activists, lacking any census data about their communities, asserts that the map will be the most powerful tool at their disposal for lobbying for recognition and resources from city government. An Armenian New Yorker is delighted to find not just that Armenian is displayed but also that someone outside the community has noted and made clear the distinctions among Western Armenian (endangered), Eastern Armenian (the national language), and Classical Armenian (the liturgical language). An activist supporting the West African script N'ko proudly notes the correct use, production, and encoding of the script in the endonym for the Mandinka language. No community or individual has asked for their language to be removed from the map, though eyebrows have been raised about ethnolects included such as Jewish English and Mexican Spanish, reflecting sensitivity that these may somehow be nonstandard or insufficiently distinctive variants.

For policy makers at the city level—our most extensive experience has been with the city's 2020 Census outreach team and the Department of Health—the map can be a desperately needed guide to known blind spots.

In these environments, resources simply cannot be allocated to communities without some justification drawing on a published source, ideally statistical. The map at least provides a starting point, a validation from a linguistic point of view of what community leaders and organizers already know, something to which they can point.

For journalists, whose work often takes the positive side of visibility as a given but who have also evolved safeguards to protect individual identities, the map is serving as a reference that leads them to ask the right questions and discover that their sources are Indigenous. Major news stories, from immigration to Covid-19, have vital Indigenous dimensions that have been consistently overlooked because of invisibility. Amanda Holpuch's article on Covid-19, for example, cited the map and centered Indigenous voices in Corona, Queens, one of the neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic in the country,[42] while similar and otherwise exemplary pieces discussed the struggles of Indigenous Latin Americans in New York City without acknowledging their identities beyond Guatemalan and Mexican.

Social justice in a representative democracy is presumed to depend on the visibility of its constituent communities, and, thus, every group in the United States with a shared sense of identity and the means to mobilize has fought for increased "visibility" for the betterment of its people. We have seen how the presence of certain migrants has been occluded as their languages easily slip through the sieve of the ACS and similar surveys due in part to the terms *language*, *speaker*, and *spoken at home*. Clearly, the underlying liberal ideology that there exists a straight line from visibility to justice cannot be assumed lightly. There are also communities that could be harmed by visibility, and visibility does not ensure that society will be moved to action; neither does it protect against empty gestures of recognition.[43] Censuses, maps, and other tools of visibility have furthermore long been deployed by states and missionary organizations to place populations under their control. The reduction of complex ecologies of speech to named languages has also played a role in colonial projects of categorization, racialization, and subjugation.[44] But while such exploitation has been largely a colonial European affair over the last several centuries, we must also recognize the agency of Indigenous and other marginalized

peoples in implementing their own regimes of naming and categorization, both as traditional practice and as acts of resistance.

Despite the spotted history of language naming and enumeration, we have argued here that the erasure of ethnolinguistic groups through policy and practice can be more pernicious than the hazards of categorization and identification. Just as Isabelle Zaugg (in this volume) argues for a sensitive three-pronged approach that recognizes the "double-edged sword" of digital visibility and usability for all languages, we see linguistic countermapping as involving a balance between pursuing greater equity and attending to those hazards. Our argument draws largely on experience with Indigenous immigrants in New York City who face inherent barriers to visibility, rendering them doubly minoritized within their respective national communities and as minorities themselves within American society and without access to basic services. Our answer to this, the *Languages of New York City* digital map, attempts to bring light to myriad hidden language communities that have until recently gone unnoticed by the city at large. While acknowledging the thorny problems of linguistic essentialization, the mapping project gives named languages a fair shake as a representation of urban multilingualism. While we are seeing success in the former goal as language communities themselves begin to use the map as official validation of their presence in the city, we continue to work toward an equally tangible but truer representation of all those communicative practices that exist between named languages.

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NOTES

Certain sections of this chapter overlap with Ross Perlin, D. Kaufman, M. Turin, M. Daurio, S. Craig, and J. Lampel, "Mapping Urban Linguistic Diversity in New York City: Motives, Methods, Tools and Outcomes," *Language Documentation and Conservation* 15 (2021): 458–490. The focus there, however, is on the development of the *Languages*

of New York City digital map. Here we focus less on the technical aspects and more on the ontological ones in relation to the recent literature on translanguaging and language disinvention.

1. Father Isaac Jogues, "Novum Belgium," in *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609–1664*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1953), 259.
2. Daniel Kaufman and Ross Perlin. "Language Documentation in Diaspora Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Endangered Languages*, ed. Kenneth L. Rehg and Lyle Campbell, 399–418 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
3. This effort began as our contribution to a cultural atlas of New York City. See Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), map 24.
4. Nicolas Tournadre, "The Tibetic Languages and Their Classification," in *Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area*, ed. Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 105–130.
5. Gerald Roche and Hiroyuki Suzuki, "Tibet's Minority Languages: Diversity and Endangerment," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 4 (2018): 1227–1278.
6. Herman W. Haller, "Between Standard Italian and Creole: An Interim Report on Language Patterns in an Italian-American Community," *Word* 32, no. 3 (1981): 186.
7. Herman Haller, "Italian in New York," in *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City*, ed. Ofelia García and Joshua A. Fishman (Berlin-New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1997), 133.
8. Among other popular efforts, the Mixteco rapper Una Isu (Miguel Villegas Ventura) tackles the colonial dichotomy directly in a trilingual song entitled "Mixteco es un lenguaje" (Mixteco is a language).
9. Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martínez, and Josiah Heyman, "Immigration Authorities Systematically Deny Medical Care for Migrants Who Speak Indigenous Languages," Center for Migration Studies, December 21, 2018, https://cmsny.org/publications/slackmartinezheyman-medical-care-denial/.
10. Greg Grandin and Elizabeth Oglesby, "Who Killed Jakelin Caal Maquín at the US Border?," *The Nation*, December 17, 2018.
11. Rachel Nolan, "A Translation Crisis at the Border," *New Yorker*, January 6, 2020.
12. Leila Miller, "Nine Years After Guatemalan Man's Shooting, LAPD Officers Get Help to Identify Indigenous languages," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2019.
13. Suzanne Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12.
14. For discussion, see Sarah Grey Thomason and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Yaron Matras, *Language Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
15. Earlier expressions of these ideas can be found in Peter Mühlhäusler, "Language Planning and Language Ecology," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 1, no. 3 (2000): 367; and Timothy Reagan, "Objectification, Positivism and Language Studies: A Reconsideration," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004), 41–60, among many others:

> The notion of a "language" is a recent culture-specific notion associated with the rise of European nation states and the Enlightenment. The notion of "a language" makes little sense in most traditional societies. (Mühlhäusler, "Language Planning," 358.)

> There is, or at least there may well be, no such thing as English. Indeed, my claim is even a bit stronger than this—not only is there no such thing as English, but there is arguably no such thing as Russian, French, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, or any other language. . . . [Languages are] ultimately a collection of idiolects which have been determined to belong together for what are ultimately non- and extra-linguistic reasons. (Reagan, "Objectification," 42, 56.)

16. C. Williams, "Arfarniad o Ddulliau Dysgu ac Addysgu yng Nghyd-destun Addysg Uwchradd Ddwyieithog [An evaluation of teaching and learning methods in the context of bilingual secondary education]" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 1994).
17. See Ricardo Otheguy, Ofelia García, and Wallis Reid, "Clarifying Translanguaging and Deconstructing Named Languages: A Perspective from Linguistics," *Applied Linguistics Review* 6 (2015): 283.
18. Francois Grosjean, "Neurolinguists, Beware! The Bilingual Is Not Two Monolinguals in One Person," *Brain and Language* 36 (1989): 3–15.
19. Otheguy et al., "Clarifying Translanguaging," 282–283. See Wesley Y. Leonard, "Producing Language Reclamation by Decolonising 'Language,'" *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017): 15–36, and "Framing Language Reclamation Programmes for Everybody's Empowerment," *Gender and Language* 6, no. 2 (2012): 339–367. Leonard usefully teases apart traditional language revitalization, with its focus on reviving a named language, from what he terms *language reclamation*, "a larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives" (Leonard, "Framing Language Reclamation Programs," 359), activities that grapple directly with the essentialization decried by Otheguy et al., "Clarifying Translanguaging." See also Leonard's chapter in this volume.
20. Otheguy et al., "Clarifying Translanguaging," 299.
21. Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook, "Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages," in *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, ed. Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 2007): 21.
22. Salikoko Mufwene, *Language Evolution: Contact, Competition and Change* (London: Continuum Press, 2008).
23. Makoni and Pennycook, "Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages," 26.
24. Jean Jackson, *The Fish People: Linguistic Exogamy and Tukanoan Identity in Northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
25. Alexandra Aikhenvald, "Language Awareness and Correct Speech Among the Tariana," *Anthropological Linguistics* 43, no. 4 (2001): 411–430.
26. Luke Fleming, "From Patrilects to Performatives: Linguistic Exogamy and Language Shift in the Northwest Amazon" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 12.
27. Jeffrey Heath, *Linguistic Diffusion in Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978), 15.
28. Heath, *Linguistic Diffusion*, 19.

29. See Paul Kroskrity, "Arizona Tewa Kiva Speech as a Manifestation of a Dominant Language Ideology," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. A. Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 402–419; "Language Ideologies in the Expression and Representation of Arizona Tewa Ethnic Identity," in *Regimes of Language*, ed. Paul Kroskrity (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 2000), 329–359; and *Language, History and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Studies of the Arizona Tewa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993).
30. William A. Foley, "Personhood and Linguistic Identity, Purism and Variation," *Language Documentation and Description* 3 (2005): 157–180. Foley named the formula after the eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, who identified a correlation between the language of a community and that community's mind or spirit.
31. Miki Makihara, "Linguistic Purism in Rapa Nui Political Discourse," in *Consequences of Contact: Language Ideologies and Sociocultural Transformations in Pacific Societies*, ed. Miki Makihara and Bambi B. Schieffelin (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2007), 49–69.
32. See Ofelia García, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
33. Gerald Roche, "Abandoning Endangered Languages: Ethical Loneliness, Language Oppression, and Social Justice," *American Anthropologist* 122 (2020): 164–169.
34. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3–32.
35. M. Bucholtz, "Sociolinguistic Nostalgia and the Authentication of Identity," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7 (2003): 401.
36. Ross Perlin and Daniel Kaufman. eds., *Languages of New York City*, map, 3rd ed. (New York: Endangered Language Alliance, 2020).
37. Perlin et al., "Mapping Urban Linguistic Diversity."
38. N. Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Antipode* 27, no. 4 (1995): 383–406.
39. Perlin et al., "Mapping Urban Linguistic Diversity."
40. Freiderike Lüpke, "Language and Identity in Flux: In Search of Baïnounk," *Journal of Language Contact* 3 (2010): 155–174.
41. Baïnounk is not even among the languages in the greatly expanded coding scheme of the U.S. Census, so his elation at finding Baïnounk in the map's alternative representation seems well justified.
42. Amanda Holpuch, "Corona in Corona: Deadly Toll in a New York Neighborhood Tells a Story of Race, Poverty and Inequality," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2020.
43. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
44. J. J. Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning and Power* (New York: Blackwell, 2007).

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Words

MOHAMMED BENNIS

Words hewn
breath
not flushed
Words burning the origin of their desires in me
with a rush of passages threatening

Words gathering union
wandering
Words rising behind a screen of words

The shadows carried their clouds to my hands
Tomorrow they will leave
through
vaults open
to their butterflies

The silence there is busy
multiplying in
the flames
of the ghombaz
drawing near the dead
who cross over
from the memory of words

Translated by Camilo Gomez-Rivas

كلمَـات

محمد بنيـــس

كلماتٌ ينْحَـتُها
نفَسٌ
منْ غيْر شُحُوبْ
كلماتٌ
توقظُ فيّ سُلالةَ شهْوتهَا
بهُجوم مَجازاتٍ تتهَـدّدُني
كلماتٌ تحْشُدُ
وحْدَتَها
وَتتُوهْ
كَلماتٌ تُشرقُ خلفَ ستائرَ منْ كلماتْ

ليَدي يرْفعُ هذا الظلُّ سحَابتهَا
وغداً ستُهاجرُ
بيْنَ
سَراديبَ انْكشفتْ
لفراشَتهَا

والصّمتُ هنالكَ مُنشغلٌ
يتضَاعفُ في
شُعَلِ
الغُنْبازِ
يقرّبُ منّي أمواتاً
عَبرُوا منْ ذاكرةِ الكلمَاتْ