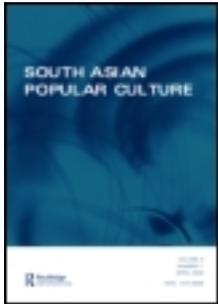


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Changing the sound of nationalism in Nepal: *Deudā* songs and the far western region

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This article looks at the *deudā* songs of Nepal's far-western region and their relationship with changing ideas of Nepal as a nation. Drawn from regional folk dances, *deudā* songs have become popular in the commercial music industry. The *deudā* industry is centered in the studios of the far west but has increasingly become part of the central music industry in Kathmandu. However, this has not happened without struggle, and many *deudā* artists feel that their music and region are marginalized within the country as a whole. In a time of state restructuring after a 10-year civil war, artists in the *deudā* industry use their music to express aims for national recognition of far-western art and culture as both regionally unique and integrally a part of Nepal. Their focus on inclusivity challenges arguments that deem all identity politics communally divisive.

Nepal's far-western region has a unique place in the country's national imaginary. Thought of as the homeland of Nepal's dominant Brahmin and Chhetri caste groups and the source of the Nepali language, it is nevertheless one of the least developed and least-known areas of the country. Its musical traditions have much in common with those of Kumaon and Garwhal, which at times have been part of the same polity.¹ Among these musical traditions are *deudā* songs, round-dance songs performed in a circle with two groups singing antiphonally, with the dance steps keeping the beat.² Now a mainstay of the far west's regional music industry, *deudā* songs remain popular at village festivals, where unlike some traditional song genres in which participation is constrained by caste, ethnicity, age or gender, everyone may participate.³ This inclusivity, along with the songs' question-answer structure, brings ideals of participatory democracy to the minds of politically active musicians. Yet these same musicians lament the fact that their region and its music have been marginalized within the larger context of the nation. As Nepalis work toward restructuring the state and reimagining the nation after 10 years of civil war, a closer look at *deudā* reveals some of the ways that far-western regional artists and their music have been excluded from dominant national discourses, and how artists use their music to fight such marginalization.

As identity politics have become highly significant in the years following the Maoist People's War (1996–2006), Nepal's current government is attempting to develop a federal system that corrects past wrongs; debates are raging over how to shape of a more inclusive state structure and incorporate marginalized social groups into the symbolic construct of the nation.⁴ The particulars of this process are highly contested, and conservatives speak

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of impending doom: having thrown out the idea of a unitary national culture and replaced it with the recognition that national space is fraught with differences and contradictions, will the state fall apart? Will Nepal be swallowed up by one of its larger neighbors? To modify Partha Chatterjee's famous phrase, current debates in Nepali politics about state restructuring, ethnic federalism, and cultural policy, pit the nation against its fragments. Outside of political extremes, the question many are now asking concerns balance and re-defining identity: how to publicly embrace multiple identities, including that of being 'Nepali.' This article examines how two artists in the *deudā* music industry have struggled with this question.

The far west: Seat of national heritage, or a marginalized region?

Nepal's Far Western Development Region lies on the western border with India's Uttarakhand state, and is the region farthest from the capital, Kathmandu. It comprises nine districts, divided into two zones, the Seti and the Mahakali. The fieldwork for this article took place in the cities of Dhangadhi and Attariya in Kailali district, as well as among professional and amateur *deudā* singers and fans in Kathmandu.

Debates around regional identity and inclusion in Nepal have primarily focused on the southern plains (Tarai or Madhes), due to this region's history of direct exploitation by the central governing elite (see ICG; Lal). At the same time, the far west and high mountains have long been neglected in terms of infrastructural and economic development, access to basic services (Thieme 82), and cultural inclusion (Bandhu 127). In the far west, migration to India for unskilled labor remains the major source of cash income among a population depending primarily on subsistence agriculture.⁵

It is ironic that the far west has been so neglected, insofar as it has long been thought of as a seat of cultural heritage and a source of basic aspects of Nepali national identity – most significantly the Nepali language. The general belief is that this language, known since the 1930s as Nepali, was the language of the Khas empire that ruled this area (including Nepal, Kumaon, and Garwhal) in early medieval times.⁶ But the language has developed in significantly different ways in the eastern and western parts of Nepal, such that far-western variants and central-eastern variants can be mutually unintelligible. The linguistic variants spoken in the far west today are classified as dialects of Nepali and accepted as predecessors to modern standard Nepali, but they are quite difficult to understand for Nepali speakers from the central and eastern parts of the country. Thus the language-based centrality of the far west to modern Nepali national identity is located in the past.

Past glory is also a theme in far-western songs and epics describing the military exploits of Khas rulers.⁷ The current narrative of Nepal's founding as a nation goes back to the 'unification' led by conquerer Prithvi Narayan Shah of the small Himalayan principality of Gorkha. While he and the rulers of most of the principalities that became the Gorkhali kingdom in the eighteenth century claimed to be of Rajput origin, their language was still *Khās kurā*, tying them to the earlier history of the Khas. Early history and its interpretation remain politically significant, as different groups appropriate different aspects of heritage for their own ends.⁸ Dominant ideas of Nepali identity, tied to the narrative of a Gorkhali unification, remain centered on the central-western hill regions that include Gorkha and the capital Kathmandu. Within this discourse, the far west is the bearer of the Gorkhali rulers' ancient heritage, and thus the heritage of the modern nation. But, present far-western cultural practices are often represented as separate from modern national culture (Bandhu 127; Bernéde 1).

The mid-twentieth-century in Nepal, especially during the one-party Panchayat regime (1960–1990), was characterized by policies of national unification through culture, media, and the education system, and emphasized linguistic unity through promoting Nepali as the national language. One of this government's slogans was *ek bhāṣa, ek bheś, ek deś* ['one language, one costume, one nation']. During these years, scholars concerned with national unification discussed the far west as an unfortunate latecomer to the mid-twentieth-century version of Nepali nationalism. Cuda Mani Bandhu of the Nepal Academy attributes this to the distinct culture of the far west and implies that far-western residents preferred their own regional culture to the detriment of their integration into the nation (127). Instead of a source of national heritage, the far west in Bandhu's characterization becomes a hinterland devoid of nationalist sentiments but full of opposition to national unity. Caught between ideas of their prestigious past and their region's current marginalization, the people of the far west would beg to differ. Rather, they call for a greater acceptance and recognition of far-western cultural expression as part of national culture. In the world of popular folk music, one way that they do this is through recordings, performances, and gatherings featuring *deudā*.

Nepali national music and the far west

The musical sounds now associated with the dominant form of Nepali nationalism were consolidated in the studios of Radio Nepal during the Panchayat period. Two genres, *ādhunik gīt* and *lok gīt*, received the most attention at the national radio. The genre of *ādhunik gīt* or modern song draws on classical *rāg*, western popular song form and harmony, and Nepali folk melodies and rhythms, many of which are inspired by musical styles of the central and eastern hills (Grandin 224; Gurung 8; Henderson 21). Lyrics often come from literary poetry, and *ādhunik gīt* is thought of as urbane, cosmopolitan art song. The genre term *lok gīt* or folk song can refer to any type of folk song including *deudā*, but at Radio Nepal, and subsequently in the private popular folk music industry, *lok gīt* producers ended up heavily promoting music of the central and western hills, and to this day these regional styles remain (sometimes grudgingly) understood as 'national' folk music.⁹ Musical form was also standardized – with complicated meters sometimes simplified, refrains added or subtracted, and songs truncated – to fit within the standard three-minute recording time. For example, prolific *lok gīt* singer and collector Kumar Basnet recalled changing some songs from the area north of Kathmandu from seven-beat meters to 4/4 meter when adapting them for radio broadcast. Vocals were emphasized in mixing, and instruments – mainly the *mādal* drum, the *bāsuri* bamboo flute, and the four-stringed Nepali *sārangī* – took an accompanying role (Henderson 22). All of these songs were recorded in Nepali, regardless of musical style and origin. Until FM radio stations came onto the scene in the late 1990s, songs in other languages received only one half hour of Radio Nepal's airtime a week on a program known as *Phulbārī*, or Flower Garden (Moisala 345; Stirr, "Exchanges of Song" 40–93).

Since the 1980s, a private music industry has expanded the scope for commercial folk music recording. The mainstream Nepali-language *lok gīt* industry remains centered in Kathmandu, but regional music industries and industries focused on other languages have also gained footholds in other areas of the country. The *deudā* industry in the far west is concentrated in the major cities of the plains. Both the *deudā* industry in the far west and the mainstream *lok gīt* industry promote their music as a means of simultaneous preservation and development; their commercial recordings thus serve to document folk tunes, while also serving to modernize them, whether through adding instrumentation and studio effects,

or the portrayal of models and urban scenes in accompanying music videos. As Stefan Fiol (24–53) has noted, in neighboring Kumaon and Garhwal, the re-appropriation of recorded tunes in varied arenas of traditional practice is one of the driving forces of the commercial industry; the tunes, and sometimes their refrains, are seen as templates for improvising new lyrics and embellishing with individual styles of vocal ornamentation, as well as providing new music for the dances associated with the song genres. This is true throughout the popular folk music industry in Nepal, and the close relationship between recorded songs and village performance may be one reason why regional music industries like the *deudā* industry remain most popular in their own regions. But most professional *deudā* artists I met dreamt of national recognition, which paralleled the desires of many people outside the music industry to be recognized as possessing both a distinct far-western cultural identity, and as being fully and undoubtedly Nepali.

Genre within commercial folk music is one area in which these musicians struggle to balance regional uniqueness with national similarities. In the Kathmandu-based commercial folk music industry, one particular musical form has gained prominence in the last 15 years. This is *dohorī*, or duet song, in which singers improvise couplets back and forth. As noted, singers do this in *deudā* as well. When speaking of the *practice* of question-answer singing, folklorists classify *deudā* as a kind of *dohorī*; here the term *dohorī* simply refers to ‘question-answer song’ (Pant 44). But, ‘*dohorī*’ as a commercial genre still refers primarily to question-answer songs in the style of the central-western hills (where the practice of question-answer singing is also known as *juhārī*), just as *lok gīt* as a commercial genre continues to highlight songs from this region. The lyrics of commercial *dohorī/juhārī* songs of the central-western hills sometimes share a poetic meter with *deudā* songs, but the songs have different musical meters and melodic material, and apart from those produced in the small (but growing) indigenous-language music industries, are sung in Nepali. Thus, the music industry in Kathmandu has maintained a distinction between the commercial genres of *dohorī* and *deudā*, based on regional and linguistic differences. The sounds of the central-western hills are still promoted as ‘national,’ while musicians from other regions struggle to get their music accepted within the category of *lok gīt*.

A far-western musician’s struggle for national acceptance

Tek Raj Abasthi, currently the recordist at Kusum Digital Studios in Kailali, says he was the first person from the far west to do a music degree in Kathmandu, and one of the first far-western musicians to go to Kathmandu.¹⁰ In the early 1990s, while education above the School Leaving Certificate level (years 11 and up) was still uncommon in much of the country and even more so in the far west, he left his village to do his Intermediate in Music at Lalit Kala Campus in Kathmandu after hearing on Radio Nepal that this was the only music college in the country. While there, he was introduced to ‘national’ *lok* and *dohorī* songs and encountered the separation between these and all other forms of folk song. As a Brahmin from Baitadi district, he says that he had not been involved in *deudā* in his youth, but rather grew up on *bhajans*. But, he became increasingly interested in *deudā* and other folk songs of the far west once he realized how little they were known in the capital. He says that people looked down on people from the far west, calling them ‘*deude* people,’ and would not include songs from the region in the category of *lok gīt*. This made him angry. In his interview with me, he emphasized his belief that ‘*lok gīt*/folk song’ as a category should apply to all songs sung by ‘folks’ from all over Nepal without regional or linguistic divisions. But, when he tried the opposite tack – to perform his songs on Radio Nepal’s Phulbārī Program – he was also turned away:

I went from here to Kathmandu. Phulbārī Program was being organized. In the course of this, the person who had gone before me had gone on Phulbārī Program, and he's the first example. At that time they allowed us on, saying that our language was Doteli. After that, when songs were broadcast on Radio Nepal, the songs of those of us who had passed the voice test were played over and over and over, presented as our own folk songs. And when I went there, a person saying he would sing on Phulbārī Program, the man at Radio Nepal wouldn't let me participate. And when I asked why, he told me, 'You all are Nepali. Nepali is your language. You don't have your own language, so we put you in the category of Nepali language. Nepali language isn't used on Phulbārī Program – it's for various ethnic groups to sing in their own languages. Those whose spelling, uh, alphabets are different, those who write their language differently, they're different than Nepali, only those people get to sing,' he said. And after that, I protested, see. 'When I speak, do you understand what I'm saying? If you can understand me when I speak my own far-western language, then fine. If not, [one of us] has already recorded on Phulbārī Program. Why should I be the only one who doesn't get to sing?' Even though I said this, he was adamant about not letting me sing. 'No, your alphabet is Nepali, you don't get to sing,' he said, and I was canceled. Only after that, when Radio Nepal was divided into regional branches, after that it was separate. Before they wouldn't let us [perform], but later they gave official recognition to Doteli language. After that they let us. After they gave it to us, now, no other songs played on Radio Nepal are called *lok gīt* except for songs that are in Nepali. They might play a *deudā* song, but, who knows, they might play our old recordings, but no one's been allowed to record new [far-western] songs at Radio Nepal.

Tek Raj's story demonstrates the challenge faced by far-western Nepali musicians, who are simultaneously perceived as outsiders and insiders to the Nepali national community. With his recollections of the Radio Nepal official's reasons for barring him from Phulbārī Program, Tek Raj frames this conflict as one between literacy and orality/aurality. Their languages might be written in the same alphabet, but they sound different; the official prioritizes the written word while Tek Raj prioritizes its sound as he argues that Nepali and Doteli are mutually unintelligible when spoken. Tek Raj's account accuses the official, and the central government as a whole, of refusing to listen.

Even when Tek Raj was telling me this story in the winter of 2008, the pendulum had swung in the other direction, and the topics of social inclusion and recognition of difference among different cultural groups had already become a predominant concern in national politics. As in movements for political recognition in many places around the world, raising one's voice had become a frequent metaphor for many forms of political action. Linguistic policy had already become a major concern of the post-ceasefire government, and two years later would comprise half of the Constituent Assembly's concept paper on social and cultural solidarity (Constituent Assembly of Nepal 5–16). Yet the coda to Tek Raj's story, that the term *lok gīt* remains reserved for Nepali-language folk songs on Radio Nepal, may well remain true. Even though Radio Nepal's market shares are greatly reduced in this era of media proliferation, the state-run radio retains a great deal of symbolic significance, especially to those artists who came of age when it was the only source of musical broadcast available in Nepal.¹¹ Artists like Tek Raj, who have always felt marginalized in the popular folk music industry, still await a national-level shift that would include folk songs from different regions of Nepal as part of a 'national' genre of Nepali *lok gīt*. They equate this with the long-awaited acceptance of all social groups as equal not only under the still-to-be-amended law, but also within the nation as it is socially imagined.

***Deudā* politics**

One of the most famous *deudā* singers to have made a name for himself beyond the far west, Nanda Krishna Joshi, is also a political activist. While no one would go so far as to equate *deudā* itself with a particular brand of politics, Joshi is known for using his musical fame as

a political platform. As a member of the Nepali Congress (in 2007, NC-D) affiliated with former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, also from the far west, Joshi uses *deudā* to promote issues related to his home region.¹² In April 2007 I attended a gathering of Kathmandu Deudā Society at the National Auditorium (Rāśtriya Sabhā Griha), on the occasion of the far-western festival of Bisho Parva and the Nepali New Year 2064 V.S. At this time, the main political concern was republicanism – whether or not to retain the monarchy in the ‘New Nepal’ – and this was a decidedly republican gathering.¹³

The auditorium was decorated with nettles, a symbol of Bisho Parva; in village celebrations of this festival, people jokingly throw nettles and water at each other. This aspect of regional culture became a theme running through the five keynote speeches given by senior political leaders that day. Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist) leader Jhalanath Khanal, from eastern Nepal, suggested that the entire country learn from far-western ‘*deudā* culture’ and throw nettle-water on enemies of republican democracy (Khanal, Keynote Address). Narhari Acharya from the Nepali Congress (NC), suggested that nettle-water be thrown at his own party for obstructing republicanism for so long (Acharya, Keynote Address). Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (Nepali Congress (D)), the first far-western politician to speak, clarified that nettle-water was not meant as a punishment for enemies, but as a game between people in a joking relationship. Nanda Krishna Joshi spoke last, expressing his far-western pride by explaining his interpretation of the custom in Doteli language. The far-western politicians’ clarifications of what the nettle-water custom meant demonstrated their concern with being accurately represented. Dissatisfied with the mere acknowledgment of a local custom that left it open to resignification potentially based on misunderstanding, they wanted to make sure that everyone understood what it meant, and that it was not seen as something negative (though perhaps useful) but as an expression of intimate ties.

Joshi then used this theme of intimate ties strengthened through ritual and musical performance to join *deudā* and republican democracy:

In fact, I think that a democratic, republican Nepal is probably coming very soon. Not only that, but inclusive republican democracy exists especially in our far-western *deudā* dance. I also want to say that it exists in *deudā* songs . . . in order to establish republican democracy in this country, if [all you politicians and other chief guests, including human rights defenders and political singers] join arm in arm, moving your legs in synchronicity as in a *deudā* song, this especial act of assistance will be an act of democratic social service (N.K. Joshi, Keynote Address) (Deuba, Keynote Address).

With this, he suggested that politicians campaigning on the basis of inclusivity should participate in *deudā* as a metaphor for working together and as a gesture of willingness to accept customs different from their own as equally important in national culture. For an easterner like Jhalanath Khanal to be seen ‘playing *deudā*,’ dancing and singing in a circle with members of the Kathmandu Deudā Society would be a significant symbolic act toward the ideal practice of inclusive democracy.

In addition to being a call for cross-regional cooperation, this was also an invitation to the politicians to join the society members on the lawn for what most people were there for: to spend the rest of the afternoon and evening ‘playing *deudā*.’ Before ending the formal part of the program, Nanda Krishna Joshi sang one song in Doteli. Then, he broke into a ‘cross-over’ *deudā* song in Nepali, improvising couplets in the well-known song ‘Jhyamma Jhyamma,’ with the words *jhyamma jhyamma* serving as the *thego* or refrain at the end of each line (see Text Box 1).

With this song he posed direct political questions in a language that all the senior politicians present would understand, and a song that they would probably all recognize. The singer who recorded the latest hit version of ‘Jhyamma Jhyamma,’ Ramchandra Kafle,

Text Box 1

<i>Jhyamma jhyamma</i>	Jhyamma Jhyamma
<i>Loktantra āyo bhanchan kahā āeko cha</i>	They say democracy has arrived, but where is it?
<i>Gaūgharkā janatāle kyāko pāeko cha</i>	What have the villagers received?
<i>Hāmro pyāro sudurpascim ajhai bikat cha</i>	Our dear far west is still remote and undeveloped.
<i>Loktantrik gaṇatantra āūdai cha ki nikata</i>	Is republican democracy coming closer?
<i>Sambidhān sabhāko cunāb kaile huncha holā</i>	When will the constituent assembly elections be?
<i>Garibko jhupaḍimā ko ko pugcha holā</i>	Who will come to the huts of the poor?
<i>Khānalāi cāmal chaina nun pani chaina</i>	There is no rice to eat, and no salt either.
<i>Gaṇatantra Nepal nabhaī manko jaso bhaina</i>	If Nepal does not become republican, it won't be what we've been hoping for.

is a well-known singer who hails from the far west. His female duet partner on the album, Sindhu Malla, is from the mid-western region and has also recorded songs in various styles from *dohorī* to *ādhunīk*. On the recording of ‘Jhyamma Jhyamma,’ the lyrics are in Nepali, but pronounced in a way that references far-western dialects. For example, in the first line, what in standard Nepali would be *timile suneko kurā ho* [‘it’s what you’ve heard’] becomes *timile sunyāko kurā ho*: /e/ becomes /ja/. This is a feature that Nepalis in the central region associate with far-western speech, whether it is standard Nepali or one of the far-western dialects. In performing the Doteli song followed by ‘Jhyamma Jhyamma’ for an audience of far-western *deudā* enthusiasts and senior politicians, Joshi simultaneously affirmed a distinct far-western musical and linguistic identity, and its incorporation into a Nepali national whole. Inviting the politicians again to join him outside, he passed the microphone to the announcer, and the program moved on to its informal phase of playing *deudā*.

In the garden outside the auditorium, people formed single-sex circles with up to 50 participants and began doing the dance that provides the rhythm for *deudā* songs: left leg forward to the right, right leg backward to the right, left leg straight backward, right leg straight forward. This way the whole circle moves to the right, making the rhythm for the song with the dance. The people in the circle divide into two groups, answering each other back and forth with couplets of two 14-syllable lines. Each group has a leader who calls out the words that the group will sing next. If no one calls out any new words, both groups repeat the same phrase back and forth, and the circle continues to go around. Those not dancing and singing stood back to watch, gathered together in conversation, or went off in small groups of friends. My friend Binod Bhatta, who had invited me to the program, took me to meet Nanda Krishna Joshi, who was happy to tell me more about his views on *deudā*.

Deudā as far-western and national heritage

Speaking Nepali with me but singing in Doteli, Joshi described *deudā* as ‘the pure folk culture’ of the far west. He emphasized the connection between sound and identity, saying that *deudā* as a poetic meter and a song form expressed far-western culture. For example, he demonstrated the meter in the following Doteli line, saying, ‘This is our rhythm, our language from there.’

Tami āya amrika hai hāmra nepālamā

You came from America to our Nepal

This poetic meter is a syllabic meter with 14 syllables per line.¹⁴ In *deudā*, lines are arranged in couplets with final rhymes, though other configurations of lines are not uncommon in other genres. The meter is known by Nepali linguists and folklorists as *sawai* and is associated with ancient epics and storytelling (Nepal 101). In central Nepal it is often referred to as *batāune para*, or storytelling style, and associated with Gandharva or Gaine songs, including but not limited to epics.¹⁵ Joshi linked this meter with ancient cultures of Nepal, as he also brought up the issue of oral versus written literature that Tek Raj also noted as a prejudice held by central and eastern Nepalis against those from further west:

This is Nepal's – it should be said that *deudā* song is the old form of Nepali language. Bhanubhakta, the 'first poet' of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries ... all of the words he uses, those words originated in our area. Either in the far west or in the Karnali area of the mid west, is where this language originated. We're still singing the ancient language of Nepal. And our language, here in this Kathmandu which is called Nepal, the people in Kathmandu don't understand our language. Our *deudā* songs have various rhythms and styles – the people here don't even understand one single one of our styles. Suppose we're far away from Nepal, we're in a different country altogether – that's how we feel. But, we are Nepali, and this *deudā* song is pure Nepali language. It is a work of epic literature written in Devanagari alphabet, which no one has yet written (N.K. Joshi, Interview).

Here he emphasized the far-western roots of the Nepali language and its poetic traditions, and the lack of understanding of this shared history and its varied developments among people from outside of the far west. He wanted to emphasize that *deudā* was deep and literary, in comparison to contemporary popular commercial *dohorī* songs which, according to him, only dealt with flirtatious young love. *Dohorī* songs from the Gandaki zone and the area around the capital, he said, are

really light ... the light definition of *dohorī*, *deudā* doesn't fall within it. [*Deudā*] is really serious. It's the form of a whole literature. *Deudā* is in fact the identity of Nepal. In fact, it's the identity of Nepal's song, music, and classical music. Not only songs and music, it's a culture that gives the introduction to Nepal's old culture: *deudā* (N.K. Joshi, Interview).

Concluding his second 'formal' speech of the day, this time into my microphone, Joshi pulled me into the circle of the men's dance and began introducing me to the other *deudā* enthusiasts in song (in Doteli): 'A little sister came from America/Wearing sunglasses/She speaks our language/The boys are all after her ... As for her marriage, it hasn't happened yet/We'll have to choose a groom for her.' (N.K. Joshi, Interview) This was basically the same theme that was used to introduce me in songs at every *dohorī* event I attended. I wanted to laugh, having just listened to Nanda Krishna Joshi tell me that *deudā*, unlike *dohorī*, was more serious and avoided such 'light' subjects. But, as a resident of the far west, Joshi cannot be unaware of the 'secret *deudā*' played between young men and women, secretly, in the forest at night, which is all about youthful love (Stirr, "Exchanges of Song" 185). As a longtime singer in the Kathmandu music world, he must surely also be aware of the wide range of topics and depth of poetic and musical creativity in genres from Nepal's central and western regions. His polemical stance pitting *deudā* against *dohorī* is analogous to that of those in the *lok dohorī* world who wish it to 'develop beyond' such light subjects or 'return to the authenticity' of poetic depth in lyrics, sometimes perceived to be lost in the past. In light of his political activism and his commitment to promoting the far west, I see Nanda Krishna Joshi's rejection of 'lightness' in *deudā* as indicative of his desire for the far west and its traditions to be recognized for their uniqueness, artistic depth and historical value as part of a multicultural Nepal. In characterizing commercial *lok gīt* and *dohorī* as 'light,' and *deudā* as deep and literary, this argument tries to demonstrate how much is lost if only the central-western hill styles are accepted as national.

Conclusion

These conversations and cultural programs in 2007 and 2008 remain relevant to the ongoing debates about cultural unity and diversity in Nepal. The situation of the *deudā* industry and its relationship to the central music industry mirrors those of other regional and ethnic-language music industries: they struggle with defining their uniqueness and its value while simultaneously trying to demonstrate their importance to the Nepali nation as a whole. In doing so they raise questions about how that nation should be imagined. With a focus on regional solidarity based on a shared music culture, and on this region's importance to national identity based on shared linguistic history, debates about *deudā* attempt to broaden the scope of what musical sounds count as national. To far-western artists such as Tek Raj Abasthi and Nanda Krishna Joshi, far-western culture, *deudā*, and the Nepali nation are in fact intimately linked, yet their shared history has been forgotten in years of emphasizing central-western hill sounds as national sounds. They call for Nepalis to remember the far west's importance in national history, and to take *deudā*'s participatory dances and question-answer songs as a metaphor for inter-cultural engagement in an inclusive polity. In their view, promotion of cultural difference in the national music industries leads not to fragmentation of the nation, but to greater acknowledgment of what is shared.

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Notes

1. In books devoted to the general topic of Nepali folk music, folklorists Shobha Tiwari and Krishnaprasad Parajuli mention *deudā* as an example of a typical musical genre of the far west, and folklorist Jayaraj Pant describes it as a type of *dohorī*. Other scholars working in this area of Nepal and across the border in Kumaon, such as Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Franck Bernède, Stefan Fiol, and Andrew Alter, have been interested in the sung epics, shamanic music, and drum ensembles, and Dhruv Regmi has looked into the nineteenth-century relationship of the Nepali monarchy with Badi performing troupes from both sides of the border with India. This border is the Mahakali River, as established in 1815 when the British annexed Kumaon and Garwhal, which at that time were part of Nepal.
2. Sometimes, a hudke drum may be used to keep the beat, as in this Kumaoni recording of *dhuskā* (*deudā*) at a festival: see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXpTOZtwfLE>. Other times, the *dhol* is used. But most often in Nepal there is no drumming.
3. For gatherings in which men and women 'play *deuda*' with each other (one group of men sings back-and-forth with one group of women), there are restrictions based on avoidance rules among affines. For example, a daughter-in-law cannot play *deudā* with her older brother-in-law, because they have an avoidance relationship. She can, however, play *deudā* with her younger brother-in-law, with whom she has a joking relationship.
4. Some volumes of ethnographic work on the changes in Nepal since the end of the Panchayat era include: Gellner and Hachethu; Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton; Lecomte-Tilouine and Dolfus; Lawoti; Shneiderman and Middleton; and, most recently, ICG.
5. For a discussion of the status of the far west in relation to other areas of Nepal, see UNDP. For a report on food security status, see WFP.
6. For more on the history of the Nepali language, see M.P. Joshi; Hutt, *Nepali*.
7. For more on these epics and their related history, see Lecomte-Tilouine, *Bards and Mediums*.

8. Currently, there is a resurgence of popular interest in Khas heritage with the decision to base the new state structure on ethnic federalism, and discussions of reservations for marginalized groups, including those designated *ādivāsi janajāti*, or indigenous ethnic groups. The Chhetri Samaj and others invoke Khas heritage to argue that they are every bit as indigenous as these groups, and thus deserve similar treatment. For example, see Chhetri.
9. Folklore professor Shobha Tiwari would rather that we used the category *lok gīt* for non-commercial songs, and '*lok ādhārit gīt*' or folk-based songs for commercial songs. But the market category *lok gīt* is not going to go away any time soon, so I follow general usage in referring to commercial folk songs as *lok gīt*, with the understanding that the term also applies to non-commercial folk songs.
10. This and all other interviews were conducted in Nepali with a small amount of Doteli. All performances also took place in Nepali and Doteli. While I had help with transcription, all translations and thus any mistakes are mine alone.
11. Besides All-India Radio and other stations available on AM frequencies from beyond Nepal's borders.
12. At the time of fieldwork the Nepali Congress was split into two separate parties, the Nepali Congress (NC) run by Girija Prasad Koirala and the Nepali Congress-Democratic (NC-D) run by Sher Bahadur Deuba. The parties re-united in 2008.
13. I have written elsewhere (Stirr, "Singing Dialogic Space Into Being") about singers' fear and uncertainty about expressing republican sentiments in performance; the difference between this situation and the one described in the earlier article is that while those singers who expressed uncertainty were performing live on state-run Radio Nepal in an unprecedented multi-partisan song competition, the politicians and artists here were participating in a private event, with a clear political position, that was not being broadcast at all.
14. Nepali folk meters are consistently represented as syllabic rather than quantitative, while the Sanskrit meters used in Nepali literary poetry are discussed as quantitative. The difference between syllabic and quantitative meters is sometimes hard to determine, so this difference in categorization could be based more on a language ideology that sees anything folk as simple.
15. In *deudā*, the better part of the fourteen syllables is often filled with *thego* words or vocables (such as *jhyamma jhyamma*), such that the amount of syllables within which singers improvise lyrics varies from song to song. This contrasts with the way *thego* words and vocables are used in many other genres, as in *Tij* songs and *dohorī* songs, where they serve as extenders used to reconcile poetic and musical meters.

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