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POPULAR MUSIC AMONG NEPALIS IN BAHRAIN

NIGHTCLUBS, MEDIA, PERFORMANCE, AND PUBLICS

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IN A NEPALI NIGHTCLUB IN Bahrain, while performers are preparing for the night's programme, I stop to talk to two regular customers, both Nepali.[1] Aware that I am researching music, they are eager to tell me about how important it is in their lives. Both drivers, they tell me about how, since they have been abroad, they have started listening

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to more Nepali popular music and singing in the nightclubs, either with the karaoke machine or with the band. They have even developed aspirations to become singers themselves, and record albums upon returning to Nepal. Music, says one of the drivers, is "our main friend now".

Nepali popular music is truly important in the lives of Nepali people working in the Gulf states. In a place where public life is highly circumscribed, music is one way of asserting both presence and group solidarity. One way Nepalis in the Gulf experience affective connection and assert their public existence as a community is through practices of popular music listening and performance. These may include playing recordings in the car, on one's phone, in one's own private space, attending Nepali events where music is performed, performing at such events, performing as a job in a Nepali nightclub, and attending a nightclub either to perform as a customer, or to sit and listen. Nepali cassettes and VCDs, and more recently, digitally distributed songs, do a brisk business on the formal and informal markets in the Gulf States. According to the owners of the only Nepali music shop in Manama, Bahrain, the highest-selling genres of Nepali music are those that have folk music elements: *lok git*, *lok dohori*, and *lok pop*. As of 2012, there were Nepali nightclubs in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, and in Bahrain's major city, Manama—the three primary Gulf cities in which nightclubs are permitted. The ones in Abu Dhabi and Dubai remain in operation, but those in Manama closed in 2014.[2] In addition, throughout the Gulf States, Nepali organizations put on concert programmes at Nepali holidays, with performers drawn from the local Nepali communities, as well as big-name artists invited from Nepal.

In terms of the performance of symbolic 'Nepaliness' in the nightclubs, what goes on in Bahrain is not too different from what goes on in Nepal's dohori restaurants. The primary difference is that while in

[2] In the summer of 2014 the Bahraini government cracked down on three-star hotels with live music, forcing those that were in violation of various regulations to cease operation. Both the hotels housing the Nepali bands fell into this category. Later in 2014, the Bahraini government banned the sale of alcohol in three-star hotels and the Nepali clubs chose not to reopen.

Nepali dohori restaurants, patrons dance to the music, in Bahrain, patrons' dancing is banned. Also, a much wider range of genres are performed in Bahrain, as performers cater to a wider range of customers of various nationalities. Bahrain is host to a mixed population of Nepalis, including many with rural backgrounds whose varied tastes in Nepali music intersect in the styles that have been most prominently promoted as 'national folk: *lok git*, *lok dohori*, *lok pop*, and *lok adhunik*.[3] The Nepal represented in much of this music and its corresponding videos is that of the central-western hills, and the songs are in the Nepali language. The reason for this narrow regional representation is rooted in the development of Nepal's music industry in dialogue with Panchayat-era ideas of unitary national culture and the associations of this area of the country with national identity that were promoted at that time (see Stirr 2017). Although this association of music from the central-western hills with Nepali national identity has been increasingly contested through the development of indigenous-language and regional recording industries (Stirr 2012), this music still remains associated with an easily-recognized version of national feeling. This version of national feeling is based on universalized tropes of rural village homes, symbolized by the musical features and common topics of songs in the *lok* family of genres. It draws on nationalist rhetoric that roots the nation in the rural hills. Like country music in the United States, which often roots the nation in the rural South, this indexical association of rurality and region with nation is recognizable even to those who do not like the music or have never experienced rural village life. Broadly, even if individuals cannot identify with the specific village setting described in a song, or the regional source of the melodies used, the established associations of these musical and lyrical tropes may still invoke this idealized version of Nepal.[4] This chapter explores the relationship between migrants'

[3] As with all genres, the referent of each of these genre names is fluid and contested, and may be different within different contexts. I use all of these terms as they are used in Nepal's commercial music industry.

[4] I am not arguing that all Nepalis like or identify with this music but that its set of associations with an idealized version of the nation are recognizable to most Nepalis. This chapter is about those who *do* end up identifying with

situation and the importance of this music in their lives, with a focus on performers and customers at two Nepali nightclubs in Manama.

INTIMATE PUBLICS, POPULAR MUSIC, AND PERFORMANCE

As Nepalis in Nepal imagine what it must be like in *bidesh*, or foreign lands, so too do Nepalis abroad imagine their homeland in particular ways, and this exchange of imaginaries is part of what drives the transnational Nepali music industry. These social practices of imagination and their related affective registers cohere in what Lauren Berlant has called an intimate public. Berlant defines intimate publics as made up of people loosely united by a sense that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who share kinds of suffering they can imagine as similar. Intimate publics are intimate because they articulate such solidarity outside of the political realm; specifically, outside of the realms of rights-based or similar claims for recognition and redress on institutional bodies (Berlant 2008: 10).

Berlant insists that intimate publics are textually mediated. By this she means that commodified genres of intimacy in literature, music, and film circulate among strangers, providing for them an affective language in which to make sense of this common emotional world. It is these commodified forms that make intimate publics public in the sense used by Michael Warner (2002) and others: they comprise a group united around a certain way of representing things. Berlant's idea of an intimate public is more loosely formed than either Warner's (2002) publics and counterpublics or Anderson's (1983) imagined communities. This looseness is due in a large part to intimate publics

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the music as an expression of Nepaliness. Those who do not identify with this music as a marker of identity and solidarity will often identify with Hindi film songs instead; such cases indicate another intimate public in which national identity is much less important to solidarity. A study of dance-only nightclubs could have illuminated such an intimate public among Nepalis in Manama, but nightclubs focusing on live song performance downplayed singing Hindi songs in favour of songs in Nepali, and thus drew patrons who enjoyed these Nepali-language songs.

being what Berlant calls juxtapolitical: existing in close proximity to and in a relationship sometimes dependent on the political sphere, but cohering, again in part, around a desire for a space of respite from political struggle. In her own analysis of film, literature, and their reception in the United States, she argues that intimate publics value generality and normativity rather than oppositional stances, and that narrative tropes shape the ideas of generality that hold intimate publics together (Berlant 2008).

Attention to such circulating tropes and shared ways of interpreting and re-signifying them provides a way to study how intimate publics cohere, and what they do in public life. Yet intimate publics do not have to be limited to communities of the imagination based on receptions of texts; the social practice of imagination that binds them together also manifests in the material social actions of live performance, with its inherent risks and potential challenges to normative practice (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Butler 1993; Turner 1986). I suggest that it is also useful to expand what we think of as tropes to include aspects of musical sound, gesture, and dance. This expansion allows us to include live performance as a medium that also serves to unite publics, yet may not always be fixed in the form of a text. While analysis of cultural texts can provide great insights, recent ethnographic work on many popular music genres has highlighted the importance of attending to the processes of mediation, networks of circulation, and practices of appropriation and re-signification that join people in popular-music-based connections, forming identities and solidarities, from the fleeting to the well-established (Fiol 2011; Fox 2004; Novak 2013; Skinner 2014).

The Nepali nightclubs in Bahrain are spaces where different communities meet, and also spaces where practices of professional and amateur public singing, and popular music listening, converge. Looking at popular music listening and performance as part of intimate public formation allows us to understand intimate publics differently and to rethink their potential political nature. I argue that performance and performative practices of music listening trouble the distinction between musical production and reception that categorizes people as creative producers and mere consumers. With this concept of both listening and live performance as social action in mind, the idea that intimate publics are not political but merely

'juxtapolitical,' bears rethinking, with attention to what politics can be apart from rights-based campaigns for recognition or party-based power struggles.

The ethnography for this chapter centres on two Manama nightclubs. I take the nightclub as one point of intersection between practices of popular music listening and performance. In July 2010, I spent one intense week as a performer in one of these nightclubs, spending 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. onstage, and meeting Nepali migrants elsewhere in the greater Manama area in the daytime. I talked with performers and patrons before, after, and during performances and spent my days with the Nepali nightclub owners and the male performers who facilitated my meetings with other migrants and patrons outside of the nightclub setting. I also visited the competing Nepali nightclub for part of one evening. This research is part of a larger, multisited project on the international circulation of Nepali popular folk music, within which Bahrain is an important site in the world of popular music among Nepalis in the Gulf.[5]

NEPALI MIGRANTS IN BAHRAIN

Statistics for migration to the Gulf from all sending countries are famously unreliable. The Nepali Club in Manama, an organization of elite Nepalis in Manama established to serve Nepalis in Bahrain (which hosts no Nepali consulate), estimates that there are probably 30,000 Nepalis in the country. One of the owners of the Nepali nightclub at which I was based estimated that there were 50,000. According to the Nepal Migration Yearbook 2009, prepared by NIDS with official government statistics, there were 5,125 men and 594 women who left Nepal through documented channels for Bahrain in 2009 (NIDS 2010: 16).

[5] Thus, while I was in Bahrain itself only for a week, I have been working within the Nepali popular music scene in Nepal, the USA, and the UK since 2000 and I knew some of the performers at these Manama nightclubs from other nightclubs elsewhere in the transnational scene. While I have not been back to Bahrain since this visit, I continue to keep in touch with the performers I met there, most of whom have moved on to other performing jobs in Nepal, Europe, and Japan.

Among the Nepalis in Bahrain, most are men working in construction and transportation, part of the "transnational proletariat" of unskilled, low-skilled and low-prestige labourers (Gardner 2010a: 49). Women, as elsewhere in the Gulf, are mainly domestic workers. Many of them come through India rather than through official Nepali channels. According to the Nepali Club, an average of two undocumented Nepali women per week contact the Club for help in leaving their employers.

Those who come with higher education to work in skilled jobs bring their families with them, and intend to make a life in Bahrain, can be seen as a "diasporic elite" (Gardner 2010a: 71). Men in this group are involved in the professions and in business: I met engineers, journalists, and entrepreneurs, as well as the men who ran the Nepali nightclubs. These men had also partnered in renovating and operating a historic Manama hotel, which demonstrates their wealth and connections in the Bahraini business world; they were not merely small-time nightclub owners. But neither do they act entirely independently. All businesses operated by foreigners are required to be run with a Bahraini partner, usually a silent partner who may or may not contribute funds or take a share of the profits. Most of these Nepali businessmen's wives do not work outside the home, but a few have entered the workforce in such various jobs as waitressing, retail, beauty parlours, and in at least one case, running her own restaurant.

Gardner argues that migrant workers in Bahrain are subject to a form of structural violence (Galtung 1969) tied closely to the kafala sponsorship system which requires all foreigners to have a citizen sponsor (kafeel) who is legally in charge of their actions while they are in the country. This system is not one codified law or policy, but a conglomeration of different policies that exist in similar ways across the Gulf States. The ways that it facilitates corruption and exploitation of workers by putting a power most often associated with the state into the hands of individual citizens have been well documented (Al-Najjar 2002; Gardner 2010a, 2010b; Longva 1997, 1999, 2005). Some aspects of sponsors' actions that are often commented upon in the press include the practice of keeping migrant workers' passports so that they cannot leave, as well as charging exorbitant fees for visa extensions and refusing to transfer or renew work permits. These practices have spread to non-citizens even though they cannot be legal

sponsors, and the Nepali owners of Bahrain's nightclubs also hold on to their employees' passports for the duration of their employment. As Gardner argues, this system and its practices affect members of the transnational proletariat and diasporic elite alike.

THE NIGHTCLUBS

The nightclub industry links the elites and proletarian groups of migrant communities, as members of both groups attend nightly performances. These performances also bring them into contact with Bahrainis, Saudis, and members of other migrant communities. Diasporic elites from various sending countries run nightclubs aimed at their own populations, and these clubs are scattered throughout Manama souq and the more upscale business district, with several different clubs in each hotel.[6] They have live bands, karaoke, dance performances, and food and drink, including alcohol. Bahrain is known for its nightlife, and alcohol is legally available there, though subject to increasing regulation. In 2010 Bahrain's policy of allowing alcohol sales in three-star hotels presented a stark contrast to its much more strictly regulated neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[7] On Thursday nights the causeway linking the island with Saudi Arabia is packed with cars with Saudi plates, full of men coming to enjoy a weekend of relative debauchery before returning to the comparatively austere environment across the border.

Men of the Nepali and Indian diasporic elites run the nightclubs in Manama in which Nepali performers are employed. These clubs are known in local parlance as 'Nepali bands'. Performers and wait-staff are recruited in Nepal, in many cases by the owners themselves, and

[6] The hotels in the Manama souq area which hosted Nepali nightclubs were classified as three-star hotels. Four-star and five-star hotels also host nightly live music performances, which are more high-end and expensively produced than those in three-star hotels.

[7] Alcohol is illegal in Saudi Arabia; in Qatar, it is available in one tightly regulated liquor store for expats, and in four and five-star hotels. Since 2014, Bahrain has adopted a policy similar to Qatar's, allowing alcohol sales in four- and five-star hotels only.

in some cases by one employee who has been tasked with putting together a team. In 2010 there were two clubs that focused on live Nepali music, one run by Nepalis but focusing on Hindi film music, and at least three Indian-run dance restaurants that employed Nepalis but offered dance without live music. I focus here on clubs with live music.

I was based at one of the two Nepali Bands, in a hotel that also housed a snooker hall, an openly advertised brothel staffed by Bengali-speaking women, and two other nightclubs, Filipino and Bengali. The performers in the Nepali nightclub (which I will call Nepali Band I) included three male singer/instrumentalists, one female singer plus me (usually there were two female singers), and four female and one male dancers. Two of the dancers were new and arrived the same day I did, while others had been there for several months. The lead dancer and the team of musicians had been recruited by the main male singer, and were nearing the end of a two-year stint. There were nearly forty wait-staff,[8] some male but most female, and six male kitchen and bar staff. All were Nepali. Both Nepali owners were also present at the club every night.

A typical night proceeded in a similar sequence to those in Nepali musical restaurants elsewhere, moving from slower songs to more exuberant and participatory performances. Performers would warm up with a nationalist raṣṭriya git. Then, as customers began to trickle in, some would request to hear solo adhunik-style songs, and to see dances performed to particular songs in Nepali, Hindi, or Arabic. As the night went on, Nepali customers, emboldened by alcohol, would start requesting to sing solo songs with karaoke or live band accompaniment, or dohori, improvised male-female duets, with a singer onstage. Dohori songs were a primary responsibility of singers, who had to be quick with their improvised lyrics. According to performers and owners in both Nepali bands, this was the genre believed to embody the most Nepaliness, and to differentiate what Nepalis did in their nightclubs from what Indians did in theirs to the greatest

[8] This was double the usual amount due to the recent closing of another club. Nepali Band I had taken on its wait-staff temporarily, anticipating its re-opening.

degree, beyond language, costumes, or dance style. While the owners and performers at Nepali Band and I proudly highlighted dohori as a unique aspect of Nepali culture, they were also quick to emphasize that what made their Nepali Band the best was the variety of genres they could perform.

When a customer requested to sing in any genre, wait-staff would deliver a wireless microphone, and the singer would sing from his table. Dancing by customers was strictly forbidden by law, a major difference from Nepali dohori restaurants elsewhere, where half the fun of requesting a song includes getting up with your whole party to dance to it. The majority of the patrons were young Nepali men who sang from their tables, visibly enjoyed the music, and found it hard not to dance. Dohori requests tended toward major dohori hits, all upbeat, danceable tunes rather than the slow, sad laments of many popular lok and adhunik songs dealing with migration. While yearning, sadness, longing, and dukha (suffering) were common song topics, they were all given upbeat musical settings, which for lok and dohori songs is common enough. Dances performed to Nepali songs were also popular requests. It was in the dances that Nepali diversity was demonstrated to the greatest degree. A range of costumes representing various ethnic, regional, and linguistic groups was paired with appropriate dances. From a few conversations with non-Nepali customers (mostly Indian, Bahraini, and Saudi), it was apparent that they did come for the 'something different' that Nepali performers had to offer. In a city riddled with nightclubs representing various nationalities, they wanted to see what the Nepalis did. Thus, Nepali Band I was oriented toward representing Nepaliness both to Nepalis and to members of other communities.

The other Nepali Band that was operating in 2010 (Nepali Band II) was much more oriented toward Nepali customers. This was the one that had hosted many of my friends in the Kathmandu dohori world as short-time performers for stints of three to six months, and it offered much more live dohori and much less of other genres. It had just reopened after being shut down due to a breakdown in the informal economy that keeps relations between nightclubs and police running smoothly, and was under more police surveillance than Nepali Band I. Thus, it had had to stick to the rules and hire no more than four performers. In Nepal, the average number of performers

in a dohori restaurant is eleven; here at Nepali Band II, these four performers, two male and two female, faced the challenge of complying with requests usually meant for a much larger band. I was able to visit there only one night due to my agreement with Nepali Band I. In Nepali Band II, I interviewed the performers about their experiences. The female dohori singer was particularly struck by the fact that some customers wanted to sing dohori in Hindi, and frustrated that she couldn't do it. Other women who had been there before her had better Hindi, and had set a standard for Hindi-language dohori. All three of the singers at this club had talked with an Indian dohori fan who frequented both Nepali Bands about singing dohori in Hindi as a way to reach out to more customers beyond the Nepali speakers, and to introduce them to Nepali culture through dohori. They all thought such outreach was a good idea:

> Male singer 1: When we're there in Nepal, if one or two such customers come and they give a response that we can understand ... we feel good, right? For Hindi-speaking customers, if we sing in Hindi, then they can know that this is what dohori is, that it's touching, heart to heart, that it has these touching words, serious words just like in Hindi, and really loveable words, and words of frustration too, that's what we want them to know.
> Male singer 2: Yeah, we want them to understand dohori.

While both Nepali Bands offered more than songs and dances (including pool tables and video games), it was clear that the performers saw themselves as representing Nepal and Nepali culture on the nightclub stages, and that they wanted to develop the competence required to reach the greatest number of people.

PERFORMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR JOBS

As in Nepali musical restaurants elsewhere, the performers in Bahrain described themselves as performing artists, emphasizing their unique skills and talents over their status as migrant workers. I follow their lead in referring to them this way. The clearest reason why any artist would choose to work in one of Bahrain's Nepali Bands was the money. In contrast to the relationships of indenture common among Nepali migrants' manual labour experiences in the Gulf,

performers wanted to go to the Gulf because there they would be sure to get paid. This was in direct contrast to performers' experiences in Nepal. Back in Nepal, many industries, including the restaurant and nightclub industry, are plagued by the practice of salary withholding. Employees will work for months without getting paid, depending on the continued assurance that their salary is forthcoming. For many, a performing job provides little guarantee of a steady income, regardless of the salary promised at the time of hiring. In 2009, most dohori restaurant performers in Nepal made salaries of Rs 5,000 per month, with perhaps Rs 1,000 more in tips. Dance restaurant performers' salaries were slightly lower, while their tips may have been slightly higher. At Nepali Band I, monthly salaries began at NRs 25,000, five times as much as the most common dohori restaurant salary in Nepal. The salary in Bahrain was guaranteed, and employees had few expenses as housing and meals were provided. Primarily for this reason, most performing jobs in the Gulf had a good reputation among Nepali artists.[9] They thus enjoyed a much higher level of prestige than manual labour jobs, which have the opposite reputation for delivering on their salary promises.

Individuals had different goals towards which they saved these salaries: main male lok git singer Prakash[10] planned to open his own recording company. Lead female dancer Archana ran a cultural centre in Kathmandu, and planned to invest in its expansion, as well as provide for a more secure future for her family. Male drummer and dancer Rubin, as well as dancers Jessica and Reema, hoped that their stints in Bahrain could lead to more work abroad and a chance to see the world. All hoped that their time abroad would prove helpful to their artistic careers.

Both male and female performers working at the three Nepali nightclubs I visited in Manama viewed their stint performing in the Gulf as a form of professional development and a way to raise their

[9] Some wait-staff and kitchen staff at these restaurants also told me that they were always paid their promised salaries on time, but I was not able to confirm this through broader participant observation as I was with the performers.

[10] All names have been changed to protect artists' privacy.

status back home. And in many ways, it was, even by virtue of just being outside of Nepal. In Nepal, I have often been witness to the prestige accorded to foreign-returned artists, who are lauded publicly for having shared Nepali culture with the rest of the world, while 'local' artists get no such acclaim.[11] Just having been abroad increases an individual's prestige. The opportunity to broaden their artistic competence in the multiple genres called for at the Nepali Bands is also a draw—styles of singing and dancing that are less common in the dohori and dance restaurants in Nepal are requested much more regularly in Bahrain's more international environment, and in catering to customers' requests, artists get a wider range of experience. Between 2007 and 2010, many of the performers in Kathmandu and Pokhara's dohori and dance restaurants had done three-month to two-year stints in one of Bahrain's Nepali Bands, and they almost all had positive things to say about their experiences. For these reasons—salary, prestige and status, and increased musical competence—a stint in a Bahrain nightclub was a post coveted by both men and women in Nepal's performing community.

CHALLENGES AND EXPLOITATION

Performers' characterizations of their time in Bahrain as an opportunity for professional development were likely also part of their strategies of dealing with the limits placed upon them. This is especially true for women. While the male staff lived in an apartment around the corner from the club and were free to travel the city as they pleased, the female staff lived in a room in the same hotel as the club. The owners locked them in at night, and unlocked the door when they were due to come down to get ready for the night's performance, as well as for rehearsals, special parties, and visits to the boss's home once a year at the holiday of Dasain. Sandhya, a female lok and dohori singer who had spent three years at Nepali Band I and whom I interviewed in Kathmandu, praised this arrangement for its security measures. She said she felt safer in Bahrain than she ever had in Kathmandu, and

[11] For a discussion of the importance of being a 'foreign-returned' artist in India, see Neuman (1980).

enjoyed being able to call men up who would cater to her every whim, bringing her everything from dinner to feminine hygiene products. She also enjoyed the respite from family troubles and the myriad uncertainties of working in Nepal, feeling that here she was valued as a performer, as shown by the fact that she and everyone else were guaranteed to get paid.

But, this is not to say that the professional and financial benefits of their jobs outweighed the costs of living behind locked doors for the women of the Nepali Bands. Sandhya herself came up against the limits of her valued sense of security when she had to fight to get her passport back after her contract had ended. To be allowed out of the room, much less out of the hotel, was an anomaly, and women had to adjust to living at close quarters with no privacy and nothing much to do. Dancer Jessica, who arrived the same time I did, was fed up after three days. Main female singer Shristi said to me sarcastically, "We have very good security here. LOTS of security". She envied the men's and my ability to go about as we pleased; because the club owners were not in charge of my visa, they did not lock me in or take my passport. Despite the benefits the nightclub staff mentioned, this 'security' or constraints on movement and communication with others puts them at risk of exploitation by those who hold the keys, as well as their passports, working permits, and the ability to fire them or withhold their salaries (this was always a fear because salary withholding was so common in Nepal and in other sectors in the Gulf, although, as noted, performers in these Bahrain nightclubs always did get paid). Reported incidents from clubs in other places in the Gulf make it clear that exploitation of many types does happen, and raise questions about the level of complicity between Nepali authorities and human traffickers abroad (Reporters Nepal 2007). While it was clear that the female performers in Nepali Band I were not being forced to engage in sex work,[12] I came across one instance of sexual exploitation of a female employee, and do not doubt that there are more. These Nepali performers' jobs in the Gulf may be less unstable than those of the unskilled labourers working for large companies, but the underlying kafala system remains the same.

[12] I was not able to find out if there was any kind of organized sex work among waitresses in the Nepali Bands.

In order to deal with this system, workers in the Nepali Bands focus on things that they can control. Dance director Archana threw herself wholeheartedly into choreography and teaching the other dancers, and in our conversations she stressed how her two years in Bahrain had made her a better dance teacher and given her the skills she would need to better run her cultural centre back in Kathmandu. While in the room that all the female artists shared, Archana spent most of her time planning dances and details like costumes, hair, and makeup, watching the dances to the latest Hindi songs on TV, and encouraging the other dancers to do the same. Her focus on artistic achievement and competence allowed her to think of herself as an artist in control of her art rather than an object for the gaze of male customers, a woman behind locked doors, or a labourer engaged in making money for the nightclub owners, and to teach the other female dancers to see themselves the same way. This way of thinking parallels transformations in views of women's performance that have occurred over the last century throughout South Asia, as women of various backgrounds and performance genres try to reclaim the cultural value that was broadly accorded to women's music and dance before colonial interventions, and reframe it in terms of prestigious art and heritage as well as modern forms of middle-class female respectability.[13]

She also hoped that this focus on dance as art would enable the other dancers to advance in their careers once they moved on, and discussed her role as that of a teacher and 'social worker' who tried to help other women see themselves as agents working toward shaping their own futures, which would be based on how well they developed their talents for dance. Her attitude recalls Uttara Asha Coorlawala's discussion of the idea of darshan in relation to dance performance, where female performers' bodily presentation and display onstage is recast as part of a reciprocal relation with their audiences, where they direct the audience's sentiments through their dance or song (Coorlawala 1996; Shrestova 2011), rather than merely appearing onstage as objects of a one-way male gaze (Mulvey 1975). In this view,

[13] See Coorlawala (1996, 2012), Maciszewski (2007), Morcom (2014), Shrestova (2011), and Weidman (2007).

performers affect audience members through their performances, and their competence is manifest in how well it moves the audience. Coorlawala, discussing the South Asian aesthetic theory of rasa, also argues that the audience also needs competence to be affected: some familiarity with the nuances of an art form is necessary to appreciate its codes and tropes (2012). Such a reciprocal understanding of the genres performed in these clubs is central to how performers and audience may come together as an intimate public, finding common ground in music that is familiar.

Without in-depth ethnography among audience members beyond the few with whom I was able to speak, it is hard to say whether this relationship of reciprocal affective connection does indeed exist between performers and audience members. Those audience members who did talk with me expressed that the performances did affect them, that they enjoyed them a great deal, and that such experiences were why they continued to visit the clubs. Whatever other audience members thought, the idea that performers did something that affected their audience was the primary way in which Archana and the other performers discussed what they did. This perspective is key to understanding how these female performers see themselves—strongly concerned with prestige and status, they emphasize that what they do is art (rather than mere entertainment in which they perform at a patron's whims), and that their performances are meant to be interactions with their audiences that provide affecting experiences. By adopting this attitude and focusing on what they believe they can control, they are able to improve their positions, within limits, both within the immediate world of work in Bahrain, and within the music industry upon their return to Nepal.

CUSTOMERS AND CONSUMPTION AS PERFORMANCE: THE LABOURERS

As a woman who could go outside the hotel, I was able to meet with some of the regular patrons from the Nepali Band during the daytime as well as visit other nightclubs at night, always accompanied by the male musicians, who were nearing the end of their time there and had come to know the city well. One day, with the male musicians,

I went to visit a labour camp[14] where their driver friends lived, along with dozens of very young men employed as manual labourers with a construction company. The drivers' room seemed to be a meeting place, with a TV and piles of Nepali VCDs. The young men gathered around and answered Prakash's and my questions about their experiences: "We haven't gotten to do any good work since we've been here. We just run machines and that's all ... and for two years, what? We pass the time". "When we think about the salary, we don't even feel like working." Then we talked about which VCD we should watch: Should it be a sad one "like Pardeshi Dai", the lok adhunik album that made one young labourer's "heart fall to pieces", as he put it, or should it be something lively, to remind them that they can still dance, even in hard times?

The drivers and the manual labourers concurred about the importance of music in their lives, and linked their practices of listening to music, and sometimes performing in nightclubs, to their desires to sing, to play instruments, to become musicians when they returned to Nepal. While abroad and alone, especially on long drives, music was their "main friend now". They measured long drives by how many dohori tapes they would play between one place and another. They saw music, in its commodity form as VCDs and cassettes and as performed in nightclubs and at cultural programmes, as a link to a wider world of shared Nepali sentiments that they could join by listening and singing along, and they were partial primarily to lok, dohori, lok pop, and lok adhunik. That is, the world of affective connections to which they wanted to belong was one of both the migrant laments that dealt with disappointment wherever they went, and a celebration of love and the world back home in Nepal, where the homeland stood for the normative versions of domestic love and wholeness to which they at least sometimes aspired. I suggest that their practices of music listening were themselves performative, that is, they were actions through which they created a shared sense of a world to which

[14] A 'labour camp' is the term used for any place where foreign manual labourers live, and applies to many different kinds of residences. See Bruslé (2010, 2012c), Chapter 9 in this volume, and Gardner (2010c).

they wished to belong. These practices became a way of fulfilling desires for connection, in *dukha-sukha*, sorrow and happiness, always two sides of the same coin. This use of music to create connection with others around shared affective orientations was visible in their visits to the Nepali Bands as customers.

CUSTOMERS' PERFORMANCES

Nepali customers made up over half of Nepali Band I's audience, and there were many regulars. These were mostly men with mid-level jobs such as drivers and airport workers, but some manual labourers, and women accompanied by men,[15] also attended the performances. Customers' restaurant performances included both live dohori and karaoke. I focus here on karaoke as I have written extensively about dohori elsewhere. I also wish to point out the parallels between commercially performed dohori and karaoke: as in karaoke, restaurant dohori's improvised couplets also use tunes from recordings as their basis and refer intertextually to lyrics from recordings, from literature, and from oral tradition, thus bringing together aspects of 'mediated' and 'live' musical spheres.

Rather than merely reproducing or consuming the original song (Adams 1996), performers of karaoke and restaurant dohori shape sociality through their creative performance. Deborah Wong (1994) relates Asian-American karaoke performance to pre-existing practices of amateur public singing, and Tyler Bickford (2006) describes how in a New York karaoke bar, karaoke reflects pre-existing patterns of popular music listening, based not just on singing but on singing along. Attention to the different types of sociality engendered in practices based on singing together and those based on listening together is as useful in parsing the similarities and differences between 'singing' and 'singing along', among Nepalis as it is among New Yorkers. Bickford argues that karaoke, music "mediated and live" (cf. Keil 1984; also see Grandin 1989) taps into shared knowledge of the musical

[15] All the women I met who attended Nepali Band I as customers were there with their husbands. They were over 30 and members of the professional elite.

commodities of recordings and music videos. Re-enactment of key musical or gestural aspects of a well-known original is one important part of making connections among audience members, building a fleeting social solidarity in a roomful of strangers through reference to audio and video recordings most of them know, and affirms the performative interrelationship between listening and performance. Karaoke performance seen in this way is a version of the "intimacy among the multitude" once attributed to collective film viewing (Carlos Monsivais, cited in García Canclini 1995: 150), emphasizing the intimate in the individual performance, while alluding to the multitude with references to original recordings assumed to be known by those present and by a wider public to which they imagine themselves to belong.

Karaoke in Bahrain's dohori restaurants connects the more recent phenomenon of recorded music and its circulation and consumption to the previously existing practices of singing that the recorded lok git, lok pop, and dohori songs themselves also reference. In Nepali Band I and in the broader Nepali migrant community, there is a fetish of original recordings' sounds, as well as a preference for liveness. This means that musicians and owners are apologetic about their use of a karaoke machine, wishing that they were able to re-create everything with a larger band as is done in Nepal. Most performances using the karaoke machine, sung by customers from the floor or by performers onstage, are Hindi songs and lok pop songs—songs in which the background arrangement carries more importance than in lyrics-focused dohori.[16] In these genres the original version carries authority, while in dohori, originals are often soon forgotten. The ability of certain well-known lok pop introductions (for example, the opening guitar chords in Nepathya's lok pop hit Jomsome Bazaarma, or the man clearing his throat that opens Khem Raj Gurung's Wari Jamuna, Pari Jamuna) to invoke reactions of recognition in the audience is such that band members try to

[16] It is possible that Hindi songs may act as vehicles for pan-South-Asian solidarity among workers in Bahrain, but the level of engagement with non-Nepali customers and other nightclubs that would be required to pursue this line of inquiry was beyond the scope of this research.

reproduce them faithfully when not using the karaoke machine, and customers requesting to sing Wari Jamuna, Pari Jamuna might start clearing their throats into the microphone before the play button has even been pushed.

The way karaoke performance can be used to create moments of heightened sociable experience was apparent in a performance of The Sky Band's Gaunma Mela Lagya Chha by a group of labourers at Nepali Band I. The song is a lok pop number on the theme of a migrant man remembering his village and the girl waiting for him there, which includes improvised rap sections and lyrical verses. The music underlying the rap sections quotes the folk song Sindhuli Gadhi. In this performance at Nepali Band I, two men took the microphone in turn: one for the lyrical verses, singing the words as written, and one for the rap sections, making up his own lyrics. It was an interesting hybrid of the faithful karaoke characteristic of most lok pop, adhunik, and Hindi song performances and the focus on improvised lyrics characteristic of live dohori. When the men began singing, those at their table were clapping along, but as the song went on, their entire section of the restaurant began to clap and sing along, and they seemed to be trying very hard not to stand up and break the dancing ban. "There's a festival in the village ... Kanchi is calling me ..." these words, typical of songs of masculine migrant longing, united these men in a sentiment that was palpable in the breaks of the singer's voice and the increasing intensity of the group's clapping and 'dancing' in their seats. As the men at the labour camp had said, sometimes it was good to play the sad ones. But like many of the sad songs in Nepali commercial folk music, this one also had a rousing beat, and the combination of sentiment and musical energy brought the Nepalis in the room together in an overflowing of raw affect. The singers performed their identification with the song's sentiments as they sang, and the other men in the room also did so by clapping, moving rhythmically, and eventually, singing along. Here originality in performance was not the point. Rather, this public, performative identification with a masculine migrants' community of sentiment used the sounds of popular folk song as a touchstone for intersecting, inter-textual references to experiences in the present and in the past that they felt they all shared. As they sang along and tried not to get up and dance, they shared the experience of loneliness in a

foreign land and the idealized familial wholeness of a lok pop version of home.

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The question remains: what of the political is there in the intimate public of Nepali popular folk music among migrants in the Gulf? Lok pop in particular has been accused of being anti-political, of positioning an idealized Nepali village faraway in time and place, and thus removing lok pop listeners from the political realities of contemporary rural Nepal (Greene 2002/2003).[17] While this reading may still apply in certain situations, perhaps among urban Nepali youth who have never lived in a village, this is not (or is no longer) the genre's primary meaning among migrants in the Gulf, most of whom grew up in and may return to homes in villages once their labour contracts are up. Rather, lok pop, with its mixture of genres associated with foreign prestige and intimate Nepali village spaces, stands for the back-and-forth these migrants experience between places associated with past and present, ideas of tradition and modernity, and the mixture of both that exists in Nepali villages. Returned migrants walk village trails with boomboxes blasting lok pop as well as lok git and dohori—the lok git sounds are the familiar sounds of home, the rock, pop, and hip-hop elements those of a home forever transformed by their travel, return, and continued mobility. Replacing all the lok git elements of these songs with rock, pop, hip-hop, or Hindi sounds would not have the same emotional resonance, because these very folk elements express the intimacy of being from a village: of having a village, with all its faults, as home (cf. Nandy 2001; Herzfeld 2005).

[17] This interpretation also relies on a perspective on studio techniques that associates echo, reverb, and delay with echoes of the past, ignoring the importance of echo as a key part of much rural hill folk music that uses the hills *in live performance* specifically to produce echoing sounds as part of a desired performance aesthetic. Here echo is a key element of sonic emplacement in an immediate hill village world, rather than one that is far away in time and space. I am not arguing that Greene's interpretation is incorrect, but rather that it is not totally representative of how all villagers in hill villages and those who have migrated elsewhere currently hear and produce *lok pop*.

This culturally intimate use of music as an assertion of belonging brings the idea of an intimate public as almost political, but not quite, into question. In describing intimate publics as juxtapolitical, Berlant relies on a definition of the political sphere that limits it to that of rights-based struggles in a public realm. The intimate public of Nepali popular folk music is more than a space of respite from day-to-day struggles; it is a space of heightened sociability, where music is a medium for experiencing belonging and actively shaping the world to which one belongs. Performances, including improvised dohori, dances to recorded songs, full-band performances of adhunik songs, karaoke, and performative listening practices, exceed the narratives that recorded songs supply, reconfiguring the ways that their messages of normative migration and family situations are understood, accepted, or rejected. They themselves are sites for individual and group struggles, for assertions of presence in public space on their own terms. Thus migrants' performative assertion of belonging and social solidarity through popular music can itself be seen as a political act. Uniting around the feelings that popular music engenders is an act of agency and resistance as individuals refuse to be defined only as labourers, insisting on their personhood. In the Gulf, where migrants' public struggles are so severely circumscribed by the kafala system, by laws limiting their movements in public space, by language barriers, by the discourses and exigencies that shape migration policies at home in Nepal, and by the challenges that lead them to migrate in the first place, the political importance of such seemingly mundane assertions of emotional solidarity becomes even stronger.