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Winter 2016

published by the EBHR Editorial Committee
in conjunction with Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, Nepal

EUROPEAN BULLETIN OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH 48 2016

48
Winter 2016

EBHR

**EUROPEAN BULLETIN
OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH**

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research

The *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* (EBHR) was founded by the late Richard Burghart in 1991. It is the result of a partnership between France (Centre d'Etudes Himalayennes, CNRS, Paris), Germany (South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg) and the United Kingdom (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS]). From 2014 to 2018 the editorial board is based at the South Asia Institute (SAI) in Heidelberg, Germany and comprises William Sax (SAI, Managing Editor), Christoph Bergmann (SAI), Christiane Brosius (Karl Jaspers Centre, Heidelberg), Julia Dame (SAI), Axel Michaels (SAI), Marcus Nuesser (SAI), Karin Polit (SAI), Mona Schrempf (Berlin), Anja Wagner, Astrid Zotter (SAI), Heleen Plaisier, and Arik Moran (University of Haifa, book reviews editor).

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The EBHR is published from Kathmandu in collaboration with
Social Science Baha (<http://www.soscbaha.org>)

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EDITORIAL

The EBHR was established in 1991 by Richard Burghart in Heidelberg, in cooperation with colleagues in Paris and London. For the first twelve years of its existence, it was printed in, and distributed from, Europe, but since 2004 it has been printed in, and distributed from, Kathmandu, in cooperation with Social Science Baha.

The arrangement has worked out very well, and the Social Science Baha has always displayed the highest academic standards. This is only to be expected, since its mandate involves “promoting and enhancing the study of and research in the social sciences in Nepal” (from its homepage: <http://www.soscbaha.org/>).

As we go to Press, there are newspaper reports that a constitutional body in Nepal, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, has encouraged the Social Welfare Council to investigate the Social Science Baha. Although we do not wish to comment on the details of the case, we do wish to state for the record that in our experience, the Social Science Baha has always displayed the greatest financial and scientific integrity. We thank them for their efforts, and look forward to many more years of fruitful cooperation.

- The Editors

Music and cultural policy in Nepal: views from *lok dohori*

Anna Stirr

Nepal has only recently outlined a national cultural policy, although many policies throughout the years dealt with relationships between culture, state, and nation. Within these policies, the understanding of the concept of culture has developed along with changes in the structure of government and state, and changes in the meaning and usage of the term “culture” itself. In Nepal, the official emphasis on national integration and homogeneity has recently given way to more pluralist conceptions, as in many other nations (Vertovec 2010). Nepal’s current cultural policy has evolved from a unitary nationalist focus in state cultural policy in the Panchayat years (1960-1990), and a greater acknowledgement of cultural pluralism in the 1990s, to the current official commitments to form a more inclusive policy, which have been in place since 2006.

Nepal’s National Cultural Policy was formulated in 2010 and outlines many goals regarding cultural preservation and development, whilst emphasising inclusivity. The policy defines the Nepali national culture as the entirety of cultural expressions produced by the people of Nepal (GoN 2010: 1), and states that promoting unity in diversity is one of its goals (7.6). The policy’s tone promotes taking the ideas of what people think of as being culturally important into account when making policies. Yet despite this tone, and despite the country’s history of state patronage of cultural production, the current policy remains silent when it comes to the relationship between the state and the cultural industries. Here, I argue that even though it is not part of the official policy, the state would do well to pay attention to cultural industries when it is working toward the policy’s stated aims of cultural preservation, promotion, and development. In order to figure out how this might be done successfully, state organisations might start by listening to the concerns of professional folk cultural producers whose activities take place in both public and private sectors, who move between rural and urban spheres, and who express their own personal

investment into many of the same concerns that are expressed at the state policy level.

In this article I call attention to one field of cultural production in Nepal – professional folk music performance – in terms of its own internal multiplicities, and I help present the wishes of its members for various kinds of recognition from the state. I do this on the basis of more than a decade of ethnographic work with a group of performing artists whose professional lives cross the boundaries between public and private organisations, rural and urban lifeworlds, and commercial and noncommercial forms of performance, who express their personal investment in building a more inclusive society through their own contributions to national culture, yet who continue to struggle to make their voices heard at the level of national policy. I draw on ethnographic and survey data from professional performers of the musical genres of *lok dohori*, who work in Kathmandu *dohori* restaurants: a population at the nexus of changing state-promoted ideas of cultural nationalism, ethnic particularism, and debates about state support and commercialisation. This article is an attempt to present their concerns systematically, and to discuss how attention to their concerns may also be relevant beyond their particular musical field.

Defining culture as an object of policy

Definitions of culture continue to be debated by anthropologists and policymakers the world over. The earlier anthropological concept of peoples and cultures that ascribed distinct cultures to bounded ethnic and regional groups has been roundly criticised by postcolonial scholars, who cite its lack of historical perspective (Fabian 1983), its tendency to reify difference at the expense of human commonalities, and its long-lasting political effects in the organisation of colonial ethnographic states and their postcolonial successors (Dirks 2001). While some perspectives now reject the culture concept altogether, others prefer to retain some of its senses, as ways to talk about shared values and traditions while remaining conscious that the groups that these values and traditions would appear to unite are constantly changing, and that their boundaries are not fixed.

Such is the position of the 2011 Nepal Constituent Assembly's concept paper on Culture (CA 2011: 53-54), informed by UNESCO (1982).

But, the concept of direct relations between distinct cultures and distinct societies persists in this concept paper, as expressed in sentences such as 'a whole society's way of life is symbolized within culture' (UNESCO 1982: 54). Nepal's 2010 National Cultural Policy has a more pluralistic bent, defining culture as belonging to groups conceived in different ways—religion, place, ethnic group, historical civilisations, asserting that they all together form national culture (GoN 2010: 1.1). In policy discussions, there remains tension between fixity and change, and between unitary and pluralist ways of imagining the nation. All of these are coloured by ongoing political debates centred on group identities (Joshi and Sada 2005, Diwas, Bandhu, and Nepal 2008: 5).

Scholars argue that to study the entire field of cultural policy, we must not only look at official state policies, but also at the policies embraced by civil society and corporate actors, both local and transnational (Ochoa 2003, Yúdice 2003, García Canclini 1995). This includes the culture industries—the locations where cultural work is paid work, and people make cultural products in commodity forms. Nepal's 2010 National Cultural Policy does not address the culture industries. According to conversations with policymakers such as Ganesh Gurung, the author of the 2010 National Cultural Policy, one rationale behind this is that the state should embrace the promotion of cultural forms that the cultural industries may overlook and may even be eclipsing (personal communication, July 2011). Reflecting this aim, the 2010 National Cultural Policy includes an ambitious plan for surveying and documenting cultural practices throughout Nepal (GoN 2010: 9.25).

The cultural policies of other countries have historically ignored cultural industries, as policymakers focusing on cultural preservation have viewed cultural industries as an “other” against which cultural policy reacted' (Hesmondalgh and Pratt 2005: 4). Yet over the past few decades many European and Latin American states have turned to focus on the cultural or creative industries in their national cultural policies (Hesmondalgh and Pratt 2005, Garnham 2005). Other states, such as India, long maintained state monopolies on the cultural industries, particularly the music industry (Manuel 1993). In recent history, Nepal had a short era of state cultural patronage in its Panchayat years, as discussed below. This era was instrumental in shaping the trajectory of

the cultural industries of Nepal as they would develop after state patronage scaled back in the 1980s and the newly democratic 1990s. In part, state-level choices heavily influenced what kinds of culture would be promoted as representing the nation. I discuss this below regarding folk music.

Thus, despite the focus of the National Cultural Policy on preserving the non-commercial, state policies have already had an effect on what gets promoted in the commercial sector, and along with this, what does not. Furthermore, as García Canclini (1995: 107) argues, mediated commodity forms play a huge role in contemporary life even in remote areas, and should no longer be considered as a sphere completely separate from another, idealised realm of traditional practice that is supposedly untainted by commerce. In other words, when studying cultural policy, we must pay attention to the intersections of state, commerce, and indeed other spheres as well.

State policy, idealised versions of tradition, and the commercial music industry intersect in the professional field of *lok dohori* song, which once enjoyed significant state support and still enjoys some, is rooted in multiple ongoing folk traditions, and is the highest grossing genre of popular music in Nepal. *Dohori* is a form of dialogic singing in which singers improvise rhyming couplets in a sung conversation, described in greater detail below. With its improvised, dialogic structure it is now often held up as a metaphor for positive interaction between different groups, such as people of different political persuasions (Stirr 2010). But behind celebrations of *dohori* as a vehicle for dialogue (Dixit 2002), is a controversial history of the genre that generates a perceived excess of cultural mixing. This is the history of *dohori* in various courtship practices that could (and often did) lead to elopements of couples that were intercaste, or otherwise deemed unsuitable to marry according to dominant social norms, fuelling conservative, purist fears of ethnic and caste mixture, and unsettling both ethnicising and nationalising narratives.¹ *Dohori*'s history of state support and its current status as a major genre of commercial popular music also challenge easy dichotomies between public and private, culture and commerce.

¹ See Stirr 2009, Chapter 3.

Lok dohori: diverse traditions and commercial genre

The term *lok git*, or folk song, has two referents in modern Nepali discourse: folk song of any type, and a broader commercial genre that includes many different song styles, united by their associations with rural life. *Lok dohori* is the term generally used to describe conversational duet songs within the professional field of commercial *lok git*. The term *dohori* is the Nepali word for the practice of singing songs in a dialogic or question-answer fashion, which is part of the traditions of many different ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups throughout Nepal (and many other parts of the world, including nearby northern India, southern China and Tibet, as well as many Southeast Asian, Mediterranean, and Latin American countries).² Another Nepali word for the practice of *dohori* singing is *juhari*, a term which is not used for the commercial genre. In Nepal, there are many terms for the particular practices of *dohori* singing, such as the northeastern genre of *hakpare*, the far-western genre of *deuda*, the genres of the Tarai region sung in Hindi and various other languages and summed up with the umbrella term *sawal-jawab gan*, and the Tibetan term *la-gzhas*. This is far from an exhaustive list, as the variety of terms is extensive. The practices of *dohori* singing are living traditions that are worthy of study and policy attention in their own right. They have received some scholarly attention³ and will undoubtedly receive more as the proposed survey of cultural practices in Nepal moves forward. In this short article, I concentrate on the professionalised *lok dohori* field.

The commercialised, professionalised variety of *lok dohori* does not encompass all the kinds of *dohori* singing that exist in Nepal. Instead, it mainly consists of genres and styles from the central and western hill regions that are sung in the Nepali language. The prominence of these particular genres and styles stems from the process of state patronage, professionalization, and commercialisation that began with Radio Nepal in the 1950s, and continued with state-run competitions, private music

² For a discussion of similar practices in Bolivia with an extensive bibliography on similar traditions worldwide, see Solomon 1994.

³ For additional discussions of *dohori* (the practice of question-answer singing, in the broad sense, known by many other genre names) in various traditions and languages in Nepal, see Parajuli 2000, Shah 2006, Jones and Jones 1976 and March 2003, Ahearn 2001, Moisala 1989 and 1991, Acharya 2005, Pant 2006.

companies, and various public performance venues from the 1980s onward. The reason that these genres became emphasised over others is partly due to chance —the men in charge of the *lok git* department at Radio Nepal chose to promote songs from their home areas— partly because of the place of the central and western hills as the ancestral home of the Shah monarchy in existing nationalist history, and partly due to the relative wealth of these areas, their proximity to the capital, and the resulting ability to support a music industry. A closer look at the process by which genres from these areas became prominent provides some insight into the impact of state cultural policies on the formation of a *lok git* field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). Bourdieu's idea of a 'field of cultural production' refers to an arena of social position-takings that are hierarchically structured, yet changing as they are reproduced through ongoing social interaction. More than one genre or music scene, it describes a broader range of interrelated artistic undertakings. The common term artists use, *lok dohori chetra*, literally *lok dohori* field, seems to connote much the same thing. This field includes both commercial and non-commercial aspects, and represents different versions of the nation that emphasise both sameness and difference, closely intertwined.

Lok dohori and Panchayat-era cultural policies

Policies in the Panchayat era emphasised national sameness at the expense of internal difference. Drawing on a version of nationalism that had developed among elites (Burghart 1984, Onta 1996a, 1996b and 1999), they emphasised the Hindu religion, along with the Nepali language, and promoted one form of dress, with the slogan *ek bhasa, ek bhesh, ek desh* (Hangen 2010: 31). Shaphalya Amatya, in a report on Nepali cultural policy prepared for UNESCO in 1983, exemplifies the prevailing attitude of the times when he writes, 'Nepal is a typical Hindu society'. He acknowledges cultural diversity within the country, but explains it away as extreme, with the statement, 'It is interesting to note that the Sherpas, who live within easy reach of the world's highest peaks...have their own way of life that has very little in common with that of the inhabitants of the plains...But these extremes are exceptions' (1983: 12-13). The unmarked, unmentioned geographic term here is the hills, which have long been the centre of state-promoted Nepali/

Gorkhali nationalism, with the mountains and plains and their inhabitants written off as exceptions along with many other social groups that didn't exactly fit the Panchayat governments' ideas of what a shared national culture should be. Even within the hills, there are many groups which remained significantly marginalised in terms of access to political power and economic development. Yet, the marginalising effects of Panchayat unitary policies played a significant role in creating a backlash, thus causing the demise of these very policies, along with the demise of the government that created and enforced them (Lawoti and Hangen 2010).

During Panchayat years, official ideas of this shared national culture were promoted through the policies (Amatya 1983) that governed the education system (Ragsdale 1989), and the national media (Grandin 1989, 2005a and 2005b). The National Communication Plan (1972) charged media institutions with implementing 'communication for development', and, along with similar development-oriented education policies (Pigg 1992), shaped the orientation toward development that came to characterise Nepal's dominant national discourse. Included in this was the musical development of genres meant to represent the nation, carried out primarily at Radio Nepal. Radio Nepal was especially significant in forming this key set of sounds as the primary site of music recording and broadcast, until Music Nepal was founded, and cassette production in Nepal proliferated in 1983 (Grandin 1989 and 2005, Henderson 2002, Onta 2005).

As Amatya (1983) states in his report on Nepali cultural policy, Radio Nepal was the most efficient and influential of Nepal's media institutions, due to the fact that it reached the greatest number of people across the widest geographical area. The musical parameters of the broad national folk song genre, referred to simply as *lok git* or folk song, were consolidated at Radio Nepal from its inception in the 1950s through the 1980s, but especially during the 1960s. While initially the majority of staff in the *lok git* department originated in eastern Nepal and thus promoted songs from this region, this changed with the coming of Dharma Raj Thapa from the Pokhara area, who promoted songs and musicians from his home region. The development of transportation links between Kathmandu and the central western hills also facilitated the continued collection of songs and access to talented

musicians from this area. The relative prosperity of the central western hills since the mid-twentieth century, linked to these transportation networks but also to the local history of employment in the British and Indian armies, may also have played a role in the access of its musicians to the capital and to opportunities at Radio Nepal. Kumar Basnet, the next director of the *lok git* department, and the most prolific folk song collector in Nepal, also strongly promoted songs and musical styles from the central western hills. For this interconnected set of reasons, the style of folk music from this area came to dominate Radio Nepal's airwaves.

One of the important effects of Radio Nepal's choices on the commercial genre of Nepali *lok git* was the establishment of the instrumental ensemble that was used to accompany songs. This came to include the *madal* drum, the *bansuri* bamboo flute, and the *sarangi* as the core instruments, with the harmonium, guitar, mandolin, and others as supporting instruments. This ensemble remains central to the sound of commercial *lok git* today, now with the addition of more instruments and synthesised effects. These are only a few of the vast number of instruments that are actually used in the highly diverse musical traditions of Nepal. Even when songs from outside of the mainstream central-western hill styles were recorded (such as Kumar Basnet's many Tamang-style songs from the mountains and hills northeast of Kathmandu), the ensemble lent them a uniform sound (Henderson 2002/2003). The sound associated with this instrumentation remains the sound that is most recognisable to Nepalis as national today, representing one version of the nation that has become recognisable to the majority of the population, though not everyone agrees with it.⁴

Dohori was supported by the state in the 1980s, not by the most prestigious musical organisations like Radio Nepal, Ratna Recording, or the National Cultural Corporation (*sanskritik sansthan*, aka *rastriyā nachghar*), but by the Ministry of Education and Sports.⁵ This ministry

⁴ See Stirr 2009 for a detailed discussion of this process.

⁵ Reasons for the lack of emphasis on *dohori* on Radio Nepal and at Ratna Recording in their earlier years include the time limitations of recording technology, whose three-minute song limit did not allow for a satisfactory length of lyrical exchanges; worries about what exactly singers might improvise in their couplets; and also, perhaps, an ideology among urbanites that ranked *dohori* as an inferior musical form. The

initiated national *dohori* competitions, run in tournament style along with dance and sports competitions, as part of the biannual National Games. Songs to be sung in the competitions were recorded and circulated beforehand so that all participants would be able to concentrate on improvising lyrics, rather than on learning the tune. Choices of songs again reflected the dominance of central-western hill styles, as all of those chosen came from this region. The original competition organiser Sharad Chandra Shah remembers that the original intent had been to use songs from different regions of the country, but this never happened. Songs used in these competitions became very well-known, and are still cited as classics and re-recorded on compilations that are meant to represent the best of Nepali folk songs.⁶

The reason for initiating these competitions, according to Shah, was an attempt to institutionalise *dohori* as a nationally unique form of communication between young men and women of all backgrounds. With the rise of commercial *dohori* since the establishment of a private music industry in the 1980s, Shah believes that his initiative succeeded, and he is content to let it run itself, paying little attention to what has become an entire *dohori* industry. Since 1991, the relationship between the Nepali state and folk song and dance competitions, showcase concerts, and recording has shrunk to include whatever is put on in-house at the Nepal Academy or *rastriya sanskritik sangh* (*rastriya nachghar*), local chambers of commerce sponsoring festivals at which performances take place, and the small percentage of recordings that continue to take place at Radio Nepal. Ways to make a living and gain prestige through performance are far more numerous in the private than in the public sector. But the rhetoric of unity and national cultural uniqueness that Shah cites as the impetus for establishing the competitions continues among artists in the field of *lok dohori*. For the artists surveyed for this article, there remains more at stake than just the continued existence of a music industry. Nostalgic for the memory

competitions run by the Ministry of Education and Sports were highly significant in changing the place of *dohori* in Nepal's musical national imaginary.

⁶ For example, the song *Mirmire Aankha*, used in one of the competitions, appears on several compilations of vocal and instrumental music that are prominent in the market today, including Kutumba's *Folk Roots* (2005) and Prabin Gurung's *Thet* (1998).

of state support that helped form their profession in the 1980s, they seek recognition from the state in various ways.

The 2010 National Cultural Policy and other culture-related policy documents from the past several years reiterate the idea that the state should support all kinds of cultural and artistic production in Nepal. The proposed methods are similar to those that have already been used with some success: in the suggestions for performing arts (9.41-9.44), festivals and competitions are proposed to promote new talent, with prizes for those who make significant contributions. This is also a model that private organisations rely on, and while state organisations provide prestige, private organisations are much better funded. Hence, there are many more privately-run competitions and prizes, and it is organisations like community radio that are promoting the circulation of non-commercial folk music at the regional level, to a greater extent than the state. Yet, the value placed on prestige conferred by state recognition remains important to artists. For this reason, along with other reasons discussed below such as the artists' own sense of national feeling, they remain interested in what the state might be able to do in support of their art. In the rest of this article, I analyse the field of *lok dohori* today from the perspectives of the performers, and this idea of desire for some state recognition, if not intervention, is a strand that runs through the themes articulated by them.

Lok dohori today

The history of *lok dohori* in the past thirty years has been one of professionalization, continuing the process started by state cultural institutions, but expanding primarily in the private and commercial sectors. The five major spheres of *lok dohori* performance today include the recording and broadcasting industry (primarily private except for Radio Nepal), the competition circuit (now primarily private), the concert circuit (both state and private), the restaurant and nightclub industry (private, informal sector), and the vast diversity of traditional contexts for performance that persist from before this process of professionalization began. Though these spheres within the *lok git* field of cultural production are each structured differently and represent different parts of the cultural economy, they are highly interrelated, such that the same artist may

participate in all of them on a regular basis, even within the span of a single day.

If the broad field of folk music in the Panchayat era was made up primarily of state-supported performance venues and local traditional performances, the advent of the private music production sector in the 1980s led to an increased professionalization of traditional practices, along pathways formed by previous state actions (Grandin 1989, Moisala 1991). When Music Nepal began to pay royalties, and the fruits of those royalties became visible in the changing lifestyles of artists, the private recording industry began to look like an attractive alternative to the state as a patron. Due in part to the reduced production and distribution expenses offered by music cassettes, as well as the relatively inexpensive equipment required to listen to them, this industry was able to offer a product that met a higher-than-expected demand, much of which was focused on *lok dohori* albums.⁷ Now, in the age of digital downloads, the market for musical commodities has again changed drastically, although a full analysis is beyond the scope of this article. As in many other parts of the world, professional Nepali folk musicians have once again begun to rely on live performances as a primary source of music-related income.

Urban *dohori* restaurants started to emerge in Pokhara in the mid-1990s, and in Kathmandu the first one, Sundhara, opened in 1998. In the mid-2000s, the latter years of the civil war, there was a boom in *dohori* restaurants, which people in the music industry attributed to increasing in-migration from the rural hills, plus a concentration of capital in the Kathmandu Valley, due to the desire of individuals to avoid getting themselves or their money caught up in the armed conflict in hill areas. After the civil war, many of these people left, taking their capital with them. A few *dohori* restaurants then opened in district centres in the western hills, such as Damauli and Besisahar. When I began my research in 2005, there were an estimated 80 *dohori* restaurants in the Kathmandu Valley. The civil war ended in 2006, by 2007 the number of *dohori* restaurants was down to 48; and in 2015 before the earthquake, there were around 35 to 40. *Dohori* restaurants line the Ring Road around Kathmandu and Lalitpur, clustering around the long-distance bus park

⁷ See Stirr 2009, Chapter 2, for a more detailed discussion of this history.

in Gongabu; the places where buses head toward the east, from Chabahil through Baneshwor and Koteshwor around to Gwarkho; and the outlet of the Valley toward the south and west, from Swayambhu and Kalanki. In central areas, *dohori* restaurants concentrate in commercial centres that also hosted hotels and nightlife: Thamel, Kamaladi, Sundhara, and Pulchowk. While these locations to an extent reflect patterns of inter-regional migration (the clearest connections are those between former Singapore Police settled in Sundhara, and former British Gurkhas settled in Kamaladi, two groups of people with dependable disposable income, who mostly hail from the western hills and support *lok dohori* as their own regional culture), it is perhaps more accurate to say that they reflect patterns of movement between regions. The clientele of *dohori* restaurants includes people who have migrated or settled in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, along with people who often travel between the Kathmandu Valley and other areas of the country. The placement of *dohori* restaurants around the Ring Road (along with their musical offerings, as discussed below) has been aimed at people coming in or out of the Kathmandu Valley, as well as those people who settled in more inexpensive areas further outside of the city.

By providing many aspiring artists with steady employment, *dohori* restaurants have played a large role in supporting Nepali folk music in general over the last two decades. The restaurants employ a significant percentage of professional performers, including many performers with successful recording careers. Most contemporary *dohori* performers have done at least a short stint in a *dohori* restaurant before they moved on to studio recording, stage programs, or other primary musical sources of income. For this reason, I chose to survey *dohori* restaurant performers in the Kathmandu Valley in order to obtain demographic information that is applicable to the professionalised spheres of the *dohori* field as a whole. While I also formally carried out this survey in Pokhara, and informally in restaurants in other cities in the western hills and Tarai, here I focus on artists in the Kathmandu Valley because of their closeness to national-level policymakers, and the opportunities these artists have to interact with these policymakers.

I conducted a survey in all *dohori* restaurants in Kathmandu between March and June 2007. At 48 restaurants with an average of 12 performers per restaurant, I estimated that there were 576 *dohori*

restaurant performers in Kathmandu. I distributed forms to 544 people, which was 94% of the estimated population. Of the artists who received forms, 67% responded to the survey, providing us with data on 62% of *dohori* restaurant performers in Kathmandu. The survey collected demographic data and asked two open-ended questions of performers. Below I present the basic demographics and a content analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions. My interpretations of survey data are informed significantly by my own participation in music in Nepal and my ethnographic research on music in Nepal since 2000. Importantly, I conducted this research before the drafting of the 2010 National Cultural Policy. The artists' thoughts expressed here share the concern of the policy with the promotion of cultural plurality; indeed, both the policy and this research emerged out of the same discursive moment. Attention to the *lok dohori* field and the concerns of its artists demonstrate how its location at the intersection of multiple different cultural categories both poses challenges and creates opportunities for applying cultural policy in the service of inclusivity.

Basic demographics

The majority of *dohori* restaurant performers in the Kathmandu Valley originated in the central and western hills of Nepal.⁸ A closer look at the home villages of the performers reveals that very few artists came from the high mountain areas within these zones. For example, those from Gorkha primarily came from the southern part of the district, and there were no performers from Manang. The ethnic and caste makeup reflects that of this broad region of the country 22% of performers are Magar, 21% Chhetri, 19% Brahmin, 11% Gurung, and 11% from various hill Dalit castes. Other *janajati* groups, people from multi-caste/ethnic backgrounds, and people who did not respond to this question, make up the remaining 5%. The average age of performers is 23.9 years.

Musical competence and demographics

Kathmandu *dohori* restaurants employ 40% women and 60% men as stage performers. There are more men on the stage, because men are

⁸ 30% hailed from the Gandaki Zone, 13% from Rapti Zone, 12% from Bagmati Zone, 12% from Lumbini Zone, 4% from Janakpur Zone, 4% from Sagarmatha Zone, and the remaining 12% from Narayani, Bheri, Mechi, Seti, and Karnali Zones.

hired both to play instruments and sing, and thus fill more positions than women, who are officially hired only as singers, although they do also play instruments in *dohori* restaurants.⁹ On stage, an average of nine or ten performers present the nightly programme: three male and three female singers, two male *madal* players, one male flutist or *sarangi* player, and one male harmonium player. Someone will usually play the electric *drumpad* as well; this has become an equally male or female role for which no one is hired exclusively. Most paid players learn on the job. Other instruments sometimes included are the *panchai baja* instruments, the *tabla*, the *khajadi*, and the *damphu*—all specific to particular song genres—and the *dholak*, which is used in many different genres to give more punch to the beat and to get customers on the dance floor. Some *dohori* restaurants also offer cultural dance performances, employing both male and female dancers and experienced choreographers.

Performing in *dohori* restaurants requires particular musical skills. In addition to being good at improvising poetic lyrics, to be a *dohori* restaurant singer requires both an encyclopedic knowledge of songs within which to insert improvised couplets, and the ability to learn new lyrics on the fly, in order to fulfil customer requests and to create an appropriate mood in the restaurant. Most performers spend a good deal of time outside of their restaurant jobs watching music videos on TV and VCDs, and listening to songs on the radio, cassettes, and mobile phones. Still, it is common for performers to have to learn a new song on stage, and to have never heard the original recordings of some popularly requested tunes. Instrumentalists also have to know how to play in a wide variety of genres, and how to both follow and guide inexperienced singers, especially patrons who may sing from their tables or the dance floor.

The particular performance expectations for people in different roles are reflected to a degree in the backgrounds of the performers.

⁹ Other staff besides performers (waitstaff, kitchen staff, security staff, janitorial staff, managers, etc.) were not included in this survey. Another survey conducted by the Lok *Dohori* Professionals' Organization in three Kathmandu *dohori* restaurants in 2006 (n=75) showed that non-performing staff were primarily from the ethnic groups Newar, Tamang, Rai, and Chhetri (in descending order), and came from the Kathmandu Valley, its immediately surrounding districts, and eastern districts. In Kathmandu *dohori* restaurants, the waitstaff are primarily female; in some others, such as Butwal's Tinahu *Dohori* Sanjh, the waitstaff are all male.

Women, who are employed as singers only, tend to come more from the central and western hills, which are home to the predominant musical styles of *lok git* and *dohori*; many women also come from *janajati* backgrounds where learning to sing and dance in public, and doing so professionally, is not looked down upon as much as among high-caste Hindu groups. Men, who are employed both as singers and instrumentalists, have more diverse regional, ethnic, and caste roots. For example, like most women, some hail from the central and western hills and aspire to be *lok dohori* singers, while specialists in *adhunik git* (“modern songs”) are more often from the east, and actually only learnt the musical conventions of the popular western-hills style of *dohori* and other western-Nepali *lok git* genres after coming to the restaurant. Still others aspire to break into the world of pop music, usually through the genre of *lok pop*.¹⁰ While most of the women aspire to have careers in the *lok dohori* world, having entered as *lok dohori* singers, many of the men are there because the *dohori* restaurant provides a steady income source while they pursue other options, either in another area of the music industry or in another field entirely (Stirr 2010, 2009). Furthermore, *dohori* restaurants are the primary source of income for most women, while many men have additional sources of income.

When I did this survey, one of the things many performers asked me to emphasise in the report was their level of education. They emphasised this because of the discrimination they perceived to be directed toward them from Kathmandu Valley residents who label *dohori* restaurant performers as uneducated rural hicks. This was in direct contrast to how the performers saw themselves. By far the most common category performers listed in this survey as other occupation was that of student (18%). Many of the performers support themselves by performing in *dohori* restaurants while they study in colleges and universities. The caste and ethnic makeup of these student-performers reflects the makeup of the field as a whole, with a slightly higher number of Brahmin men enrolled in degrees. At B.A. degree level and

¹⁰ Greene's (2002/2003) article on *lok pop* describes the genre in Pokhara in the 1990s as one that memorialises rurality. While this attitude may still characterise some urban producers and performers of *lok pop*, in the 2000s, especially in central and western-hills villages, the genre has come to represent a modernised, rather than memorialised, rurality.

higher, there is no significant pattern of ethnic, caste, or regional background. Furthermore, the percentage of *dohori* restaurant performers with a B.A. (18%) or M.A. degree (3.5%) is higher than the national average.¹¹ And the majority of male performers (though not of female performers) have completed secondary education up to the SLC or higher, which is also higher than the national average. Even those who have only completed primary education, or no formal education, are keen to dispel the myth of *lok git* performers in general as being uneducated, as a lack of education is often a euphemism for a low status of other kinds. The performers see themselves as artists, having chosen a profession that requires specific skills and talents that deserve to be respected, valued, and supported in their own right.

Artists' hopes and concerns for the field

In the survey, I asked performers for their reasons for becoming artists, and their opinions on what changes, if any, they would like to see in the *lok dohori* field. I used nVivo qualitative analysis software to perform a simple keyword-in-context analysis of responses, and then translated the responses into English. The words used below represent the dominant themes in the responses that were given. Most of the performers indicated that they became *lok dohori* artists out of a personal interest in the field and their own ambitions, others expressed a concern for culture and preservation. The most commonly occurring word in responses to the question on possible reasons for becoming an artist is interest/desire (*iccha*), followed by culture (*sanskriti*) and variations of the concept of preservation (*samrakshan*). The response, "I became an artist to preserve the country's folk culture and to fulfil my

¹¹ The 2001 census includes data for people over the age of 6 as an aggregate group; thus, the percentage is obviously going to be smaller (1.8% with higher education) (Manandhar and Shrestha 2002:255). Predictably, among *lok dohori* performers, men have had more education than women, as is the case nationally. As reported on the survey forms, 6% of men have M.A.'s, 22% have B.A.'s, 29% have I.A.'s, and 29% stopped their education after passing the SLC. 9% have some primary education under the SLC level, 3% are literate but have no formal education, 1% have formal musical qualifications only, and 1% did not respond. Of the women, 8% have B.A.'s, 16% have I.A.'s, and 20% stopped their education after passing the SLC. 40% have some formal education under the SLC level, and 12% are literate but did not have formal education. The 4% of women who did not respond to this question may also fall within this category, as they were obviously literate enough to fill out the forms, and the education level was a self-reported category rather than a box to check.

aspirations” can be understood as representative of the majority of responses to this question.

In response to the question on what changes, if any, they would like to see in the *lok dohori* field, artists went into greater depth about their concerns regarding the field as a whole. In general, artists desired a greater amount of public respect and value, in accordance with the high-level official discourse about folk music and cultural preservation within which they framed their profession. I identified keywords in their responses that defined three main themes running through the responses: preservation, development, and respect and value, which I examine together along with another keyword, degeneration. These themes overlap considerably, but also sometimes exert tension on each other.

Preservation

Official state discourse in Nepal values cultural heritage and its preservation. The language of the 2010 Cultural Policy reflects this, as does the commercial music industry. The folk music industry in Nepal has been framed as a means of cultural preservation ever since the beginning of Radio Nepal’s folk music recordings in the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, the folk music industry took place at the level of the state: Radio Nepal and the state-owned Ratna Recording employed artists, made recordings, and disseminated them, with the aim of cultural preservation and promotion rather than profit. The same set of values informs artists in today’s music industry, though within this discourse, it is the recording of tunes that matters, rather than their musical arrangements. The prevailing ideology remains one of oral tradition, and *dohori* restaurants are important sites for the oral transmission of recorded songs, which themselves often draw from existing songs that may or may not have been recorded before. Thus, the industry remains close to non-commercial practices of music making, in a manner that is very similar to that which Stefan Fiol (2011) describes for the popular folk music industry in neighbouring Kumaon and Garwhal. Individuals, along with melodies and words, can easily circulate between commercial and non-commercial spheres, while instrumentation and arrangements set commercial and non-commercial songs apart. *Dohori* restaurant performers see their actions as a contribution to cultural

preservation by promoting rural hill folk music genres in the capital city, as one artist expressed it in a term paper for his bachelor's degree in music (Poudel 2002), and both on the survey forms and in conversations many other performers also express their desire to contribute to cultural preservation in the best possible way.

One major subtheme related to cultural preservation is authenticity, as expressed in answers to the question of what should change in the commercial *lok dohori* field:

However many songs are made, I hope that Nepali culture and authenticity will shine through in them all.

Nepali *lok dohori* is pure, genuine Nepali. Unlike other genres it has no western influence in it. Thus I hope that its authenticity is not lost.

We shouldn't let our authenticity, traditions and customs fade away. I feel that it would be good to not let new creations overshadow older creations.

I hope that the songs that are pure and authentic, the seasonal songs, and the kinds of songs palatable to all of society will be preserved.

I hope for good changes in *lok dohori*, which will help ensure that according to *lok dohori*, *salaijo*, *kauda*, *jhyaure* and other such customs, songs will continue to be sung forever in our own authentic languages. I hope that western culture doesn't influence authentic Nepali *lok dohori* to lean towards western languages, and that the folk songs from Tarai to Himal will continue to resound throughout our rural areas, without forgetting our motherland Nepal, Nepali customs, Nepali ways of life.

The organisations related to this field should think seriously about this. As folk music is part of Nepali cultural identity the state should also concern itself with its preservation. With an eye to the circulation of *lok dohori*, there needs to be more concentration on the authentic (*thet*) and the genuine (*maulik*).

The mentions of authenticity here highlight the national cultural heritage in music and language as opposed to influence from western culture, and appear to value the old over the new. These emphases

reflect the common official language of cultural preservation and promotion, and come across as rather dutiful. But greater commitment and professional involvement with music are apparent when it comes to invocations of different folk genres.

Performers in the *lok dohori* field see themselves as versatile in terms of genre and style, as custodians of a wide range of styles of folk music, beyond those styles that dominate the recording industry. In fact, while western-hills-style *dohori* dominates the industry production of cassettes (and now mp3s), restaurants present a more varied range of regional styles in folk music performances. This depends, to some extent, on the patterns of settlement and temporary residence within the Kathmandu Valley, and the preferences of restaurant clientele in different areas of the city. The Kathmandu-area *kathe git dohori* song style¹² is a favourite of many *dohori* restaurants that cater to patrons from this area. In 2007-8, this included many of the *dohori* restaurants in Chabahil and Gaushala, as well as in Gwarkho—those restaurants around the eastern edge of Kathmandu’s Ring Road. These restaurants were also more likely to employ singers from eastern areas of the country; the few female singers from eastern ethnic groups including Rai and Sherpa were employed in restaurants lining the Ring Road in Chabahil. Specialising in songs of a particular region does not necessarily mean that these singers come from these regions; rather, it may mean that they have worked to develop these skills as a part of becoming professional performers. For example, Rajkumar Rayamajhi of Lalitpur Rodhi Club, originally from Palpa, is the restaurant’s male specialist in *Kathe* songs, which he learned only after he came to Kathmandu to become a professional singer. Versatility and a broad knowledge of folk musical genres is seen as a professional skill worthy of being developed.

Performers routinely attempt to broaden their competence in ranges of traditional genres, through recordings on cassette and VCD, as well as by listening to other performers in the *dohori* restaurants where they work, at competitions, and at rural festivals where the stage performance is but one venue for making music, and music making often continues all night long after the official show has ended.

¹² The *kathe git* sound is exemplified in recordings by singers such as Navaraj Ghorasaini and Gita Devi.

Sometimes, performers draw on the melodies, rhythms, and words of the songs they hear at such festivals when they create new songs for their own albums. The process of circulation and learning during which songs and singers move in and out of the commercial domain into different forms and roles is central to the commercial world of *lok dohori*, there is considerable overlap between commercial and non-commercial songs and performances and the boundaries are constantly in motion, in a process that is perhaps even more complex and involves more steps than the similar process in neighbouring Uttarakhand that Stefan Fiol referred to as a movement 'from folk to popular and back' (2010). *Dohori* restaurants are important nodes in this network, where commercially recorded songs often circulate and change in performance, and where their origins sometimes hold significance and sometimes slip into obscurity.

In this complex relationship among urban centres, towns, and rural villages, among the recording industry and the various levels of commercial and non-commercial live performances, what is commonly understood by the term preservation actually revolves around rurality. The recording industry and the live performance industry are seen as a means of preservation of rural songs and dances, transmitted through oral traditions, but preserved for posterity in their commercial incarnations. Thus, the nature of the songs that are recorded and performed in the commercial world is a topic of debate, with strong calls for commercial products to retain and promote aesthetic and ethical values associated with rural life. Some survey responses illustrate this:

In my opinion, our village homes and the earth of our country should speak through our songs.

Others express the wish that commercial *dohori* should 'remain Nepali cultural' and express the best of Nepali culture. The debate over what commercial recordings and performances should be like revolves around changes brought by the commercialisation and professionalisation of *lok dohori* performance, viewed from different perspectives as both development and degeneration.

Development

The idea of preservation is connected in complicated ways to the idea of development. For some in Nepal, development means moving away from rurality, at least implicitly (Pigg 1992). For most in the *lok dohori* field, development means a positive change rooted in valued aspects of rural life, sometimes framed in terms of past glories, and sometimes framed in terms of valuable present or aspirational practices. As in any nostalgic genre, the valued aspects of rurality and past-ness are chosen according to present concerns. For many, development means the continued flourishing of the genre, combined with a sense that it is progressing, as this respondent expresses: 'May *dohori* occupy an even greater place in Nepal than it does now; may this musical field not just fade away; may it develop even further.' The discourse of development as progress in *dohori* has two main aims: that of musical development, and that of social development through music.

The discourse of musical development stems from the transformation of performance practice from village contexts to urban commercial contexts. In village contexts for performing *dohori*, instrumental accompaniment is often optional, and the primary instrument used to accompany *dohori* singing is the *madal*. People do not always pay attention to the tuning of the *madal*, and prefer to sing in a key that suits their voice. Women and men who sing *dohori* with each other may not always sing in the same key. *Madal* playing is often directed at dancing rather than singing, cueing the dancers and thus promoting repetitions of the same musical phrase for purposes of dancing, rather than cueing singers as to when to move on to a new musical phrase. All of this changes when village-trained performers become professionals.

Since the days of Radio Nepal, *lok git* has become an ensemble genre, and performers discuss musical development in terms of competence in ensemble playing. Radio Nepal's voice tests and instrumental tests still primarily examine whether or not a performer knows the basic things necessary to perform in an ensemble: how to play in tune and in time, or *sur* and *tal*. As these may be employed differently than the performer is used to, this is a bigger challenge than it might initially seem. Instrumentalists in particular are frustrated with singers who often appear to display no understanding of *sur* and *tal*, a problem that is

complicated by the prevailing ideology in which singers are the focus of the industry. So, the most common development-related response in the survey relates to the necessity of performers gaining musical knowledge. For example:

There is a lack of musical knowledge among the artists. Even if they only study the basics, they should study those and only then step onto the stage.

The change that is most needed in *lok dohori* is good concentration on musical elements like tuning and timing, I hope that these are taken more into consideration.

People involved in *lok dohori* have little musical knowledge. They have to enter this field with prior education.

One respondent took the idea of musicians lacking formal ensemble training further, and connected it to the stereotype that most folk musicians are illiterate. Survey data actually shows that this is not the case: everyone who filled out a form had at least basic literacy, and the majority of performers have education beyond the SLC level. It is likely that the person who wrote this would have known this, so illiteracy here stands in for more than just its literal meaning, implying rural backwardness and lack of modernity (Pigg 1992). While this is the only response that blatantly referred to this stereotype, others acknowledged the tension between the desire to preserve what is valued and the feeling that there are some aspects of culture best left behind by progress. One person initially expressed a dislike of remakes of old songs and argued that nothing should change in *dohori*, but then came up with a list of desirable changes.

Still others explicitly linked music and social improvement:

Lok dohori is that sector which no one has to change. It will polish itself with the passage of time. Time will change it. I feel that way.

Distorting songs by old artists to make it conform to the demands of 21st century and basking in that glory is nothing but trying to show one's inadequacy under the guise of 21st century. I want these kinds of changes--our society still maintains old thinking; may bitter culture be transformed and presented in tender language. May *lok*

dohori be palatable to everyone's eyes and ears. May music bring changes in people's behaviour. *Lok dohori* should speak our upbringing. May we not copy others but may the world emulate *lok dohori*.

I feel that we should create rhythms and tunes that bring social awareness and alertness and further strengthen society (through music).

For these performers, *lok dohori* has a responsibility to society to help create positive social change, which goes along with preservation. One person connects development with songs that help maintain a sense of history, connecting development and preservation:

I feel that what the *lok dohori* field can do for an undeveloped place like Nepal is create awareness about development; help preserve old tunes based on pertinent events.

Another person focuses on ethnic diversity and the challenge of maintaining the uniqueness of different traditional musical styles when they become the basis for *lok dohori* songs of the professional, ensemble variety.

Change is good with change in time. Even if there is change, we should not let our authenticity and genuineness disappear. Different ethnic groups have their own songs but they should retain their authenticity even if they are converted into folk songs. In addition, I also want *lok dohori* to get an identity in other countries.

This response exemplifies a dual significance of the term identity in the *dohori* field today, and more broadly in all of Nepal, where ethnic/regional and national identities are both important, but the means of reconciling them is unclear. What is development, and what is dissolution of identity? How important are which aspects of identity? These questions play out to some extent in aesthetic debates about songs. While I will not go into the particulars of such debates here, I will note that a tension exists in other responses between promoting the originality of songs and preserving traditional culture; the above response is prescient in identifying a need to promote the musical styles of different ethnic groups. Within the past few years since the survey

was completed, I see this as one of the newer developments in the industry. Now, *lok dohori* artists are increasingly choosing to include songs beyond the mainstream *lok git* and *dohori* formats in their albums. There is an increase in regional song production (Stirr 2012), as well as in the production of songs in languages other than Nepali. According to my conversations with some older artists who have been in the field for decades, such as singer and instrumentalist Krishna Gurung of the National Cultural Corporation/Rastriya Nachghar; singer, songwriter, and novelist Hiranya Bhojpure, formerly of Radio Nepal and Lekali Cultural Group; and even *lok dohori* star Komal Oli, this is not so much a new development but more like a correction. They see the incorporation of a variety of genres and styles as a return of professional folk music to the days when a greater variety of song styles were more common in the *lok git* market, before the *dohori* boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Finally, ethnic and regional media have found growing niches in the recording industry, and I would not be surprised if songs in ethnic and regional languages begin to be performed in *dohori* restaurants. To discuss these changes under the category of development links them with changes in state cultural policy and the social movements that have shaped the policy, in which the understanding of unity and diversity, and the fluid relationships among multiple identities continue to evolve.

Respect and value

As *dohori* performers see themselves as being engaged in a project of preservation and development, they are concerned with changing what they see as an unfair stigmatisation of the genre. One of the major phrases that is common both in the media and in survey responses that address respect and value, as well as in everyday talk about *dohori* by performers and fans, is the phrase *vikriti visangati*, degeneration and disharmony. *Vikriti* is often used as a euphemism for what some consider to be an excessive expression of sexuality in performances, in music videos, and in song words. *Sanskriti*, culture, and *vikriti*, degeneration, are often placed in rhetorical opposition to each other, facilitated by the fact that the words rhyme. But this rhyme also metaphorically signals that separating the two is not always straightforward.

Much of the stigma faced by *dohori* performers has to do with the association of *dohori* and sexuality, which is rooted in the traditions of many ethnic groups of *dohori* singing as a courtship practice that often includes bawdy lyrics,¹³ and modern, urban (mis)interpretations of these traditions that frame female performers as being sexually available. The atmosphere in a *dohori* restaurant is intended to resemble the atmosphere in a Gurung or Magar village at festival time, as is shown by the common invocation of the *rodhi* traditions of Gurung and Magar culture, as well as a more generalised festival atmosphere. All of these are contexts in which public singing and dancing by women in general are *not* traditionally considered to be morally suspect.¹⁴ This contrasts with conservative Hindu views that proscribe the public performance of women in most contexts.¹⁵ The clash of these two different views leads to many misunderstandings: some patrons expect female performers to be sexually available, and reactions to this perception contribute to discourses of purification among *dohori* performers and fans. Some survey responses in this vein include:

Cutting down on the ‘dirtiness’ [*phohori*] that’s come along with *dohori*, my wish is for it to be purely cultural.

Obscenity or lack of control [*chhadapan*] should be done away with. The degenerations that have come into this field and the public’s negative view of it should be changed.

¹³ Including, but not limited to: Gurung *rodhi* and Magar *basghar* along with other multi-ethnic songfests, in which various song genres are performed as *dohori/juhari*; Limbu *dhan nach*, Tamang and Sherpa *selo*, northeastern *hakpare* and *gothalo git*, far-western *deuda*, and the various forms of *sawal-jawab gan* of the Tarai, performed in Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, etc.

¹⁴ For more on the Gurung *rodhi*, see Andors 1976, Macfarlane 2003, Messerschmidt 1976, Neupane 2011, Pignede 1966, Moisala 1989, 1991, and Stirr 2009. *Dohori* does not, however, have roots in traditions of hereditary female performers or *mujra* style performance and thus *dohori* restaurants are quite different from the *mujra* establishments of northern India and Pakistan, where hereditary female singers and dancers, backed by male instrumentalists, sing and dance for male patrons (see Qureshi 2008; Brown 2007). Performers trained in these styles can be found among the Badi caste of western Nepal, among whom both men and women have historically been hereditary performers (see Singh BK, n.d.).

¹⁵ An exception is the festival of Teej, about which much has been written (see for example Ahearn 1998; Skinner, Holland, and Adhikari 1994).

Singer Srijana Pun, who performs in a *dohori* restaurant and also works at a women's rights NGO (WOFOWON), connects stigmatisation with a focus on bodily display rather than on musical and poetic competence. She invokes a nostalgic narrative of valued aspects of rural life as part of her argument that *dohori* and *dohori* performers should be accorded greater social value:

In fact, *lok dohori* used to be a tradition of singing authentic folk tunes, as women and men expressed their words back and forth through the medium of song in village homes, forests and fields, *chautaris* and the custom of *rodhi*. Now, these songs are used commercially in the hotels and restaurants of the city, where they are accorded little or no value. Here in the city *dohori* restaurant managers look only at empty outer beauty; because of this it is only a matter of time before the *lok dohori* field will slip out of everyone's mind. In the name of *lok dohori* we, Nepali sisters, are subject to various kinds of bodily exploitation; even so, so many *dohori* restaurant employees continue to endure it. I want to say that, leaving this kind of degeneration behind and giving real *dohori* the value it deserves, we should create and follow a positive road.

Here Srijana does not mean that *dohori* songs shouldn't be performed in commercial venues, but rather that no matter where they are performed, the songs and the performers should be treated with respect. She continues to perform as a *dohori* singer in a restaurant because she enjoys it, and has the means to quit if she wishes. Her wish is for the conditions in which she performs to be more congruent with her own idea of her performance as maintaining a valuable folk tradition. Similarly, another artist writes,

Artists are the jewels of any nation. Thus art and voice [*kala ra gala*] should be properly valued. On top of that *lok dohori* is music within our own country. That is why I want real valuation of art and voice based on talent and not on nepotism and beauty.

The word translated here as 'valuation' is *mulyankan*, which can also be translated as 'evaluation'; however, the context in which this

respondent and others use the word implies more than just a musical evaluation of performance on its own terms. It implies a desired positive valuation of *lok dohori* within society and the nation, and a concomitant appreciation for excellence in performance. It also has to do with financial remuneration. At many *dohori* restaurants, performers have to ask for their salaries each month, rather than receiving them regularly. Often, artists who ask for their salaries will be denied them, and instead face insulting behaviour from owners or managers.¹⁶ One artist referred to the practice of withholding salary and said, ‘this is the real *vikriti!*’ Salary forms a consistent theme in survey responses, with two particularly prominent issues: being paid on time or at all, and transparency in the allocation of salary amounts. Performers ask

[t]hat artists be paid satisfactorily according to their abilities and that salaries be given on time.

May all artists get paid on an equal, honest scale.

In general, *dohori* restaurant performers argue that if they were truly valued in the way that official discourses of cultural heritage frame their profession and their art, they would not face the financial hardships that they currently face. Familiar with rhetoric such as ‘artists are the jewels of the nation’, they would like to see some material confirmation of what often seems like empty praise. The legacy of patronage systems, including the state patronage of the Panchayat era, influences their claims upon the state to do something to demonstrate to the nation that folk music—including commercial *lok dohori*—is a valuable tradition that is worthy of support.

Conclusion

Due to its sometimes bawdy lyrics and the uncertainty of what performers might say in live improvisations, its history of association

¹⁶ This is also true for restaurants (*lok dohori* and pop/*adhunik*/Hindi-song-oriented) in UK and US migrant communities, but, significantly, it is not true of the *dohori* and dance restaurants I visited in Bahrain (see Stirr forthcoming). Performers are particularly keen to go to the Gulf despite its drawbacks, because they know from the experiences of others that they will actually be paid the promised salary on time and without having to fight for it. And, it should also be noted, the withholding of salaries is not limited to the world of hotels and restaurants, but has been common in many fields of business in Nepal.

with elopements, and its current commercial profile, *dohori* unsettles unitary ethnicising and nationalising narratives, along with purist discourses of cultural heritage, or easy dichotomies of the folkloric and the commercial. It remains associated with messy boundary-crossings, transgressive flirtations, night-time elopements, and the ways in which such transgressive desires have both been encoded in traditional social norms and structures through formal and informal proscriptions, and commodified and celebrated through the music industry and the broader night-time entertainment industry in the growing urban areas of Nepal. *Dohori* restaurants are sites where visions of the nation as unitary, the nation as made up of diverse cultures living and interacting together, and the nation as a place of shifting boundaries between changeable identities, all come into contact and sometimes conflict with each other. And as we have seen, *dohori* restaurants employ artists with diverse musical aims, who see themselves as dedicated to the preservation and development of a tradition and who believe that state policies and initiatives regarding art and culture should also apply to them and take their perspective into account.

The responses of *dohori* restaurant performers to questions about the state of their profession, and their reasons for becoming artists, sum up their wishes to be seen as contributors to the nation in terms of preserving and developing aspects of Nepali culture, and their wishes for their particular contributions to be recognised. The commercial *lok dohori* field, especially the restaurants that support live performances, has the potential to be a site of great creativity, committed not only to mainstream nationalist musical styles, but also to varied ethnic and regional styles that individual performers bring with them from their home communities, as well as to a creative integration of these styles across genres from *lok dohori* to *adhunik* and pop. If we regard these performers solely within the category of their main means of making a living in the *lok dohori* industry, we might miss their wide range of musical backgrounds and ambitions.

Nationalisms are configurations of moralities, and state policies aim, among other things, to define a moral order among those they govern (Herzfeld 2005: 62, 71). Cultural policy at the state level is one means by which that moral order is legislated, disseminated, broadcast, and performed. This article has focused on state-led ideas of cultural

nationalism put in practice in cultural policies, from the perspective of artists who interact with and would like to be recognised as contributors to their national culture. There is still a strong idea among *dohori* performers and other workers in the culture industries that the state should be an important arbiter of value. This stems less from nostalgia for censorious Panchayat-era unitary policies than from dissatisfaction with free-market approaches in the culture industries, and memories of the positive aspects of state patronage. Their perspectives analysed above support the embrace by Nepal of inclusivity as a moral framework for the nation in its cultural policy, and they express a wish for actions of the state that would clearly demonstrate that multiple sets of aesthetic values are welcomed and valued as intrinsic aspects of the nation.

Building on the concerns of artists as outlined above, I add a few recommendations of my own. As Nepal implements the current National Cultural Policy, the challenge now is to avoid the pattern that Panchayat-era cultural promoters fell into, and to inclusively promote practices and genres from outside the current mainstream, thus demonstrating that these practices and genres are considered valuable at a national level.

To do this, the state itself need not launch a new search for cultural forms worthy of promotion, as there are many organisations and individuals that have the capacity to do this, and they are already taking on these responsibilities. The Nepal Folklore Society is one example; organisations supporting groups of artists, such as the Folk and Duet Song Academy Nepal, provide further options. If the state wishes to work with these organisations, perhaps it can make some small changes in one particular policy: that of awards and prizes. Instead of offering prizes and awards only to those who have already accomplished great things, a small-grants program would encourage artists or others who wish to support cultural practices to do things that might not otherwise be financially possible. This would acknowledge the perspective of artists that preservation and development go hand in hand, while also making a statement about the value of diverse cultural forms.

The creative world of cultural production is also intimately tied to labour. Commercial performance venues, like *dohori* restaurants, pay cultural workers' salaries; the main complaint of workers is that these

salaries are not guaranteed. This problem is actually widespread across many industries, beyond the cultural. A carefully crafted labour policy that helps performance venues stay in business while paying the salaries of their workers on time could be highly significant as an indirect cultural policy. The implications of such a policy are challenging: would enforcing payment of salaries in *dohori* restaurants, for example, require a full-scale formalisation of what today remains an informal sector? Would such a move actually cause more businesses to close, and leave the artists they employ worse off? Despite these challenges, the intersection of cultural policy with a living cultural economy is important to consider at the level of policy implementation. Through applying cultural policy in a truly inclusive spirit, the Nepali state can help re-assert the importance of Nepal's cultural traditions among its citizens, demonstrating to artists of all kinds that they are respected at levels beyond that of rhetoric.

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