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Languages of History, Histories of Language

***Past & Present* virtual issue, eds. Purba Hossain & John Gallagher**

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Introduction: Languages of History, Histories of Language

Purba Hossain & John Gallagher

I. A turn not taken?

Just over three decades ago, in the introduction to a volume of essays titled *The Social History of Language*, Peter Burke wrote that 'language is too important historically to leave to the linguists – so intimately involved with the processes of social interaction and social change that social historians need to give it much more attention than they have done so far'.[1] Four years later, Roy Porter stated the problem more boldly: '[l]anguage is so intimate to living that it has long been overlooked by historians, rather in the way that little historical attention has been paid to such other home truths as the body, its gestures and clothing, and the everyday objects with which people surround themselves'.[2] In the decades since Burke and Porter wrote, those everyday objects – just like clothing and the body – have become central to new and exciting fields of historical scholarship. By contrast, language still remains relatively marginal as a subject of historical analysis: the role of language and languages in shaping individual lives and grander historical narratives has yet to receive the close and sustained historiographical attention due to something so 'intimate to living'. This is particularly true when we think of language in its everyday uses – not as a collection of keywords and discourses but as a set of social tools used in ways that speak loudly, if we will listen, about relations of status, class, gender, age, and race. In general, linguists and literary scholars have paid far more sustained attention to languages in use in the past than have historians. Reading Burke and Porter on the social history of language today, over thirty years on, they seem to be predicting a historiographical moment that never quite came – a turn not taken.

[1] Peter Burke, 'Introduction', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds.), *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 17.
[2] Roy Porter, 'Introduction', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds.), *Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 1.

This virtual issue of *Past & Present* brings together work on the history of language from the journal's archives, showing how viewing language as an object of historical enquiry can lead to new insights into a variety of historical questions and debates. The virtual issue was inspired by a Past & Present Society-sponsored workshop on 'New Histories of Language' held online in summer 2021. The workshop brought together five scholars working on a diverse range of language histories. Ardis Butterfield brought perspectives from medieval England and France, drawing on her research into the complexities of language and identity during the Hundred Years War.[3] Paul Cohen considered the multilingual and multidialectal encounters of the early modern Francophone world.[4] Margaret Kelleher brought insights from her recent study of a murder in rural Ireland and its prosecution, showing how language difference remained a crucial force in shaping relations between Anglophone authorities and an Irish-speaking population even at the end of the nineteenth century.[5] Rachel Leow shared reflections drawn from her work on multilingualism and nation-making in British Malaya and postcolonial Malaysia.[6] Farina Mir showed how her work on Punjabi language and literature made it possible for her to write a history of vernacular culture which did not centre the colonial state, and which questioned traditional ideas of language's role in the relationship between ethnicity, state, and language.[7] The work of this disciplinarily varied group of scholars shows how thinking about language in the past can shed new light on histories of empire, power structures, and nationhood, while also offering bottom-up perspectives on social interactions, encounters, and agency. The editors of this virtual issue are two scholars whose work considers histories of language from yet other perspectives – Purba Hossain's new project engages with the role and agency of translators and language intermediaries in colonial India, while John Gallagher's work explores questions of multilingualism, mobility, and migration in early modern Britain and Europe.

[3] Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[4] Paul Cohen, *Kingdom of Babel: The Making of a National Language in France, 1400-1815* (forthcoming, Cornell University Press).
[5] Margaret Kelleher, *The Maamtrasna Murders: Language, Life, and Death in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
[6] Rachel Leow, *Taming Babel: Language in the Making of Malaysia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[7] Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

'Language', for historians, is a slippery term, and one which has been used to describe a great variety of objects, from systems of signs (spoken, written, or gestural) used for communication, to more abstract sets of concepts or shared beliefs and actions. The essays assembled here consider language in a variety of forms. They explore the meanings of 'national' languages alongside sign languages, pidgins, and creoles; they interrogate ideas about language as well as its usage in contexts of conflict, insult, and protest. Elsewhere in the *Past & Present* archive, we find 'language' used in the sense of a set of symbolic codes rather than utterances, in a usage that owes much to cultural anthropology.[8] In assembling this collection of articles, our interest was primarily in language not as metaphor, but as a tool for communication – language as the stuff of everyday life. These are articles which explore how language could shape social relations and political histories, from medieval writing and early modern sign language to swearing, blasphemy, and minority language revivals.[9] They show how thinking with language can offer insights beyond the linguistic and into the realm of the political, economic and social; like the article by Stephen D. Behrendt, Philip D. Morgan, and Nicholas Radburn, which uses linguistic information to trace the ethnic origins and mobilities of enslaved Africans within Africa prior to their transportation across the Atlantic. They also showcase how putting language more squarely at the centre can upend our assumptions about places and periods in history. A common theme at the roundtable was the danger of anachronism when talking about language. As Eric Dursteler's article in this virtual issue shows, it can be easy to unthinkingly apply modern assumptions about the relationship between language, nation, and identity to periods where this simply does not apply. Discussions of language in *Past & Present* have covered periods from ancient Palestine to twenty-first-century Ireland, and remind us that the idea of a monoglot nation-state is in most

[8] See, for instance, William M. Reddy, 'The textile trade and the language of the crowd at Rouen 1752-1871', *Past & Present* 74 (1977), pp. 62-89.

[9] Arguably underrepresented here, and possibly in the *Past & Present* archives, is work from the traditions of intellectual history and history of political thought. These are rich and extensive fields, but helpful ways in include J.G.A. Pocock, 'Languages and their implications: the transformation of the study of political thought', in *Politics, Language & Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Quentin Skinner, 'The idea of a cultural lexicon', in *Visions of Politics* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 158-174. Skinner was responding to Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976). For a recent reassessment of keyword histories which attempts to connect the social and the political, see Mark Knights et al, 'Towards a social and cultural history of keywords and concepts by the Early Modern Research Group', *History of Political Thought* 31.3 (2010), pp. 427-448.

cases a very modern one.[10] Across most periods of the world's history, multilingualism has been a normal element of everyday life. Reconstructing polyglot pasts can trouble broader narratives of nationhood, culture, and politics, but it also demands that we pay new attention to everyday interactions at every level of society. Language worked differently in and on the past: as Rachel Leow argued in the roundtable that inspired this virtual issue, writing histories grounded in language can allow historians to think across and beyond artificial geographical and political boundaries.

Histories of language must necessarily be interdisciplinary. They demand our engagement with work by colleagues in the study of languages and linguistics, who in many cases have pioneered methodologies and introduced important concepts for thinking about the workings of language in societies both past and present. Some of the most effective work in the history of language to be found in the *Past & Present* archive (and beyond) is that which draws constructively on tools and approaches from other disciplines. In this virtual issue, we can see how Elizabeth Horodowich, Eric Dursteler, and Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers have drawn productively on sociolinguistics to interrogate late medieval subversive speech and early modern multilingualism. The analysis of enslaved people's linguistic backgrounds found in Stephen D. Behrendt, Philip D. Morgan, and Nicholas Radburn's article is explicitly indebted to work by linguists on African languages, while Ian B. Stewart's historical investigation of ideas on Celtic language and culture engages productively with the philological and antiquarian traditions which shaped the study of language and linguistics in Europe. At our roundtable, Margaret Kelleher reflected on how approaches from sociolinguistics had equipped her to read against the archival grain in researching the Maamtrasna murder case, while Farina Mir called for disciplinary humility on the part of historians in the face of the breadth of knowledge and methodological sophistication on show among linguists. We might, as historians, turn Burke's comment that language is 'too important historically to leave to the linguists' around, and ask ourselves why so much of the theoretical and methodological heavy lifting around the study of language in society has happened outside of our own discipline. Reading work in historical linguistics, which commonly engages closely with historians' work to provide contexts for its findings, there can be a sense that this is a

[10] Seth Schwartz, 'Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine', *Past & Present* 148:1 (1995), pp. 3-47; Thomas Waters, 'Irish cursing and the art of magic, 1750-2018', *Past & Present* 247:1 (2020), pp. 113-149.

conversation to which historians are, by and large, coming late. As the history of language develops as a field of historical studies, it will stand to learn much from, among others, the focus on the social meanings of language use in the past found in historical sociolinguistics and historical pragmatics, while the work of corpus linguists on historical corpora could inspire historians to work on patterns and features of historical language usage and their wider implications for our research questions.[11] Whether we work on sources in one language or a variety of them, historians always have to be language-learners: studying the codes, styles, and meanings of our sources. All of our historical research is mediated through language: even where scholars might not think of themselves as working 'on' language, language histories can and should inspire historians to reflect on the place of language(s) and linguistic assumptions in their own practice.

A glance at this virtual issue's table of contents will show that these articles practise a variety of approaches to historical research. For our authors, language has offered new insights into debates in social, political, and cultural history. They have considered the workings of language at scales from micro to macro, from the hyperlocal to the transnational. These articles consider a variety of kinds of language and linguistic contexts – the spoken, written, and gestural, the mono- and multilingual – while engaging with both the history of linguistic ideas and the historical realities of communication. We are far from certain that each of these authors would identify themselves, primarily or otherwise, as historians of language, or identify what they are doing as part of a coherent field called the history of language. But in bringing these diverse articles together, our ambition is to argue that such a field exists, that it is deserving of more attention from historians, and that its object of interest is not only language in itself, but language's role in these broader histories of speech, society, and culture. The 'history of language' should not be taken to mean the history of any one language – and usually of a prestigious or powerful one. Instead, it must be a field which explores the

[11] As an example of this kind of interdisciplinary work, Stephen Doherty, Lisa Ford, et al have used the computerised text analysis tool Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) to locate emotive language and understand language relating to power differentials in nineteenth-century commission reports of the British Empire. This method allows for new discoveries about empire, power, and commissions at a scale physically not possible without digital humanities tools. Stephen Doherty, Lisa Ford, Kirsten McKenzie, Naomi Parkinson, David Roberts, Paul Halliday, Zoe Laidlaw, Alan Lester, and Philip Stern, 'Inquiring into the corpus of empire', *Journal of World History* 32:2 (2021), pp. 219-240.

dynamics of linguistic encounter, and the stories of the manifold forms of speech, language, and communication which have underpinned so many historical processes.

These articles approach histories both medieval and modern from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, but they offer object lessons in how taking language seriously as an object of historical analysis can have tremendous implications for how we understand agency, identity, communication, and resistance. Language emerges from these articles as an instrument of solidarity and a tool of domination, sometimes in counterintuitive ways: linguistic revivals are argued to have strangled the languages they claimed to protect. Language becomes the key to understanding popular political ferment in late medieval Flanders and the gendered and social dynamics of early Soviet society. It uncovers the links between blasphemy legislation, migration, and social control in early modern Venice, and reveals the dynamics of communication and memory in ninth- and tenth-century Europe. Linguistic dislocation and cultural assimilation work uneasily alongside each other in accounts of fifteenth-century Spain and the eighteenth-century Caribbean, while linguistic scholarship proves central to the making of European history, memory, and ideas of nationhood. Taken together, these articles make an eloquent case that it is long past time that language took its historiographical place alongside Porter's other 'home truths' like clothing or the body. In these articles, the outlines of a new history of language takes shape: often interdisciplinary in its methods, but rigorously historical in its questions and insights.

II. Orality and communication

Within the pages of *Past & Present*, the interconnected histories of orality, literacy, and memory have been a popular area of focus. D.R. Woolf has studied histories of folklore and oral tradition, Chris Wickham has interrogated the impact of oral utterances such as gossip, while scholars such as Rab Houston, Michael Sanderson, T.C. Smout and Barry Reay have explored the concept of literacy and its relationship with social mobility or popular religion.[12]

[12] D R Woolf, 'The "Common Voice": History, Folklore And Oral Tradition In Early Modern England', *Past & Present* 120 (1988), pp. 26-52; Chris Wickham, 'Gossip And Resistance Among The Medieval Peasantry', *Past & Present* 160 (1998), pp. 3-24; Rab Houston, 'The Literacy Myth?: Illiteracy In Scotland 1630–1760', *Past & Present* 96 (1982), pp. 81-102; Michael Sanderson, 'Literacy And Social Mobility In The Industrial Revolution In England', *Past & Present* 56 (1972), pp. 75-104; T C Smout, 'Born Again At Cambuslang: New Evidence On Popular

These works represent a crucial area of scholarship in histories of language, which interrogates oral and literate forms of communication and explores the interplay between the two. Taken together, they make a strong case for studying histories of language alongside histories of orality. We bring together two such articles in this virtual issue: Matthew Innes's 1998 article explores memory, orality and literacy in early medieval society, while a more recent contribution by Rosamund Oates focuses on the development of sign language as a form of speech.

Matthew Innes focuses on the ninth-century records of a monk named Notker (c. 840-912) from St. Gallen in modern-day Switzerland. Using Notker's literary outputs, Innes interrogates the interrelation between orality and literacy and offers insights on social memory in early medieval society. Notker's works like *Gesta Karoli* ('Deeds of Charlemagne') were largely based on orally transmitted material, and thus raise questions about the fallibility of memory, problems of translation and interpretation, and ahistorical retellings. Innes questions the common assumption that the written word was marginal in Carolingian society, arguing that written documents (often legal documents and property charters) were familiar even within village communities, and were key points of reference in local legal proceedings. Thus, even as individual small-scale landowners were not literate in the modern sense of the term, they worked within a world where the written word held considerable power. This interplay of the oral and the literal was further complicated by the fact that in the early medieval context, the written word was in a language different from the spoken. For instance, locals in St. Gallen spoke Old High German while the written word was in Latin. Innes thus urges against applying modern definitions of literacy to premodern practice, arguing that it homogenises culturally distinct and socially diverse practices. Drawing upon the example of Notker's works, Innes argues that instead of seeing the important changes in the High Middle Ages as brought about by the arrival of writing in a world of pristine orality, we must see them as a result of 'a shift in the role of writing within a long-established and durable cultural system'.[13]

Religion And Literacy In Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Past & Present* 97 (1982), pp. 114-127; Barry Reay, 'The Context And Meaning Of Popular Literacy: Some Evidence From Nineteenth-Century Rural England', *Past & Present* 131 (1991), pp. 89-129.

[13] Matthew Innes, 'Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society', *Past & Present* 158 (1998), pp. 3-36 (9).

Innes's article is an important and widely-cited thesis on the interplay between the oral and the written. It helps understand how a past society saw and interacted with language, and how in turn language becomes a way of analysing society. In the context of oral and literate forms of record-keeping, Innes also raises the question of who was in charge of memory, writing that '[a]ristocratic and royal women characteristically acted as repositories of family memory, as educators of children and intercessors for, and commemorators of, dead menfolk.'[14] He leaves us with the following question: 'Do we characterize the spoken text as oral or literate? Is writing initially much more than another device which informs human memory, albeit a more permanent and less malleable one than its predecessors?'[15]

Rosamund Oates's 2021 article juxtaposes and complements such histories of orality by exploring the experiences of deaf people in early modern England and introducing the theme of aurality and gesture.[16] It argues for the role of preachers in the evolution of signed languages for the deaf. Oates offers a detailed account of the standardisation of hand gestures, and a history of sign language as speech – seeing it as the result of early modern preachers trying to find ways to preach effectively beyond orality. Early modern Europe forms an ideal backdrop for this study because of the commonly held belief that 'faith comes from hearing'. As listening to sermons was seen as a means of salvation, deaf congregants were often believed to be damned.[17] Manual pulpit rhetoric thus became the means of overcoming this issue. Oates shows that although sign language had not been created by early modern preachers, the codification and use of manual sign language helped validate it as an alternative to speech. The use of standardised rhetorical gestures by English preachers not only made their sermons more accessible by the deaf, the hard of hearing, and those who found it difficult to follow sermons due to ambient noise, but also legitimised the use of sign language as an articulate, effective, and legal form of communication. Preaching manuals encouraged the use of gestures 'to bring sermons to life'.[18] Gesture was thus not necessarily at odds with verbal communication, and in fact the standardisation of these gestures through compendiums, guides and lexicons (like John Bulwer's *Chirologia: or, The Naturall Language*

[14] Innes, 'Memory, Orality and Literacy', p. 26.
[15] Innes, 'Memory, Orality and Literacy', p. 35.
[16] For Oates's use of 'deaf' as opposed to 'Deaf', see Rosamund Oates, 'Speaking in Hands: Early Modern Preaching and Signed Languages for the Deaf', *Past & Present* (2021), p. 1.
[17] Oates, 'Speaking in Hands', p. 1.
[18] Oates, 'Speaking in Hands', p. 14.

of the Hand and *Chironomia: or, The Art of Manuall Rhetoricke*) helped deaf congregants attend sermons and communicate.

Deaf people in early modern society faced restrictions on their legal rights, as legal tradition barred them 'from inheriting property, getting married and from fully participating in church services.'[19] In some cases, lack of speech was seen as a sign of physical and mental impairment, and before the standardisation of sign language, it was common to assume that prelingually deaf people could not express understanding or consent. Standardised lexicons thus played a crucial role in validating the use of sign language: 'offering them a legal identity while recognizing the value of their native language, sign'.[20] Over time, sign language increasingly came to be used by prelingually deaf men and women to express consent and receive licences. Even as there were continued attempts to teach deaf people to speak vocally, gestures and sign language came to be seen as an eloquent form of speech that could express complex ideas and emotions. As Oates concludes, 'The development of sign languages for deaf people went hand in hand with the emergence of a preaching culture in post-Reformation England'.[21] By looking at deafness within an especially aural world, this article opens up the space to discuss histories of orality, memory and literacy in conjunction with histories of disability. This not only adds a new dimension to the historical interplay of literacy and orality, but also demonstrates how histories of language overlap with sub-fields such as social history, cultural history, and disability history.

III. Multilingualism and linguistic encounter

In recent years, work in *Past & Present* has reflected historians' concerns with the workings of multilingual societies and communities. In this virtual issue, we bring together three articles which explore multilingualism at different scales. Eric Dursteler's 'Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean' takes the hyperdiverse linguistic environment of the Mediterranean as its focus, arguing that '[t]he sea's fluid boundaries, the widespread mobility of people across its waterways, the intense rhythm and range of exchanges all created a connected environment characterised by a rich landscape of

[19] Oates, 'Speaking in Hands', p. 6.
[20] Oates, 'Speaking in Hands', p. 5.
[21] Oates, 'Speaking in Hands', p. 35.

language'.[22] Claire Gilbert's 'A Grammar of Conquest: The Spanish and Arabic Reorganization of Granada after 1492' illuminates the place of language and multilingualism in processes of institutional change and political and religious subjugation in the city of Granada immediately following the Nasrid city's conquest by Spain's 'Catholic kings'. And the article by Stephen D. Behrendt, Philip D. Morgan, and Nicholas Radburn, 'African Cultures and Creolization on an Eighteenth-Century St Kitts Sugar Plantation', uses language as a lens for thinking about histories of the Middle Passage, slavery, and creolisation, by focusing on the unusually detailed records of one Caribbean plantation. A sea, a city, a plantation: from the grand sweep of Dursteler's Mediterranean to Behrendt et al's 'microhistory', these three articles explore the politics and power dynamics of multilingual communication at different scales in the long early modern period.

The early modern Mediterranean, in Dursteler's article, was a trans-imperial space characterised by intense mobility. As a meeting-place of empires and individuals, its linguistic variety could seem bewildering to the outsider. But the sea's 'more linguistically ambiguous and complex reality' was 'less destabilizing and disorienting to its inhabitants than it seemed to contemporary observers', for whom such linguistic variety was viewed as neither surprising nor undesirable.[23] If the linguistic ferment of the early modern Mediterranean seems bewildering to a modern observer, Dursteler argues that this is a result of the distorting influence of much more recent linguistic nationalisms, which insist on the idea of the 'national language' at the expense of linguistic variation and minority languages, all in the service of the modern nation-state.[24] Multilingualism was the norm and not the exception, linguistic difference was a fact of life rather than a problem to be solved, and the relationship between language, identity, and 'nation' was significantly more fluid and surprising than it might be today.

Alongside these broader contentions runs the idea that an understanding of this 'widespread individual and societal multilingualism' is central to understanding how communication worked in the early modern period.[25] In the article's final pages, Dursteler turns to the

[22] Eric Dursteler, 'Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean', *Past & Present* 217:1 (2012), p. 75.
[23] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', pp. 50, 52.
[24] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', pp. 48-49.
[25] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', p. 53.

question of how language(s) worked in the early modern Mediterranean. The sea's many languages need not suggest that individuals were all masters of multiple languages, nor that all conversations were fluent and effective. People used the linguistic tools available to them – from basic competence in multiple languages to shared lingua francas or the use of gesture – and their abilities are best understood, Dursteler argues, through the framework (borrowed from sociolinguistics) of 'communicative competence'.[26] Effective conversation did not require anything approaching a modern idea of 'fluency': Dursteler's cast of characters used language pragmatically to facilitate trade, travel, and other activities, not concerning themselves with grammatical correctness or beauty of expression.

Dursteler's article performs the important historiographical function of making multilingualism ordinary again. To focus only on skilled 'go-betweens' and elite multilinguals fails to represent the realities of Mediterranean multilingualism. Dursteler argues that while the Mediterranean was home to highly trained linguistic mediators and to increasingly complicated schemes for their training, multilingualism was much more socially widespread, with evidence of polyglot abilities among soldiers, slaves, traders, missionaries, and migrant workers.[27] The languages used by these people were similarly varied, from the Mediterranean Lingua Franca, a Romance-based pidgin spoken widely on board ships and along coastlines, to the rudimentary Italian which functioned as a 'vehicular language' in the Mediterranean or '[t]he hybrid Judaeo-Castilian dialect called variously Ladino, Spanyol or Judezmo... spoken by Sephardim throughout the Mediterranean, and [which] served as a sort of 'passport' language in the Balkans, where it was widely understood'.[28]

The Mediterranean has long been considered a 'contact zone', a space in which peoples, languages, and cultures were engaged in intense contact and exchange. For Dursteler, the linguistic implications of this contact zone have yet to be fully understood: they might demand a shift away from an idea of a space in which difference is forever being mediated, and towards 'an early modern Mediterranean world characterized by unity and connectivity'.[29] But more broadly, this article functions as a call for premodern historians to throw off the blinkers of linguistic nationalism and to consider more closely the workings of a world where

[26] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', p. 75.
[27] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', pp. 52, 53-67.
[28] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', pp. 58, 67-68.
[29] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', p. 77.

'multilingualism was the norm, where there were no efforts to impose linguistic homogeneity, and in which language was a marker of identity but not to the exclusion of other elements'.[30]

If Dursteler's Mediterranean seems like a polyglot utopia, Claire Gilbert's study of language, faith, and power in post-conquest Granada presents a very different picture of early modern 'language policy' at work. She begins with Antonio de Nebrija's famous statement in his 1492 grammar of Castilian that 'language has always been the companion of empire', reminding the reader that when Nebrija wrote those words, his eyes were not on a new world, but on the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. Following its conquest in 1492, Arabic continued to be used in Granada's daily life and its institutions, leading to an 'uneasy cultural and religious bilingualism' which lasted into the early sixteenth century.[31] Gilbert's way into the multilingual workings of post-conquest Granada is an extraordinary text by the Hieronymite friar Pedro de Alcalá (*fl.* 1501-8). Alcalá's *Arte para ligeramente saber la lengua arauiga* (The Art of Easily Learning Arabic), written around 1501 and printed in 1505, offered instruction in the Granadan dialect of Arabic. The *Arte* emerged in a multilingual moment before a policy of suppression of Arabic had properly taken hold, and it reflects the linguistic makeup of a Granadan society in which Castilian and Arabic rubbed shoulders in streets, households, and institutions, such that a 1499 ban on insults specified that they could not be uttered in either language.[32]

In fifteenth-century Spain, the term *reducción* – previously mainly associated with military conquest, social reorganisation, and religious conversion – came to be adopted by writers on language.[33] For Nebrija, *reducción* was the term used to describe 'both of the mutually reinforcing projects of Spanish philology and empire', while Alcalá similarly saw his linguistic work as an instrument by which 'the Muslims of Granada would be adopted into Castilian society, like undomesticated beasts who have not yet felt the soft yoke of our Redeemer'.[34] While Dursteler's Mediterranean seems free of many of the strictures imposed by the linguistic policies of modern states, Gilbert shows Granada at the turn of the sixteenth century as a place in which new ways of linking language to conformity, identity, and creed were being

[30] Dursteler, 'Speaking in tongues', p. 77.
[31] Claire Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest: The Spanish and Arabic Reorganization of Granada after 1492', *Past & Present* 239:1 (2018), p. 4.
[32] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', pp. 14-16.
[33] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', p. 10.
[34] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', p. 13.

worked out: '[t]he contributions of the humanists to nascent vernacular philology created new ideological connections between language and subjecthood that had real-world consequences in sites of conquest like Granada'.[35] Humanist scholarship, political domination, and religious change came together to forge a new kind of linguistic policy, and one whose repercussions would be felt far beyond Europe.

A book like Alcalá's *Arte* was designed as a language aid in a multilingual society, but also as a means by which the new converts of formerly Muslim Granada would become part of Catholic Spain's *policía cristiana*.[36] Alcalá's book presented Arabic as a language of vernacular (Christian) religion, at the same time as Arabic's appropriateness for religious practice was being challenged. The city's archbishop, Hernando de Talavera (1428-1507), was the dedicatee of the *Arte* (and a patron of Nebrija's Castilian grammar a decade earlier); his insistence that converts from Islam should 'forget as much as you possibly can the Arabic language' ran counter to his support for the use of Christian texts in Arabic and the example of his own sermons, which were peppered with Arabic words and phrases.[37] Gilbert's nuanced analysis uncovers the strategies by which new institutions and forms of belonging were made to seem enticing to a readership of converts from Islam. Alcalá had learnt his Arabic among Granada's *alfaquíes* or *fuqahā'*, experts on Islamic law whose legal knowledge and bilingualism had made many of them essential intermediaries between the kingdom's population and their new Castilian overlords in the years following the conquest, and their influence can be seen in Alcalá's presentation of important terms and concepts.[38] Gilbert analyses the linguistic choices made by Alcalá in his presentation of religious concepts: his use of Islamic terms to describe Christian concepts, or his use of loanwords from Spanish for key terms (such as *ticonfesar* for 'to confess').[39] At the heart of a text whose aim was conversion, both religious and cultural, was a linguistic practice which reflected Alcalá's own engagement with the city's Muslim teachers and bureaucrats.

The bilingual officialdom of post-conquest Granada was crucial in the processes Gilbert describes, echoing other work in *Past & Present* which has emphasised the importance of

[35] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', p. 11.
[36] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', p. 21.
[37] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', pp. 24-25.
[38] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', pp. 17-19.
[39] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', p. 29.

multilingual intermediaries in polyglot polities. Lloyd Bowen's 'Information, language and political culture in early modern Wales' argues for the importance of 'bilingual brokers who could readily access and circulate information' in shaping the political culture of Wales at a crucial moment in its history, while John-Paul Ghobrial's 'The archive of orientalism and its keepers' highlights the role of informants, and specifically of multilingual Eastern Christians, in the history of orientalism.[40] In Gilbert's analysis, nascent linguistic policy made vernacular languages a means of fostering inclusion alongside social control. Texts that taught language taught more than language, encouraging a cultural and religious hybridity which would soon turn coercive: 'becoming part of a community of speakers meant exposure to great control & regulation (both linguistic & political) inside and outside the home, and in the case of Granada eventually led to a total reorganisation of society'.[41]

The management of language so as to exert control over hybrid populations is a central theme in Stephen D. Behrendt, Philip D. Morgan, and Nicholas Radburn's article. Their central question is '[h]ow important was language as enslaved people began rebuilding their lives in the Americas?'[42] The authors offer a microhistory of the sugar plantation known as Cayon House, operated by Robert Cunyngham (1669-1743), a Scottish migrant to the Caribbean. Cunyngham and his sons kept detailed records which allow the authors to follow an enslaved population of 331 people between 1729 and 1735, paying attention to their places of origin, the languages they likely spoke, and the strategies of assimilation employed by their enslavers at Cayon House.

While other planters commonly paid little attention to the origins of the people they enslaved, the details noted by the Cunynghams indicate that this information – gathered by direct questioning, sometimes with the aid of multilingual senior African slaves as translators – was central to how they managed their enslaved workforce.[43] Robert Cunyngham used language as the primary means to ascertain an enslaved African's 'country', and the records of the plantation allow Behrendt, Morgan, and Radburn to reconstruct in considerable detail the

[40] Lloyd Bowen, 'Information, language and political culture in early modern Wales', *Past & Present* 228:1 (2015), pp. 125-158; John-Paul Ghobrial, 'The archive of orientalism and its keepers: re-imagining the histories of Arabic manuscripts in early modern Europe', *Past & Present* supplement 11 (2016), pp. 90-111.
[41] Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest', pp. 37-38.
[42] Stephen D. Behrendt, Philip D. Morgan, and Nicholas Radburn, 'African Cultures and Creolization on an Eighteenth-Century St Kitts Sugar Plantation', *Past & Present* 253:1 (2021), p. 197.
[43] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 209.

languages spoken by the Africans of Cayon House. The authors' linguistic analysis is also suggestive regarding how far enslaved people were moved before they crossed the Atlantic – linguistically diverse groups of captives originating from a wide variety of locations might have made the crossing together.[44] Some might have shared mutually intelligible languages, while others would have experienced great difficulty in communicating with other captives. Among the 182 Africans for whom linguistic information can be derived, there were speakers of fifteen African languages from five different language families, but even where the captives spoke languages from the same language family, mutual intelligibility was not guaranteed. The authors describe the Cayon House plantation as 'a veritable Tower of Babel' in which 'some of [Cunyngham's] slaves spoke two languages, but most originated from geographically distant 'countries' that had little linguistic contact with each other'.[45]

On a plantation where no one linguistic group was in the majority, ways of communicating and working had to be found. Cunyngham developed a practice of pairing newly arrived Africans with mentors, though he does not seem to have attempted to match them based on linguistic affinity – the exception to this was when the task to be taught required technical precision (and thus accurate and exact communication), as was the case with sugar boiling.[46] Elsewhere, the shared language was Creole, and the authors suggest that '[f]orcing Africans to abandon their native language was, perhaps, a deliberate strategy to accelerate the traumatizing process of assimilation'.[47] By creating a situation where groups of workers were linguistically diverse, and where most of the enslaved population married outside their language groups, Cunyngham 'accelerated the process of creolization' on the plantation.[48] The pressures of life and work at Cayon House, coupled with the linguistic diversity of the community in which they found themselves, meant that there were good reasons why enslaved people on the plantation might have chosen to use a language other than the one they had used prior to their enslavement. Learning Creole became an essential part of life on the plantation very shortly after the captives' arrival.[49] In Behrendt, Morgan, and Radburn's

[44] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 214.
[45] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', pp. 218-220.
[46] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', pp. 222-224.
[47] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 224.
[48] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 227.
[49] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 232. For a complementary study of the use of creole languages in Suriname, see Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Creole languages and their uses: the example of colonial Suriname', *Historical Research* 82 (2009), pp. 268-284.

analysis, language emerges not as a means to solidarity but as a tool of domination: linguistic diversity was recognised by the Cunynghams and harnessed in order to create a new type of coerced community which reflected 'the interplay of African heritages and New World innovation'.[50] The microhistorical approach taken here is a long way from Dursteler's sprawling Mediterranean, or the rapidly changing environments of *reconquista* Granada, but its focus on the details of linguistic difference shows how multilingualism could be yoked to a process of coercion and control.

IV. Language, history, and nationhood

Language has long been central to debates about national origins and the modern state, and our next two essays reflect on the history of linguistic ideas and their place in broader discussions of identity. Ian B. Stewart's 'The Mother Tongue: Historical Study of the Celts and their Language(s) in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland' is a wide-ranging article which argues that the antiquarianism and linguistic research of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries exerted an underappreciated influence on debates around national origins and identity in eighteenth-century Europe, and specifically in Britain and Ireland. In ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', Joan-Lluís Marfany presents a counterintuitive case which sees literary movements around the revival of 'minority' languages like Catalan or Welsh not as the engines powering language revivals. Instead, he argues that in the case of Catalan, the much-vaunted 'Renaixença' of the language should be seen as 'a merely symbolic gesture of compensation for its deliberate suppression as a fully functional language'.[51] While they consider different periods and different contexts, each of these articles is rooted in the question of language's relation to questions of nationhood and identity.[52]

Stewart's article sets out to show that the idea of a pre-Romantic 'Celtic Revival' is a mistaken one. Where previous scholars have seen an awakening of interest in the Celts signalled by the debates around the publication of the Gaelic 'Ossian' poems, which purported to date to the third century CE, Stewart instead situates understandings (and uses) of the Celts in a longer

[50] Behrendt et al, 'African Cultures and Creolization', p. 234.
[51] Joan-Lluís Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', *Past & Present* 184 (2004), p. 138.
[52] For these themes elsewhere in the *Past & Present* archive, see for instance Martin J. Wein, ''Chosen Peoples, Holy Tongues': Religion, Language, Nationalism and Politics in Bohemia and Moravia in the Seventeenth to Twentieth Centuries', *Past & Present* 202:1 (2009), pp. 37-81; Derek Sayer, 'The language of nationality and the nationality of language: Prague 1780-1920', *Past & Present* 153:1 (1996), pp. 164-210.

train of debates stretching from the humanist scholars of the Renaissance to nineteenth-century nationalists.[53] 'The fundamental mistake in Anglophone studies of Celticism', he argues, 'has been to misidentify eighteenth-century literary interest in the Celts as a *sui generis* development linked to 'pre-Romanticism' or 'Romanticism' proper, rather than recognizing Celtic popularity stemming from humanist historiographical inheritance'.[54] To early modern scholars, the Celts represented 'an eminent European ancestor and a stitch between sacred and profane histories': the foundation of these beliefs was linguistic scholarship.[55]

For early modern scholars, linguistic evidence offered 'a conjectural means for the study of human history before written records'.[56] Humanist scholars like George Buchanan interrogated language for what it could say about national histories and national origins in the wake of the Reformation, as these national narratives became increasingly polarised. In Britain and Ireland, scholars debated the extent to which contemporary cultures were founded on Celtic or 'Anglo-Saxon' beginnings.[57] By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the ground-breaking work of Edward Lhwyd in his *Archaeologica Britannica*, along with the interest shown in the topic by scholars like John Ray and John Aubrey, had stoked 'great linguistic fervour' among British scholars, 'as antiquarians of all stripes embraced study of the origin and transformation of languages for their nationally minded historical enquiries'.[58] Edward Lhwyd had stated his aim as being 'a Clearer Notion of the First Planters of the Three Kingdoms', though his careful researches set off a frenzy for Celtic heritage among scholars in Britain and Ireland, mirroring similar debates by their continental predecessors.[59]

Ultimately, Stewart argues that eighteenth-century literary interest in Celticism emerged from an antiquarian scholarly context in which the Celts and their language had become intrinsically linked to Britain and Ireland – and to ideas about nationhood within these islands – as a result of linguistic research and debate. Instead of representing a high point of interest

[53] Ian B. Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue: Historical Study of the Celts and their Language(s) in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland', Past & Present 243:1 (2019), pp. 71-78.
[54] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 78.
[55] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 78.
[56] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 74.
[57] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 79.
[58] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 90-91.
[59] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 93.

in the Celts, Stewart argues that the publication of the 'Ossian' poems and the debates they prompted in fact represented the beginning of the end for the Celts' position in historical-cultural scholarship.[60] One aim of Stewart's argument is to rehabilitate, or at least to reappraise, the linguistic scholarship of the early modern period: 'not simply an unscientific precursor to modern linguistics', it was in fact central to early modern antiquarianism and played an important role in the debates about contemporary cultures and deep histories which that antiquarianism fed.[61]

Joan-Lluis Marfany's article on 'minority' language revivals shares Stewart's concern with questions of nationhood, but focuses on more modern movements, especially those relating to Catalan and Welsh. Marfany argues that while literary revivals of minority languages (by which he refers to non-state languages) have been seen as concerned with the preservation and restoration of those languages, there is in fact a kind of false consciousness at work here, and those who championed these literary-linguistic revivals were in fact hammering nails into their language's coffin.[62] By casting themselves as the rescuers of a lost tradition, language revivalists commonly erased living linguistic and literary traditions, attempting to replace them with a situation in which the spheres in which the language could be used became ever narrower and ever more distant from everyday usage.

The literary usage of minority languages, Marfany argues, should not be construed as an act of resistance – rather, much writing in a language like Catalan in fact accepted its reduced and restricted position in the public sphere, rather than challenging these norms or expanding the fields in which it could be used. While these usages were commonly accompanied by 'eulogies and declarations of love for the native language', these are misleading and draw attention away from the acquiescence involved in the endeavour.[63] Marfany argues that many of those engaged in literary revivals were, effectively, hypocrites: it was rare for the authors he studies to use the minority language across their other social transactions.[64] We might detect a

[60] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 105.
[61] Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue', p. 107. Another excellent *Past & Present* article which engages with early modern linguistic scholarship and its legacies is Aya Elyada, 'Protestant scholars and Yiddish studies in early modern Europe', *Past & Present* 203 (2009), pp. 69-98.
[62] For his use of the term 'minority languages', see Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 137n1.
[63] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 148.
[64] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', pp. 151-153.

measure of special pleading when Marfany dismisses the eighteenth-century Welsh-language correspondence of the Morris brothers, 'who stood behind most cultural activity in Welsh during the Georgian era', arguing that 'there was, by then, something very much contrived about writing letters in Welsh, that these epistolary exchanges were basically undertaken as conscious exercises'.[65] If the authors are damned for writing in English but also damned for writing in Welsh, which is dismissed as a kind of performance, it's difficult to see what would satisfy such a sceptical observer. More broadly, though, there is a challenge here to romanticised portraits of literary revivalists whose use of their championed language did not match up to their rhetoric.

Marfany understands the trajectory of these minority languages thus: literary production in the language diminished in quality, before 'pass[ing] into the hands of a subaltern class which was itself in the process of disappearing through either promotion into the ranks of a bourgeoisie or demotion into those of a proletariat, both in the making'.[66] While at this point the language might have developed more of a presence in print, that presence was 'even narrower in form and content, the latter increasingly restricted to the jocular'.[67] It was at this point that 'the new breed of bourgeois intellectuals ... tried to replace this real, if degraded, tradition with an invented one which purported to be the restoration of an older, purer native culture corrupted and disfigured by centuries of national decline'.[68] This was the process, Marfany argues, that can be seen in events like Catalonia's Jocs Florals or the *eisteddfodau* of Wales, where the use of the minority language can be seen as 'strictly symbolic gestures of amends to that same language which was happily betrayed every other day of the year in every other kind of activity'.[69]

The rhetoric of linguistic 'rebirth' which accompanies language revivals, Marfany argues, obscures a reality in which these celebrations of minority language use contributed to shrinking the spheres in which those languages could be used, in a process of linguistic ghettoisation. In the case of Catalan, he argues that the literary 'revival' of the language in fact extinguished what remained of a living literary tradition.[70] Where popular use of the

[65] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 152.
[66] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 154.
[67] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 154.
[68] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', pp. 154-155, 158.
[69] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 157.
[70] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', pp. 154-155.

minority language was attended to by elite revivalists, they engaged in a programme of 'co-optation and disqualification of popular literary activity'.[71] 'In all these supposed revivals', Marfany argues, 'the mother language was being relegated to token literary use and nothing else'.[72] Ironically, it was in writing that made fun of elite revivalists that the 'ordinary' language thrived, as in the scurrilous Catalan writings of the 'català que ara es parla' ('Catalan as it is spoken nowadays') movement of the 1860s and 1870s.[73] Those who had taken to print to mock their social superiors would become central to the actual revival of Catalan as an everyday language, but it was not a process spurred by literature. Instead, the engine of linguistic revival was the conscious decision of this generation to use Catalan in their written correspondence and as a written language of everyday life. Marfany argues that '[t]he eventual revival of Catalan is inseparable from the development of Catalan nationalism' – and, ultimately, that the power of nationalistic movements of the latter nineteenth century was what was needed to ensure a future for those languages which had survived, however precariously, to that point.[74]

V. Languages of subversion & resistance

The relationship between language and subversion – especially the importance of language and utterances as means of resistance – has been a subject of much scholarship by social historians. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James C. Scott famously distinguished between public transcripts and hidden transcripts.[75] Distinct from public and open interactions between those who dominate and those who are dominated, hidden transcripts were discussions and discourses that took place 'offstage, beyond direct observation by powerholders'.[76] As Scott wrote: 'Offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible. Slaves in the relative safety of their quarters can speak the words of anger, revenge, self-assertion

[71] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 160.
[72] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', p. 165.
[73] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', pp. 162-163, 165-166.
[74] Marfany, ''Minority' Languages and Literary Revivals', pp. 166-167.
[75] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
[76] Scott, pp. 2-4.

that they must normally choke back when in the presence of the masters and mistresses'.[77] Scott thus made the crucial link between language (including gestures, utterances, jokes and verbal criticism) on the one hand, and the politics of domination and subordination on the other. This continues to be a point of reference in histories of language and subversion.

Several articles in *Past & Present* have explored the role of language in subversion and resistance, including through swearing, rumour, libel, mutterings, slogans, songs, blasphemy, political insults and threats. Thomas Waters has focused on Irish cursing, John Arnold on voices of dissent in heresy trials, Adam Fox on ballads and libel, and Virginia Reinburg on rumours and eyewitness accounts.[78] In this virtual issue, we focus on three works on subversive speech – Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers's article on subversive speech in late medieval Flanders, Elizabeth Horodowich's article on the Venetian government's control of blasphemy in the sixteenth century, and Stephen A. Smith's work on swearing in imperial and early Soviet Russia. Ranging from late medieval to early modern to Soviet times, these three articles offer crucial insights into the use of subversive speech, as well as attempts to control and repress it.

Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers's 2012 article shows how medieval Flemish rebels constructed and voiced their own political discourses, while also subverting official ideologies (even if only partially). It builds upon Scott's research on the hidden political languages of subaltern groups to argue that speech acts through which political discourses were expressed existed not only as 'hidden transcripts', but were in fact vital elements within the political system of late medieval Flemish towns and cities. Political utterances and expressions of the popular classes in medieval Flanders varied according to the speakers' social position and whether they could take advantage of the possibilities offered to them to express grievances. In official meetings and petitions, they used juridical and formal arguments that followed the dominant political languages of the time, whereas threats and insults were used in more informal settings. Dumolyn and Haemers argue that even as subversive speech drew upon

[77] Scott, p. 18.

[78] Thomas Waters, 'Irish Cursing and The Art of Magic', *Past & Present* 247, no. 1 (2020), pp. 113-149; John Arnold, 'Voicing Dissent: Heresy Trials in Later Medieval England', *Past & Present* 245, no. 1 (2019), pp. 3-37; Adam Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past & Present* 145 (1994), pp. 47-83; Virginia Reinburg, 'Archives, Eyewitnesses and Rumours: Writing About Shrines in Early Modern France', *Past & Present* 230 (2016), pp. 171-190.

dominant political language tropes, there was no neat distinction between 'popular' and 'elitist' speech in late medieval Flanders. In doing so, this article offers a nuanced analysis of the linkages between language and power, and adds to wider scholarship on political power, subversion, and the voice of opposition. In fact, it uses marginalised and informal speech acts to study the actions of marginalised and rebel groups.

Dumolyn and Haemers show that overt forms such as political pamphlets and public meetings were not the only forums for subversive speech. Rumours, mutterings, battle cries, and songs and poems that could be heard before and during revolts also held political meaning, often indicating an imminent threat of revolt. This article thus shows how histories of libellous or subversive speech demonstrate awareness of the potential dangers of popular speech. Speech becomes not just a political act, but also a dangerous act. Therefore, besides adding to scholarship on histories of speech and subversion, this article demonstrates how language acts through speech, pamphlets, petitions, and protest as a means to wield power, criticise those in power, and to become closer to the power centre. Conceptually, this article draws upon sociolinguistics and literary theory, and shows speech (especially aggressive popular speech acts) as a socio-political action in urban political systems and a veritable means of resistance. Such analysis is reminiscent of Ranajit Guha's seminal work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, which argued for the need to see subversive speech among the colonial Indian peasantry (like rumour and slogans) as political acts of resistance.[79] Moreover, Dumolyn and Haemers demonstrate the drawbacks of studying subversive speech because of the oral and clandestine nature of utterances – thus raising an important methodological question that applies to works on speech and fragmentary sources.

The use of methods of sociolinguistics to study histories of language continues to be a theme in Elizabeth Horodowich's 2003 article, which explores the Venetian government's control of blasphemy in the sixteenth century in order to create a universal civic language and Venetian identity. Horodowich shows how the imposition of a normative language and grammar became the means of defining and disciplining the community in a time of profound social change. In fact, language became a means of consolidating and expressing power in sixteenth-

[79] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

century Venice, just as the insistence on 'proper' speech and the suppression of blasphemy became the means to integrate new arrivals into the urban community and define what it meant to be Venetian. Language further became a means for the state to wield power, guaranteeing to the state the powers of repressive intervention.

Blasphemy in Venice was not just a subversive form of speech but one punishable by law. It is also a speech form often controlled by religious and state power. This adds an interesting juxtaposition of legal, religious and linguistic rules in context of early modern Venice. By exploring this juxtaposition, Horodowich shows how linguistic control serves as a means of achieving social, political, and religious control. As Venice saw an increasing influx of immigrant labour, the shifting social conditions became a major factor in enforcing a stricter code of civic language, and by implication, stricter blasphemy laws.[80] Horodowich also articulates the relationship between language and acceptable modes of decorum, which, for instance, excluded blasphemous speech and insults. The Venetian state imposed 'correct' forms of language to define community identity. Language thus formed a core component of statehood and subjecthood – not just spoken and written language, but also the decorum surrounding language.

Horodowich's article also highlights the relationship between histories of language and histories of migration. It shows that debates around language often tended to occur in the context of mobility, and that anxieties about mobility and migration found strange outlets, including the focus on a unifying language. More importantly, it shows that debates about language are rarely ever (only) about language. As it focuses on state-sponsored monoglossia and the state's focus on proper speak and control of blasphemous speech as a means to integrate migrants into Venetian society, Horodowich's article forms a perfect juxtaposition to works such as that of Dursteler on the Mediterranean. Taken together, Horodowich and Dursteler's works demonstrate that language could function both to help intermingle among diverse communities, as well as to create borders.

Histories of subversive and transgressive speech also offer insights into social identities and social norms. Stephen A. Smith's 1998 article analyses representations and usages of swearing

[80] Elizabeth Horodowich, 'Civic identity and the control of blasphemy in sixteenth-century Venice', *Past & Present* 181:1 (2003), pp. 25-28.

in late imperial and early Soviet Russia to reflect upon constructions of class and Russian ethnicity, social norms, and masculinisation of the workspace. This article draws upon the social meanings of 'obscene language' in several crucial ways. Focusing on the way in which swearing was represented by the educated public, Smith shows that it carried different meanings depending on ethnicity, class and gender. For the educated public, swearing was a marker of the cultural backwardness of Russian society – a symbol of ignorance, immorality and a lack of civilisation. As a question of public morality, it was closely tied to fears that industrialisation and urbanisation was rapidly bringing about social and moral degradation. For the workers, however, the act of swearing was a mechanism of enforcing and eschewing specific class and gender identities. It was a way of constructing social identities, enforcing collective norms, and maintaining group boundaries. Thus, swearing could be used as abuse, entertainment, as well as ways to stave off boredom (through songs, jokes and anecdotes). Swearing also served as mechanisms of male bonding: '*Mat* [swearing or profanity] … was also way in which men sustained their manliness in an environment which conspired to make them feel subordinate and disempowered'.[81] At the same time, norms around swearing were gendered – swearing by men was acceptable, even if unpalatable, but swearing by women was frowned upon.

Language was a key marker, not just of social norms, but also of the move from imperial to Soviet Russia. Pointing to the change in attitude after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Smith says: 'Swearing continued to signify the general lack of culture in Russian society, but now, in particular, the 'old' society, with its legacy of serfdom, poverty, illiteracy, drunkenness, superstition and wife-beating.'[82] Swearing came to represent 'gross corporeality, the lower physical faculties', which was seen as at odds with Bolshevik asceticism.[83] Swearing was also increasingly associated with male chauvinism, and female workers were encouraged by trade unions to complain about uncomfortable atmospheres created by men swearing in the workplace. The trade union campaigns against swearing demonstrates how control of language as an extension of maintaining public morality was not just the purview of the state, but also bodies like the trade union. This article thus makes a crucial intervention in

[81] Stephen A. Smith, 'The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia', *Past & Present* 160, no. 1 (1998), pp. 167-202 (188).
[82] Smith, p. 196.
[83] Smith, p. 197.

discussions on the control of popular speech, and especially on the belief that controlling such speech was crucial for the maintenance of social order. From early modern Venice to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russia, regimes of linguistic control helped to shape societies and mould identities at moments of demographic, political, and cultural change.

VI. Conclusions

The *Past & Present* archive holds up a mirror to how histories of language have been studied over the years. A few disciplinary trends are evident, especially in terms of geographical and temporal scope. There is an overrepresentation of Europe and especially western Europe in histories of language in *Past & Present*. Recent work like that of Rachel Leow, Henrietta Harrison, and E. Natalie Rothman shows the potential of thinking about language histories beyond Europe's borders, and it is to be hoped that future work in the history of language will reflect the transnational and global approaches taken by much recent scholarship.[84] This work might take inspiration from South Asian and Asian histories which place language at the centre of their analysis, such as Sheldon Pollock's *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, Bernard Cohn's 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', or even Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* with its focus on print capitalism and the written word.[85] New histories of language will, we hope, centre indigenous voices and languages and reflect the histories of marginalised and endangered languages, while continuing to challenge the monoglot assumptions of many modern societies. Similarly, although articles on language in the journal range from ancient Palestine to twenty-first century Ireland, work on the history of language in the *Past & Present* archive is often focused on the medieval and early modern periods. Is it that these periods and the sources that survive from them are particularly amenable to writing histories of language, or simply that scholars working on these periods have been particularly engaged in the interdisciplinary conversation with linguists? We don't

[84] Rachel Leow, *Taming Babel: Language in the Making of Malaysia* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Henrietta Harrison, 'A faithful interpreter? Li Zibiao and the 1793 Macartney embassy to China', *The International History Review* 41, no. 5 (2019), pp. 1076-1091; E. Natalie Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

[85] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Bernard Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 16-56; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

propose an answer here, but the application of the 'language lens' to a broader variety of periods and places will be something to welcome.

By bringing this wide range of articles together, this virtual issue makes the case for considering the history of language as a field in its own right. As a field of study, it has the ability to transcend area studies and time-period specific research, and encompass studies of monoglossia and polyglossia, language and resistance, language and nation, language and communication, language and social identity, language learning and mediation, many of which have been showcased in this issue. By putting language(s) at the centre of our analysis, this approach also makes it possible to challenge the primacy of the anglophone experience and trouble the monoglot assumptions of the modern nation-state, while privileging histories of multilingualism, linguistic encounter, and (mis)communication within and across borders. By challenging rigid disciplinary boundaries and incorporating methodological approaches from elsewhere in the humanities, histories of language also allow for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research. It permits those scholars who work at disciplinary frontiers or in trans-regional contexts to find a disciplinary home. If before now, histories of language have represented a turn never quite taken, this slice of the *Past & Present* archive makes the argument for embracing and encouraging new histories of language.