

TEARS FOR THE REVOLUTION: NEPALI MUSICAL NATIONALISM, EMOTION, AND THE MAOIST MOVEMENT

Anna Stirr

Music has played important roles in Nepal's twentieth-century nationalizing project, and in the more recent Maoist movement. In fact, the musical genres used by Nepali Maoist revolutionaries are often the very same genres employed by the state towards construction of national unity. Both draw on the resources of a national imaginary (Hamilton 1990): a sphere of contested symbols whose appropriation by various groups, for various ends, contribute to the continued construction of ideas of the nation through performance, discourse, and circulating media. Such symbols may include everything from the colors of performers' costumes and styles of dance presented, to the instruments, genres, forms, and styles used in musical composition and its rendering in performance; in performance, they both evoke prior uses and associations, and may be resignified. As ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin (1996:1) puts it, cultural forms like music, to which we may also add dance, drama, poetry, and other expressive practices, are 'stable yet constantly in flux,' and offer 'both striking metaphors and tangible data for understanding societies in moments of transition'.

In this chapter I am concerned primarily with the music of the Nepali national imaginary, and its use toward promoting emotional unity in a Maoist context in a time of great instability. Specifically, I examine an opera composed for a crucial moment in the Maoist People's War. Khusiram Pakhrin's *gītī nāṭak* or opera 'Returning from the Battlefield'¹ was commissioned especially for a significant meeting of the Maoist central committee in the village of Chunbang, Rukum on October 9th, 2005.² The performance, including audience reactions, was videotaped, edited, and made available on VCD by the party's Central Media Department. Through a close analysis of the music, I examine how this Maoist opera uses musical and poetic tropes of Nepali nationhood in an attempt to unite its audience in an affective space that is both Maoist revolutionary and a particular kind of Nepali nationalist at heart.

Setting the Scene

On a grassy field before an audience of Maoist cadres and central committee members, a motley line of actors enters, portraying weary fighters returning from the battlefield. Carrying the wounded on stretchers and in baskets on their backs, they mime their actions as a team of musicians performs a song of struggle and sacrifice:

Carrying a great dream, these marching travelers
Adorned with Prachandapath, these combatants

¹ *Yuddhamaidān bāṭa pharkindai*. Alternatively titled *Yuddhamorcā bāṭa pharkindai*, 'Returning from the battlefield'. The Nepali *gītī nāṭak* ('song drama') and the English 'opera' are used interchangeably, with the English word written in Devanagari in the captions on the VCD. The videos cited are accessible on: <http://www.vjf.cnrs.fr/himalaya/RevolutionNepal/>

² According to the banner displayed at the performance.

They are playing with the roaring of cannons and the smoke of gunpowder
They are coping with countless challenges and difficulties
They are sacrificing their lives for the liberation of the proletariat
They are writing an epochal history with blood...³

The story continues: a helicopter attacks the fighters as they tend to their wounded. After successfully repelling the attack, a dying fighter sings for his comrades and family, reminding them not to grieve too much, as it is merely his material life that he gives to the greater cause of revolution. His comrades grieve, singing about the need to ‘bind our hearts and move on’ even after losing close comrades in battle. His widow sings an inspirational charge to the fighters, reminding them that the world is looking to them, and the hopes of the poor are in their hands. The opera closes with a song of hope brimming with national sentiment: a new age is dawning in the country of Mount Everest.

The ensemble of musicians sits on a raised stage behind the actors, who perform on the ground, level with the audience, who are also seated on the ground. With madal, tabla, flute, guitar, sarangi, and harmonium accompaniment, two female and several male singers provide the main voices of the opera, singing into a microphone while the actors lip-synch. The songs blend the genres of *lok gīt* and *ādhunik gīt*, folk song and modern song, both strongly associated with dominant ideas of Nepali nationhood. Seated next to each other in the front row of the audience, Maoist chairman Prachanda and senior leader Baburam Bhattarai look on. Midway through this first song, Prachanda begins to weep, and by the fourth song, both he and Baburam Bhattarai are sobbing uncontrollably. Other central committee members also break down in tears, along with many members of the audience, but the camera returns repeatedly to Prachanda and Baburam’s displays of raw emotion, using successive footage to link their tears to those of the actors crying over the death of their comrades.

In the months preceding this meeting in Chunbang, personal and ideological differences between Party Chairman Prachanda, who favored negotiating with the monarchy, and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, who favored forming an anti-monarchy alliance with the mainstream political parties, had threatened to split the Party. At this meeting both men publicly and officially reconciled their differences. The central committee negotiated the Party’s policy, Bhattarai’s line prevailed, and the official decision was made to ally with the mainstream political parties with the goal of abolishing Nepal’s Monarchy. This alliance was ultimately successful, mobilizing street protests that caused the king to reinstate parliament in May 2006. A ceasefire between the Maoists and the Royal Army followed soon after, as did the entrance of Maoists into parliamentary politics, and the election of a Maoist-dominated Constituent Assembly that voted to abolish the Monarchy in May 2008. A Party report from 2007 states that this 2005 meeting in Chunbang, now known as the Historic Chunbang Meeting, ‘put an indelible mark in the history of the party... The meeting resolved the intra-party struggle and achieved a new unity applying the method of unity, struggle and transformation and maintaining the dialectical debate’ (CPN-Maoist 2007).

³ Translations of the song lyrics were a collaborative effort between Anne de Sales, Hikmat Khadka, and myself. As I produced the final version, I take full responsibility for any mistakes. All other translations throughout this article are mine alone.

Senior Maoist musician and current Member of Parliament Khusiram Pakhrin wrote this opera especially to be performed at this meeting. In an email responding to my question about the goal of this opera, he wrote (22 February 2010):

The Chunbang meeting took place at the height of the People's War. At that time the party had split and reunited. At that time tens of thousands of the children of Mother Nepal had given their lives for the liberation of the people: so many had just lost their husbands, so many had just lost their wives. Thousands of children had been orphaned. At such a time the event of the party splitting had seriously worried the people, the cadre, and our international supporters.

May the party never split, for if it splits it will be a terrible blow to the Nepali people and to the international proletarian class; not by splitting but only by uniting will the dreams of the martyrs and the necessities of history be fulfilled. This is what the tears of the martyr's children are saying. This is what the tears of the martyrs' parents are saying. This is what the land and the people are saying. Believing that if drama can express these poignant feelings, then they will be sure to touch the intellectual leaders deeply, I scheduled rehearsals surrounded by the roar of war, and prepared the songs and music within fifteen days.⁴

Pakhrin says that the main actors in this first performance were members of a real martyr's family: the wife, child, and brother of a man killed in the battle of Khara (p. c., 19 April 2010). As this battle was central to the disagreements that threatened to split the Party (see Cowan this volume), the choice of these actors has strong symbolic significance, calling the knowing audience's attention to the events that prompted Party disunity and the continued high human stakes of the entire struggle in its political, ideological, and military aspects. One of the artists who took part in this performance told Marie Lecomte-Tilouine that the opera expressed the battle of Khara and the story of one particular individual martyr and was therefore performed by his wife, Comrade Dipa (p. c., 7 April 2010). While Pakhrin states that the opera addresses not just one individual's martyrdom but the story of martyrs in general, this cadre's understanding of the performance as a personal story, and the choice of the artists, is one example of how such artistic narratives can be personalized in reception.

The Party's Central Media Department has since released the opera in music video form, as 'Returning from the Battlefield: The Opera Performed at the Historic Chunbang Meeting.' This video is faithful to the action of the drama, using very similar choreography, but it is shot like a short film rather than a stage performance. In several places in this commercial video, the live footage of Prachanda and Baburam in tears is interspersed with the slick music video footage, as are other live scenes from Maoist video archives. Both VCDs are available from Maoist sources and in shops in Nepal.

The fact that we find recordings of this opera not as raw footage in a party archive, but as carefully edited, produced, and circulated commodities, draws attention to how significant both the opera itself and the leaders' display of raw emotion have been to the Maoist party. I should note that while it is unusual to see politicians cry in Nepal, the context of drama, poetry, and musical performance is one in which crying in public is not considered to go against social norms. Such public displays of emotion can be considered within norms of self-possession—understood as part of a regime of emotion with social rules for what is appropriate and when (Hochschild 2002; Smith 2002a; 2002b). With the term regime of emotion, I do not

⁴ All Khusiram Pakhrin's words quoted here are my translations from the Nepali.

mean to imply a purely cynical take on the way feelings are culturally structured. Instead, I mean to call attention to these structures of feeling, their similarities and differences within different realms of the same society, and the ways in which they come to be hierarchically ranked according to the norms and values predominant within particular ideologies.

Is there a Maoist regime of emotion, and how does it relate to ideas of unity, intra-party or national? What might this opera be able to tell us about Nepali Maoists' ideas of unity and the role of music and emotion in its production? Furthermore, what can the opera tell us about the connections between Maoist artistic production and the recent nationalist history of Nepali artistic production? What makes this opera and the images of Prachanda and Baburam crying such powerful tools for the promotion of unity, and might its message extend beyond the Maoist audience? Partial answers to these questions can be found through engaging with the history of musical nationalism in Nepal, and its relationship with nation-building since the end of the Rana regime in 1951. While the relationship between music and concerns with national unity is strongly associated with the Panchayat years of one-party monarchical rule and state-run musical production, this relationship continues into the present day, shaped by greater concerns with diversity within the nation-state. Since the first People's Movement in 1990, artists across the political spectrum have expressed a continued concern with national unity, as identity politics and ideological divisions have come to characterize increasingly fragmentary ideas of what it is to be Nepali. This opera's concern with uniting the Maoist Party echoes wider concerns with affectively based national unity that run through at least the past sixty years of Nepali musical history.

Musical Nationalism and Developmentalism: *Lok Gīt* and *Ādhunik Gīt* in the Panchayat Years

Nepal's musical national imaginary owes much to two musical genres developed at state-run Radio Nepal for the specific purpose of representing the nation. As Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) notes regarding Egyptian television, Nepali radio had a pedagogical mandate from a developmentalist state, both to create citizens of a modern nation and to legitimize the state. From the early days of Radio Nepal, just after the first democratic revolution in 1950, artists, broadcasters, and cultural policymakers considered the issue of how to develop a musical style that would represent the Nepali nation. When King Mahendra took over in a 1962 coup, this orientation toward development and creating national cultural unity remained central to his one-party monarchical regime, known as the Panchayat system, which held power until Nepal's second democratic revolution, in 1990. In the 1972 National Communication Service Plan, with the motto 'Communication for Development,' Radio Nepal was charged with '[impacting] information on international and national affairs in an entertaining way' and '[impacting] knowledge on Nepalese society, culture, literature, and religion,' in order to 'bring about national unity and development through cultural exhibitions or entertainments' and 'awaken cultural consciousness among the different levels of Nepalese society' (NCSP, cited in Amatya 1983). The project of developing national musical genres focused on the idea of affectively based national unity (Greene 2000; Henderson 1996; 2002/2003; Onta 2005). Drawing on material from various styles of folk music, Western tonal harmony, and Indian classical and light classical music, Radio Nepal's artists developed the national genres of *lok gīt*, folk song, and *ādhunik gīt*, modern song. The idea of the rural village as the rustic homeland and origin of

national identity, along with tropes of nature and natural beauty, served as a unifying thread through the lyrics and music of both styles.

Ādhunik gīt was styled as the modern musical expression of Nepali national identity, with rural Nepal appearing in lyrical images of nostalgic idyll. Created before rock and pop came to dominate expressions of cosmopolitanism, it combined Western and Indian sources with Nepali musical and lyrical material in a way similar to early Indian film music and to the Bengali genre also known as *ādhunik* (Grandin 2005). Its instrumental ensemble and composition techniques are cosmopolitan, as befit its designation as ‘modern song’: guitar, mandolin, clarinet, violin, and tabla are the instruments most often included in the ensemble, and songs are based on harmonic progressions and most often through-composed, though sometimes strophic. Vocal styles draw from Indian light classical and ghazal singing styles, and complicated rhythmic cycles of seven or ten beats are not uncommon. Melodies are often rāg-based. Recordings emphasize the individual singer’s voice, putting it forward in the mix so that the lyrics and their vocal delivery are most prominent, and the instrumental setting is clearly an accompaniment. Lyrics often describe poignant images of the land, situating listeners in a distinctively Nepali landscape and linking feelings of love and nostalgia with hills, forests and rivers, serving to root cosmopolitan sounds in an ordinary rural past (Henderson 2003:21-22; Greene and Henderson 2001).

Lok gīt was envisioned as the expression of the *lok*, the folk or the popular masses:⁵ a people unified by culture at a grassroots level, a ‘nation of villages’ (Pigg 1992). *Lok gīt* focus less on overt lyrical expressions of nostalgia and more on a celebration of idealized rurality and rusticity, with lyrics, beats, and melodies based primarily in Nepal’s hill region. Radio Nepal’s folk song collectors and arrangers, the most famous of whom are Dharma Raj Thapa and Kumar Basnet, drew on the oral traditions of Nepali villages for material for the new radio folk song genre. Songs were simplified to render them suitable to represent the nation: they were translated into Nepali, and arranged in simple strophic forms, in simple 4/4 duple and 3/4 or 6/8 triple meters, known respectively as *khyālī* and *jhyāure*. The great variety of instruments found in Nepal was replaced by an ensemble of three instruments that has now come to represent an essentialized national sound: the *mādal* drum (a double-headed drum with the heads pitched a fifth apart); the *bāsurī* flute, and the small bowed *sārangī*, all instruments popular across the hill region. Other classically-associated instruments that connote prestige are also included: sitar, tabla, guitar, violin. Unlike in *ādhunik* and classical, singers use a high nasal timbre with melismatic ornamented melodies, most commonly pentatonic. Recordings highlight lyrics and vocal delivery, as in *ādhunik*, but the beat of the *mādal* has an almost equally important role—after all, most *lok gīt* stem from dance music. Lyrics focus on love with an emphasis on youthful flirtation, with reference to nature and aspects of rural hill life to provide a universalized national village setting. Though the original intent was to be musically inclusive, the song forms and styles of Nepal’s central and western hills (predominantly the Gandaki area) came to dominate the radio *lok gīt* genre, giving added credence to existing perceptions of this area as metonymically standing in for all of Nepal. The process leading to

⁵ For a discussion about the meaning of the word *lok* in relation to the English folk see Chalmers 2004; in short, the Nepali word has a wider semantic field that encompasses both the sense of ‘folk’ and ‘people’, similar to the Latin American usage of *el popular*. There is, however, another Nepali word (*janatā*) used for ‘the people’.

this region’s sonic prominence began with influential figures from this region, such as Dharma Raj Thapa, in prominent places at Radio Nepal, and continued as other prominent figures like Kumar Basnet promoted similar styles. These styles were appreciated and supported by listeners from this region, which is one of the most populous areas of Nepal. Moreover, as this region is the ancestral home of the Shah monarchy, it had been central to place-based ideas of the Himalayan polity for several centuries.⁶

Nepali “National” Genres: Aspects and Associations

Ādhunik Gīt

- Cosmopolitan, urban “modern song”
- Guitar, mandolin, clarinet, violin, harmonium and tabla
- Songs based on tonal harmonic progressions
- Rāg-based melodies
- Most often through-composed, though sometimes strophic.
- Vocal styles draw from Indian light classical and ghazal singing styles—straight tone contrasting with ornamentation
- Complicated rhythmic cycles common
- Introspective lyrics, in which the rural appears as a place of nostalgic idyll

Lok Gīt

- Songs of ‘the folk’ celebrating rurality and rusticity
- Mādal, bāsūrī, sārāngī (plus harmonium, guitar, sitar, violin, tabla)
- Based on beats, melodies, and lyrics of central-western hill region
- Major pentatonic melodies common
- Strophic
- High nasal timbre, melismatic delivery of melodies
- Simple duple and triple meters drawn from dance (jhyāure 3/4 and 6/8, khyāli 2/4 and 4/4)
- Lyrics about youthful flirtation, rural words, reference to many aspects of rural life for a universalized village setting

As Moisala (1989) notes, *lok* and *ādhunik* were seen as pan-Nepalese music, welcomed as modern by rural villagers but held in uneasy tension with varied ethnic and regional genres and their associated values, which were excluded from the nationalizing project. Currently, the ‘pan-Nepalese’ sounds of *lok* and *ādhunik* are recognized as malleable aspects of a national imaginary, representing a version, or versions, of the nation to which anyone can lay claim. Rather than being rejected after the fall of the Panchayat regime, they have instead been appropriated by various social groups to serve multiple ends. The Panchayat project’s hold was always only partial (cf. Gellner 2003; Grandin 2005a; Skinner and Holland 1996), and the nation that these songs encourage listeners to imagine is not necessarily tied to a particular version of the state.

Both the political left and right have adopted *lok* and *ādhunik gīt*. During the period 1960-1980s, the musical elements of *lok* and *ādhunik* formed the basis for oppositional *pragatīśīl gīt*, ‘progressive songs’ defined not by their musical content but rather by their leftist lyrics and

⁶ For a detailed analysis of this process, see Stirr 2009. For examples of similar situations in other places, see Yano 2002 and Dent 2009.

populist performance practices, and by the fact that they were banned from Radio Nepal and state-sponsored performance events (Grandin 1989; 1996; 2005a; 2005b; Manjul 1988). *Lok* and *ādhunik* musical elements also formed the basis for conservative *rāṣṭriya gīt*, ‘national songs,’ some of which overtly supported the monarchy and the Panchayat regime (Anderson and Mitchell 1978; Grandin 2005a). Furthermore, the contrast between *ādhunik gīt* as cosmopolitan art music for intellectual connoisseurs, and *lok gīt* as music of the rural masses, has blurred and blended since both genres were first developed at Radio Nepal. Artists in the private recording industry, active since the early 1980s, have created genres like *lok pop* (Greene 2002/2003) and even *lok ādhunik*.⁷ While their hierarchy still exists to some extent, both genres have come to connote an idea of Nepaliness that is theoretically available to all and remains strongly associated with dominant ideas of Nepali nationhood (Grandin 2005b; Stirr 2009).

This is not to say that everyone accepts all aspects of *lok* and *ādhunik gīt* as representative of their ideas of what the Nepali nation is or should be. The Madhesis of the southern plains, who have been excluded both from political representation within the state and from symbolic representation within expressive constructions of the nation, challenge the musical forms of mainstream *lok gīt*, and the primacy of the Nepali language in both political life and expressive practices, as representative of hill-region dominance. The Maoists contest the prominence of love-song lyrics in both genres, associating them with the Panchayat-era move to depoliticize the arts.⁸ The shifting realm of indexical linkages that makes up *lok* and *ādhunik gīt*’s national imaginary was questioned and challenged in various other ways even before the fall of the Panchayat regime. Yet it remains both malleable and prominent enough to carry powerful emotional and rhetorical weight when used in many different settings.

Progressive Songs, Progressive Performances: *Pragatiśīl Gīt* and Maoist Songs

As in many political movements, and with inspiration from communist movements worldwide, the political left in Nepal has a long tradition of using art, song, dance, and drama to share ideological messages. The rhetoric displayed in Maoist lyrics owes a debt to the lyrics of Panchayat-era progressive songs. Basing his analysis on the lyrics of 79 songs, Grandin summarizes the message of Panchayat-era progressive songs as calling for the brave, hardworking people of the beautiful land, Nepal, to unite and fight against exploitation, looking forward to the day of change (Grandin 1996:7). Grandin notes that these songs share a

⁷ *Lok ādhunik* has not yet been the subject of much scholarship. Exponents of the genre include many eastern-Nepali singers such as Satyakala Rai and the now-legendary Shambhu Rai (who joined the Maoist Party in the later years of the People’s War), both of whom have recorded in the mainstream *lok* and *ādhunik* genres as well. These singers often draw on eastern Nepali melodies for the *lok* aspects of their *lok ādhunik* releases. This works well musically because much of eastern Nepali folk music, unlike that of the central, western, and mid-western regions, is not pentatonic but uses a much wider range of tones, making it easier to blend with the rag-based and tonal harmony-based aspects of *ādhunik*.

⁸ My interviews with Maoist musicians during fieldwork on *lok dohori*, commercial recordings of which consist primarily of love songs, often included discussions about how *dohori* could address more than mere love, and could be useful for the people and thus more emotionally affecting. An example one man gave is a song he heard sung by his friend and a woman in a village in Lamjung, on the topic of her struggle to raise her son in the absence of her migrant laborer husband.

developmentalist perspective with other *lok gīt*, *ādhunik gīt*, and even monarchist songs, but that in progressive songs development takes place through struggle and revolution. He also discusses the position of the songs' narrators vis-à-vis their addressees: Panchayat-era progressive songs are about and for the people, but not sung from the people's perspective. Lyrics stating that 'we' must work to 'uplift the people' position artists as bourgeois intellectuals, a class apart.

Maoist song lyrics and poetry add to this progressive narrative an emphasis on sacrifice and martyrdom on the road to victory, sung from the perspective of the people themselves. This is not unique to Nepal, but forms a distinct part of the idea of a people's war as developed in Maoist thought (Mao Tse-Tung 1972; Koller 1974). However, in Nepal the narrative builds on existing Nepali themes. As Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) and de Sales (2003) discuss in detail, Nepali Maoist lyrics and poetry since the early 1990s have used the symbolism of sacrifice and self-sacrifice to inspire a commitment to overturning the old, rotten regime and creating an entirely new world. These images draw on nationalist and Hindu ideas of regenerative sacrifice, but with a new, Maoist emphasis on martyrdom (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). The idea of giving one's life for one's country is not a new theme in Nepali lyrics—perhaps the most famous use of this trope is classic *adhunik* singer Gopal Yonjan's Panchayat-era hit 'If the Nation Asks for Blood,' a *raṣṭriya gīt* with the famous refrain, 'If the nation asks for blood, offer me up as a sacrifice. My mother will not cry, she the daughter of a Nepali mother.'⁹ Yonjan's song links martyr's blood with mother's milk,¹⁰ both as substances with the power to nourish and regenerate. Lecomte-Tilouine (2006:53) argues that within the Maoist People's War, martyrdom as regenerative sacrifice reached cult status, eclipsing older models of brave (*vir*) military heroism with the revolutionary and apocalyptic figure of the martyr, *śahid*. The Maoist army grows from the martyrs' blood spilled on the earth of the motherland. The martyrs sacrifice only their material forms, their spirits live on as their martyrdom inspires more and more comrades to join the revolution. The enemy has no chance at martyrdom; martyrs are only those who die for the revolutionary cause. Expressions of strong emotion play a central role in these lyrics and poetry, connecting comrades with each other by acknowledging shared experience and witnessing grief, and with the world they inhabit through personification and ascription of emotions to mountains, rivers, and the earth itself. As Mottin (2010:68) notes, the role of emotion in Maoist poetry, music, and dramatic performance goes beyond political propaganda; Maoist expressive practices also have cathartic effects for those combatants who have experienced the traumas of war, and thus constitute a form of 'witness art.'

While a focus on the lyrics has much to tell us, we gain additional perspective with attention to the music's role in shaping a Maoist social world. Fujikura (2003) makes it clear that existing musical settings were acceptable to the Maoists, as he describes how they used familiar nationalist songs taught in schools and set them to new, Maoist lyrics. Eck (2010) notes how such revised yet familiar songs played a significant role in recruitment to the movement. Earlier Maoist videos depict cultural performances of folk songs with Maoist lyrics; for

⁹ 'Deshle ragat māge / Malāi bali chaḍau / Rundinan merī āma / U Nepalikī chhorī.'

¹⁰ The Nepali word used in the song to denote both blood and mother's milk is *stan*, which normally connotes mother's milk but could be translated more ambiguously as 'life-liquid.'

example, the section on setting up people's governments in the villages of far western Nepal in 'Eight Glorious Years of the Maoist People's War' (2004) shows people performing the far-western rural genres of *huḍke* and *deuḍa* song and dance, singing about Prachanda and the army's fight for liberation.¹¹ The footage of these genres, which exist on the margins of the national commercial music industry, if included at all, shows that attention to local expressive idioms, beyond the widely recognized national genres of *lok* and *ādhunik*, was also an important part of spreading the Maoist message. Yet *lok* and *ādhunik*, along with the related, more recently developed genre of *lok pop*, remain the primary genres of much of the Maoist party's musical production.¹² In 'Returning from the Battlefield,' Khusiram Pakhrin uses *lok* and *ādhunik* genres in various combinations that are significant in relation to the lyrics, the story of the opera, and the context of its first performance at the Chunbang meeting.

'Returning From The Battlefield'

Khusiram Pakhrin exemplifies what Mottin calls Maoist performers' multifaceted roles as 'simultaneously artists, intellectuals, organizers, activists, guerrillas, leaders and visionaries' (Mottin 2010:67). He has been a composer of progressive and revolutionary songs since the late 1970s. Currently a Maoist representative in Nepal's Constituent Assembly, he has worked with five Communist cultural groups since 1979, leading up to his vice-chairmanship of the Maoist cultural wing, All Nepal People's Cultural Federation. The fact that he is member of Party administrative bodies and that his son died in the People's War rounds out his revolutionary credentials.¹³ Pakhrin and other artists, by virtue of being artists, are uniquely positioned between leaders and the grassroots of the party, as they interact with both levels on a regular basis. Their compositions and performances have a tradition of critique, often addressing the leadership from a grassroots perspective, a role they are expected to perform within the party (Mottin 2010:66). As we shall see, this is part of the narrative of 'Returning from the Battlefield.' Since I am interested in the events of the Chunbang meeting, I concentrate my analysis on the live recording of the stage drama. I refer also to the studio recording when I find significant musical differences or other aspects that influence my interpretation.

¹¹ <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=17063726976666142&sourceid=docidfeed&hl=en#docid=-106777649090059134>. Accessed 15/03/2010. These videos are available in shorter segments at www.cpnm.org, one of which, entitled 'Formation of People's Governments in the Villages,' contains these musical clips. [This website no longer exists. Do you know where everything has gone? I think they took it down due to the annoyance of constantly having to maintain it against sophisticated denial of service attacks...](#)

¹² I am not including the wide range of music by Maoist sympathizers. The topic of how Maoist ideology and artistic production has influenced non-Maoist Nepali expressive practices is fascinating, but beyond the scope of this article.

¹³ 'CA Member Khusiram Pakhrin is a popular name in the world of progressive music. Associated with politics since 1979, Pakhrin had begun his cultural journey through Himali Youth Club. Thereafter he worked with Chitwan Sanskritik Pariwar (Chitwan Cultural Family), Abhiyan Pariwar (Campaign Family), and Sangrami and Samna Pariwar. He then became the vice-chair of All Nepal People's Cultural Federation. He also became a district committee member in 1993 and a regional bureau member in 1998. Fifty-six-year-old Pakhrin has written about 500 lyrics. He lost one of his sons to the People's War.' (Nepal Election Portal <http://result.nepalelectionportal.org/candidate.php?CID=48&CAType=PR>)

Song 1: Carrying a Great Dream

The song that begins the opera is sung in unison to a slow, somewhat martial 4/4 *khyālī* beat on the madal and tabla. Rhythm guitar fills it out with chords, the harmonium doubles the vocals, and the guitar and flute take four-bar melodic solos in the interludes between verses. The song is a blend of *lok* and *ādhunik* elements. The song's major pentatonic melody is a defining characteristic of the dominant central-western Nepali *lok gīt* style, and *khyālī* is one of the two most popular *lok gīt* beats (Shah 2007). Yet the lengthy verse structure and straight-tone, mid-range, non-nasal and non-melismatic vocal delivery are characteristic of *ādhunik gīt*, and its prominence marks this song as more *ādhunik* than *lok*. In general, this stylistic combination of the two genres' key features, which we might call *lok ādhunik*, continues through the entire opera. In light of *ādhunik gīt*'s association with prestigious, urban cosmopolitan musicianship and *lok gīt*'s association with rural-based national identity, this *lok ādhunik* style blends the two musical genres that, grossly generalized, represent intellectual and proletarian aspects of the nation.

The unison performance draws attention to the musicians and singers' position as part of the group performing the opera, and the actors in front of them, some of them lip-synching or singing along as they act out the aftermath of a battle, tending to the wounded, grieving over the dead, add to the idea that this group is singing about themselves. They themselves are the 'red people,' who march with the great dream upon their backs, 'facing great challenges,' and their artistic work is part of the greater People's War. It ties them to the leaders who sit in the audience and to all of the people on whose behalf they fight. As in political songs the world over, including many Nepali *pragatiśīl gīt* and *rāṣṭrīya gīt*, unison singing is iconic of solidarity and unity of purpose.

Song 2: The Martyr's Message

From the unison expression of a common goal, the opera moves to sentiments expressed and explored by individual singers, each representing a particular subject position or stock character in the Maoist narrative: the martyr, the comrade, the people. The first to sing is the wounded and dying fighter, soon to be a martyr. Held by his comrades on a stretcher after they have repulsed the helicopter attack, he begins:

I am falling, comrade, sacrificing this physical life to the revolution
I am going, leaving my friends forever
I fell as I fought, please take this news to my home
Please tell my parents not to weep too much with worry for their fallen son.

This first verse recalls a trope common to many Nepali songs, that of the dying fighter sending a message to his friends and family. The most famous, recent example of this trope is the song known in its various versions as 'He Barai' ('Hey Friend'), 'Lahure' ('Gurkha soldier/Migrant'), or 'Āmāle Sodhlin' ('Mother May Ask').¹⁴ A *lok gīt*, it is one of the best known songs in the style of Gandharva or Gaine occupational-caste musicians, the traditional traveling bards of Nepal known for their narrative ballads and their instrument, the sarangi. In 'He Barai', the dying

¹⁴ See Weisethaunet 1997 for a detailed analysis of this song.

soldier asks the listener to convey different messages to different relatives, with the apparent purpose of breaking the news in a way appropriate to their relationship, and in a way that will allow them to carry on without him.

Similarly, the dying fighter's song in 'Returning from the Battlefield' conveys messages on several levels. As in 'He Barai' and other Gandharva ballads, the sarangi features prominently in this song. In Nepal and throughout the northern subcontinent, the sarangi is known as a particularly emotional instrument, capable of expressing sadness beyond words (Qureshi 1997; Weisethaunet 1997). The Nepali sarangi has a particular place in the national imaginary as the sound of a particularly type of sorrow and poignancy, the *dukha* of the rural poor. The sarangi solo in traditional style that opens this song thus locates the song and its messages within a tradition of expressing multivalent sadness in a particularly Nepali emotional landscape. It is a *lok gīt* in a pentatonic western Nepali melody and 6/8 *jhyāure tāl*, the rhythmic pattern most closely associated with rural Nepal and *lok gīt*'s rural-based depictions of national identity (Henderson 2002/2003; Stirr 2009). It also uses the poetic meter called *jhyāure*, which carries the same associations (cf. Devkota 1938). But as in the first song, the long verse structure and vocal delivery add a significant element of *ādhunik* style, again juxtaposing sonic signifiers of the proletariat and the intellectual classes.

The first message in the lyrics above follows a particular Maoist emotional logic, suggesting a structure of feeling (Williams 1977) particular to a Maoist regime of emotion, as Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) and de Sales (2003) have both discussed in their analyses of Maoist song lyrics and poetry. The fighter is a martyr, sacrificing only his or her material life to the glorious cause of the revolution. The parting from friends and family at death causes grief in both the soldier who dies and those they leave behind, but within the Maoist regime of emotion, this grief should not be all-encompassing. The dying fighter thus tells his comrades to carry on, alluding to themes of harnessing emotions for revolutionary purposes that will be elaborated further in the next song, sung by the grieving comrade.

In the second verse of this song, though, the lyrics become critical:

When aspirations and ambitions are not fulfilled
Some proletarians break norms and values
They are trying to destroy the people and the revolution,
Those who consider our blood to be a drop of water.

In the context of the Chunbang meeting, it is possible to hear this as a criticism of the leaders whose personal differences, ideological opinions, and (it is rumored) conflicting ambitions had threatened to split the Party. While this may seem quite forward, in fact the Maoist Party encourages such criticism. This opera was by no means the only piece of artistic work that addressed the crisis in the Party at this time (Mottin 2010: 66). Within the Maoist rhetoric of struggle and sacrifice for the revolution, there is perhaps no more powerful position from which to speak than that of the martyr. The music and the first verse have constructed the emotional setting from which the martyr speaks, and within which listeners can interpret his words, thus giving them great rhetorical power. The sarangi sounds the sorrow of this particular death, but also the plight of all the poor; the *lok ādhunik* musical setting, here leaning more toward *lok gīt*, situates the martyr as an everyman whose sacrifice is significant to proletarians and intellectuals, fighters and ideologues, the rural and the urban poor, and, through *ādhunik*'s association with urban cosmopolitanism, to revolutionaries everywhere.

Song 3: The Comrade's Reflection on Death

If the martyr's *lok ādhunik* song links personal sacrifice to the entirety of the revolution, the grieving comrade's song deals with the conflicting emotions of those left behind to continue the fight. This song, with introspective lyrics integrated into related, through-composed musical settings, is a characteristic example of *ādhunik gīt* and this genre's focus on inner mental and emotional states. It is through-composed, with three separate sections (ABC form). A listener trained in Hindustani classical music might hear it as based on Rāg Khamāj: it has a flat seventh scale degree (ni komal), and it is pentatonic in ascent, and uses all tones of the scale in descent, all aspects of this rāg. But it does not use Rāg Khamāj *pakad*, the patterns of notes that characterize a particular rāg. Furthermore, it is structured using harmonic chord progressions, and the flat seventh is occasionally raised to make a major V chord in what could be heard as a G major tonality with mixolydian modal aspects. This mixture of rāg and tonal harmony is a common feature of Nepali and Bengali *ādhunik gīt*, referencing a linked heritage that can be traced through the early Darjeeling-born Nepali-language singers and composers like Gopal Yonjan, Ambar Gurung, and Aruna Lama, to other subcontinental engagements with mixing nationalist and colonial classicisms to form new, modern styles of art song, from early, light-classical-based Bollywood film music, to Rabindranath Tagore's Rabindra Sangeet.

Section A opens slowly, with a flute solo over a slow 6/8 beat: a slow *jhyāure tāl*, in an *ādhunik* context. In the live version, a small, high-scale flute gives the performance more of a *lok gīt* flavor. In the studio version, a large, low-scale flute plays a classical-style *alāp*, emphasizing a learned *ādhunik* style. The harmonium doubles the singer's voice as he sings:

When brave fighters fell today, the sun hid, the mountains bowed
The hills wept, the sky cried, the earth trembled
The dam of patience burst open
Eyes kept flooding.

These lyrics exemplify a trope of Maoist poetry in which the entire landscape participates in the joy of victory and the sorrow of defeat (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006:66), and also a broader trope of Nepali nationalist poetry and lyrics that identifies the people with the landscape (Henderson 2002-03). Here the landscape is both universal—the sun, the sky, the earth—and congruent with nationalist images of Nepal that emphasize mountains and hills. The landscape is also part of embodied affect, where patience is a dam on a river of tears that flows continuously from undifferentiated eyes when the dam bursts.

The B section suggests musically as well as lyrically what is to be done with these overflowing emotions. The 6/8 beat quickens to a moderate tempo, closer to the quicker tempo of *jhyāure tal*. While the A section implies Rag Khamaj, the B section is more like G major, with no lowered seventh and plenty of major V chords. It is quite possible that this tonality is supposed to signify a lighter mood, if not the Western association of major tonality with happiness or the ancient Indian association of Rag Bilawal (7 natural notes) with *vir rasa*, or the emotions of bravery and heroism. The lyrics support this interpretation: 'They keep fighting, turning tears into fury and happiness into power.' Lecomte-Tilouine (2006:57) discusses the prominence in Maoist poetry of a narrative in which all emotions transform into fury and a desire for revenge that fuels the revolution. She also suggests, as does Maoist writer Pokharel (2007), that grief and sadness at a comrade's passing, when understood in the context of martyrdom, are presented as inspiring others to fight not solely for revenge but also for justice and the revolution's final aim: a better world for all.

The C section combines the faster beat of the B section with the Rag Khamaj-like melodic figures of the A section, perhaps acknowledging a mix of emotions with this musical blend. The song's repeated final words, 'With happiness comes sorrow; with life comes death. We must bind up our hearts and move on again,' are less of a victorious emotional narrative than a recognition of the multiple, often conflicting emotions combatants experience. While they can bind up broken hearts and move on, the fact remains that hearts are broken.

Song 4: 'Message from the Martyr's Family'

Yet there is consolation for the broken-hearted soldiers, from one who appears to be stronger than they. On the live and recorded versions, the staging of the next scene is the same: a line of soldiers marches up to a young woman working in the fields, a baby on her back. She could be the widow of their fallen comrade; she is a widow of a fallen comrade, the only woman to sing a song of her own in this opera, and the embodiment of the people, all those for whom the People's War is being fought. If the previous song was an *ādhunik gīt* with few *lok gīt* attributes, this one is a *lok gīt* with few *ādhunik* attributes. The only things *ādhunik* about it are the lengthy verse structure, and the fact that it does not fit into a specific *lok gīt* subgenre. The female singers who perform it, both in the live version and the studio version, use a *lok gīt* vocal style in its characteristic high nasal timbre. Their delivery is highly ornamented, using melismas and ornamental vibrato on long tones in a style known as *svār ghumāune* or turning the voice around, quite unlike the straight tone that is valued in *ādhunik* and classical vocal performance as a contrast to specifically placed ornaments. Their particular style of *svār ghumāune*, along with the major pentatonic melody, is associated with the central-western Nepali *lok gīt* style. The beat this time is 4/4 *khyālī*, and the *mādal* and *tabla* use common dance figures with the rhythmic patterns 'dhin, kha ti na ka dhi na' and 'dhin na ka ti na ka tang'¹⁵ played prominently at a moderately fast tempo, giving more of a dance-related *lok gīt* feel than the slow renditions of the same rhythms used in the first song, also in *khyālī*. Unlike the other songs, the lyrics of this one do not include words that most Nepali speakers would classify as literary, or outside of a normal linguistic register for *lok gīt* lyrics. But neither do they celebrate rural or regional speech, as some *lok gīt* do.

While at first we might think it is the soldiers who have come to comfort the grieving widow, in fact it is the widow who comforts the grieving soldiers and reminds them of their greater goal. Her repeated refrain advises them:

You must fight and win this last battle
Broken shoulders, wailing hearts
Are waiting for a new day to dawn

In subsequent repetitions, the middle line is replaced by 'aching hands, dry lips;' 'empty laps,

¹⁵ The words used for these rhythmic patterns are known as *bols*, versions of which are used throughout South Asia to represent the sounds produced by different combinations of strokes on percussion instruments. There is no standardized set of *madal bols*; rather, they differ slightly from region to region. The *bols* I use here are those of my *madal* teacher Kharka Budha Magar, from Salyan, who teaches at the National Cultural Corporation (Sanskritik Sansthan, best known as the Rastriya Nachghar). Subi Shah's 2007 book *Madal* offers a slightly different set of *bols* to describe the same sounds, based on his own experience growing up and learning to play *madal* and dance in Dhading district.

orphaned children;' and 'fallen-in roofs, unlit hearths.' All of the bodily, familial, and material signs of *dukha*, of the disorder brought by years of oppression and by the sacrifices of the People's War, are waiting for a new day to dawn. The verses make it clear that it is up to the soldiers to bring about this new dawning for those who, like this widowed mother, have placed their hopes and dreams in their hands. In the first verse, the suffering people of the world look to the soldiers for liberation.

The world today says they look to you
They say they learn from you the art of fighting
All know this in their hearts:
The suffering people of the world have their hopes in you

In the second, the soldiers and the people are shown to be emotionally one, with the shared goal of a united peoples' victory:

When you break, hearts shatter with you
When they hear 'We are united', hearts blossom
They wish to see, united,
The flag of victory raised even higher.

The third verse reminds listeners that the army comes from the people, that the martyr's sacrifice belongs also to those who gave birth to him and raised him. That it is a sacrifice born of love, that the people in their unshakable confidence and growing unity continue to make.

The people are giving the children from their laps
When you fall, they remember you proudly
At all times, they are becoming united
One after the other, their line becomes longer

It is significant that a woman sings this most *lok* of songs, and that, in the lyrics she sings, she comes to represent all 'suffering people of the world' for whom the People's War is being fought. It is also significant that she is a mother. *Lok gīt* is a genre to which the marginal is central. Part of this has to do with a culturally intimate view of love and sexuality that associates rural women from marginalized groups—Dalits and indigenous nationalities, as well as those who are marginalized purely by being rural—with taking active roles in flirtatious, erotic sung exchanges with men that characterize a popular *lok gīt* subgenre known as *dohorī* (Stirr 2009). Though this goes against the culturally dominant view of women as uninterested in love, or passive objects of male pursuit, it is also not-so-secretly valued and celebrated even among the dominant castes and classes, hence my use of Herzfeld's (2005) concept of cultural intimacy: that which unites a culture in outward embarrassment but inward pleasure. Apart from love and flirtation, *lok gīt*'s celebration of rurality and rusticity, sometimes against developmentalist norms focusing on progress or *bikās*, is also a culturally intimate aspect of the genre's wide appeal and utility for nationalist unification from Panchayat times onwards. While Maoists strongly object to themes of romantic love or sexual innuendo, *lok gīt*'s polysemic valuation of marginality associated with the rural, the indigenous, the lower caste, and the female, is particularly relevant to their identification with the oppressed. Thus the love one expects to hear in a *lok gīt* here becomes a mother's love, easily abstractable to the idea of the nation as mother: Mother Nepal, as mentioned in the first song of the opera. She is personified in all the aspects of the natural world that share in human grief in the third song. Fighters are the children of Mother Nepal, and she continues to offer them up in a particularly Maoist-nationalist sense of social reproduction, to become martyrs for the liberation of all her present and future children. The sacrifice is here shown to be based on love and kinship

extended to all those who suffer. Within this context of unity based on a kinship that encompasses a primordial connection to the nation's natural landscape, and the actors being a real martyr's family, perhaps it is no surprise that this is the song in which Baburam Bhattarai, Prachanda, Prachanda's wife Sita, and several other Maoist leaders lose emotional control to the greatest extent. I will return to this point below.

Song 5: 'Commitment to Build a New Nepal'

In the refrain of this song, the connection between kinship broadly defined, the natural landscape, and social reproduction through martyrdom is further emphasized as a new era emerges from the 'soil soaked with the blood of the brave fighters.' The singers commit themselves to achieving this through an emotional and ideological vow:

We cannot tread on our pride
We will never let our blood-red flag hang low
We will always safeguard our great ideology
We will fulfill the dreams of the brave.

Like the first song, this one is again *lok ādhunik*, using the same ensemble of flute, guitar, madal, tabla, and harmonium but without the sarangi's *dukha*-laden cry. A song of triumph (indeed, the studio version is punctuated by triumphant fanfares of synthesized brass), it relies on a *khyālī* beat markedly faster than that of the previous song, using the same dance figures, played prominently on the mādāl and tabla. Men and women sing in unison. The live version ends with the actors and dancers marching around in a circle in the performance space, repeating the line 'in the country of Mt. Everest', where the proletarian utopia will shine like a beacon for the rest of the world as if from the top of the highest mountain, act as the world's proletarian base, shine with the beauty of nature and resound with sweet music.

Regarding the idea of commitment, composer Pakhrin explains:

The exploited laboring classes of the world have their own views and thought. Likewise, capitalist classes also have their own views and thought. Commitment means commitment to unity built on following the views and thought of one's own class. If you go outside of this thought and unity in the name of freedom, you become a dissenter. In the end, dissent comes to serve the capitalist class. In saying this we are not against freedom. We need freedom with commitment (p.c. 22 February 2010).

The idea of artistic performance itself as commitment is a recurring theme among Nepali Maoist artists. As Mottin (2010: 57, 67) notes, artists often refer to their performances as 'our commitment'. This idea that performance enacts commitment is a powerful one that recalls theories of performativity that focus on performance's role in constructing social reality. While many scholars have focused on the instability of performed iterations as holding the key to changing social norms (Butler 1990; 1993), others have noted that such performed iterations construct social identities in and through training subjects to inhabit social norms (Mahmood 2005: 23). The Maoist idea of performance as commitment contains an awareness of both perspectives on performativity: it both works toward social change, and establishes the new norms that will govern the changed world.

For Pakhrin, a Maoist artistic work like this opera, its performance, and its reproduction and circulation in VCD form, are part of the 'continuous struggle' necessary to establish 'culture that is on the side of the people' by changing the societal base in order to change the cultural superstructure (p.c. 22 February 2010). In Maoist thought, such continuous struggle

takes place between socioeconomic classes, within one socioeconomic class, and also within the individual (Koller 1974). It is an ongoing process of negotiation that creates and reaffirms class-based ‘views and thought,’ and also emotion. The idea of continuous struggle is perhaps the key to understanding and defining a Maoist regime of emotion in the Nepali context—a set of norms that subjects sincerely wishing to be good Maoists undertake to train themselves to inhabit, in order to live what they believe is an ethical and moral life. This is recognized as struggle for good reason: it is a difficult process, imagined in Maoist thought in terms of an all-encompassing form of violence that purifies the self and society (Lecomte-Tilouine 2010b:68). Pakhrin situates its difficulties in individuals’ grappling with existing cultural forms: ‘because culture, as human emotion and meaning (*bhav*) and as custom, is deeply rooted in the heart of society, the societal base cannot be fully changed quickly. For this a long period of continuous struggle is required’ (p.c. 22 February 2010). Performance as commitment is an act of taking part in this continuous struggle, of dealing with contradictory emotions—especially those regarding death and loss in war—and coming, through repeated iterations of these acts, to understand them in Maoist revolutionary terms.

Melodrama, Multivocality, Longing, and Aspiration

If we concentrate on the first and the last songs of the opera, we might understand its narrative as univocal, all disparate perspectives pointing the way toward one true version of universal salvation in the Maoist utopia—a commitment to the great dream. This is a narrative that exists in much Maoist cultural media, and could be seen as a regime of emotion in which all of the conflicting emotions such as those that the grieving comrade expresses must be harnessed in service of the revolution, fear turned to rage, tears turned to joy. We could hear the combination of *lok* and *ādhunik* sounds into a more blended, *lok ādhunik* genre, as a glorious unification of everything they each represent. And thus we could imagine Prachanda and Baburam crying with recognition at the error of their ways, in causing strife within the party that detracted from the ultimate goal. Or, more cynically, we could imagine their tears as a staged and strategic enactment of remorse elicited by feeling rules (Hochschild 1983) that demanded a public, emotional spectacle to mark the true reunification of the party. Though the narrative of subsuming all other emotions under the glory of revolutionary zeal is both common and compelling within the world of Nepali Maoist artistic expression, the actual emotional situation is slightly more complicated. Other regimes of emotion and value compete with the Maoist one, within the minds of both Maoists and non-Maoists who wish to understand some of the Maoist perspective (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009c:83). Following scholarship on melodrama, I argue that it may be precisely the tension between possible interpretations that elicits tears in the opera’s audience, and makes the image of the leaders’ tears so important as to warrant re-mediation in the later music video as part of this opera’s visual text.

Writing about tears and melodrama in American film, Lutz notes that viewers’ emotional responses are often related to characters’ dilemmas regarding idealized social roles. Many find it moving when a character fulfills an ideal role despite great adversity or temptations to the contrary. In this opera, the character who fulfills the ideal role is the martyred soldier—it is he who can speak from a place of unquestioned authority, having given his life for the revolution. His imminent death makes him noble and right, and he calls on his audience to remain united for the sake of the revolution. The widow, representing the people, also nobly fulfills an ideal

role in her strength and commitment to the revolution in the face of her husband's death. The realism of having a real martyr's widow play this part only serves to highlight the nobility of this role. Yet the soldiers remain dazed and wracked by emotional turmoil, crying throughout the opera's three central songs. Composer Pakhrin knew the feelings that fighters dealt with in the face of loss, having lost his own son in the war. In his own words:

What is the pain of fighting a war? When it is time to fight, you fight; when it is time to die, you die, but when it is time to return from the battlefield you must go carrying the mortally wounded, some on stretchers, some on the shoulders of others, some must be guided and led, through jungles, up and down hills, across rivers, through the bombs and gunfire of the enemy, surmounting countless obstacles, treating the wounded all the while. So many die during treatment, and in a state of near death, in the final hour of their lives, they continue to tell their friends not to give up, as the final victory will belong to justice. Saying, 'Tell my mother and father at home not to weep too much,' these combatants demonstrate admirable courage and patience. Whatever troubles befall their ideology and faith, with steadfast greatness they continue to win victories over death. What it is like to return from leaving your friends at [their funeral pyres on] the riverbank, and what a revolutionary's patience should be like at that time—these were the feelings that this drama was meant to convey (p.c.22 February 2010).

Here Pakhrin both acknowledges the pain and conflicting emotions combatants experience, and glorifies those who overcome that pain and thus embody the revolutionary ideal. Lutz argues that 'tears at melodrama are overdetermined by pressures to strive to fulfill and at the same time reject the dominant...roles of the time' (Lutz 2002:186). Williams similarly argues that in viewing melodrama we identify with 'all the conflicting points of view represented,' finding ourselves 'within-against' the social mores of the represented world (Williams 1998). These arguments offer a way of understanding part of this opera's melodramatic power to move Maoist leaders—and indeed perhaps all of the Maoist audience members—to tears, as they recognize tensions between the social roles and emotional responses expected of them, and all the conflicting emotions brought by the events of war and intra-party personal and ideological struggle. All the more so when they have just been through a similar set of pressures in the reality leading up to the Chunbang meeting.

This position also presents an argument for understanding this opera in more multivocal terms. While the emotional tensions of the three middle songs resolve in the final song with confidence that a utopia will be formed, the decisions made at the 2005 Chunbang meeting demonstrate how visions of what that utopia might be like change along with Party strategy and tactics. While the idea of continuous struggle focuses on coming to terms with contradictions in order to act towards a common goal, the fact that the definition of that goal is also malleable opens this opera to more potential interpretations. Such interpretations may center more on an affectively-based nationalism commonly understood (at least since Panchayat days) as transcendent of political parties' ideologies, and strongly linked to the poetic metaphors and musical tropes used to express utopian yearnings and narratives of loss and desire, whether nostalgic, revolutionary, or both at once, from the Panchayat era to the Maoist era. But while the Panchayat-era ideal held national sentiment apart from party politics, its place in today's national imaginary instead makes it available to multiple political projects, with potentially overlapping regimes of emotion that draw on nationalist structures of feeling.

I have emphasized the mixture of *lok* and *ādhunik* musical styles in this Maoist opera, suggesting that it can be heard as a way of unifying multiple perspectives and associated social

roles from the *ādhunik gīt* intellectual to the *lok gīt* proletariat, crude as these categories may be. Both *lok gīt* and *ādhunik gīt*, alone and together, and especially when juxtaposed as in this opera, can be heard in terms of symbolic movements between tradition and modernity, country and city, valued ways of life that have now disappeared and hopes for the coming of better times for all. In short, these musical genres fit into the broad category of genres celebrating aspects of marginality that ethnomusicologists Fox and Yano refer to as ‘global country.’ ‘Country’ in the sense used here ‘invokes complex and contradictory linkages between racial identity, working-class experience, emotionality, and always tenuous and disputed claims to primordial indigeneity in a rural, ancestral homeland and in a richly imagined history of conflict and dispossession’ (Fox and Yano Forthcoming). Their emphasis on the twin poles of loss of valued aspects of traditional social relations, and desire for the ever-distant promise of the full benefits of modernity, suggests that the nexus of longing and aspiration characterizing ‘country’ as a field of cultural production is more than just an aesthetic—it is a critical position expressed in music.

Both *ādhunik* and *lok gīt*, though *lok gīt* especially, can be heard in terms of ‘country’s’ critique of the modern condition (Dent 2003; 2009). *Ādhunik gīt*’s nostalgia and *lok gīt*’s celebration posit the rural as the heart of the nation, within which bonds of kinship, ethnicity, and place persist as the sun hides, the hills weep, the sky cries, as a fighter who watched his friend fall speculates, in classic *ādhunik gīt* fashion, about the meaning of it all, and the wife of a fallen comrade merges with Mother Nepal and the idealized Nepali people, the imagined familial community of a nation in whose name the People’s War is being fought. Underlying *rāga*-style melodies and tonal harmonies is the rural *jhyāure* beat, as an *ādhunik* voice sings a martyr’s last thoughts in the *jhyāure* meter. In using these dominant, national genres charged with the symbolism of the national imaginary, laden with developmentalist narratives of cosmopolitanism in tension with nostalgia for a rural purity, this opera appeals not only to those well-acquainted with the Maoist regime of harnessing emotions in service of the revolution, but also to those who recognize similar narratives of conflicting emotional and moral choices in their own experiences of a changing Nepal. Furthermore, the music can call to mind parallel and contradictory narratives of national belonging, nostalgia and hope, adding to the ways in which, ‘through multiplying thought and experience, we come to be multiply moved to tears’ (Neu 2000:40).

Such multiplicities serve multiple versions of unity, marking the Maoists as part of the nation, and perhaps making it possible for non-Maoists to more readily identify with the party’s versions of national progress. The 2005 Chunbang meeting at which this opera was first performed was a first step toward bringing the Maoists into the mainstream. Today, the very issues of intra-party divisions that came up at that meeting are once again the subject of public debate. If, as Dent (2009) suggests in the case of Brazil’s economic modernization, ‘change has been too radical and come too fast’—for both non-Maoists hesitant to welcome the former armed rebels into democratic governance, and for Maoists hesitant to give up armed revolution—the resonance of national sentiment in Maoist music’s combination of *lok* and *ādhunik gīt* may serve to unite both sides in a shared sense of place and belonging. The indexical meanings of *lok* and *ādhunik* sounds slide into overlapping configurations, offering a tenuous common ground.

Yet this common ground holds only as long as all parties accept the overlapping versions of the nation these sounds index. As Nepal’s mainstream politics now grapple with issues of

ethnic and regional inclusivity, the nationalist emotional resonance of *lok* and *ādhunik* may diminish as groups from outside the dominant hill region struggle for inclusion not only in the process of restructuring the state, but also in the symbolic practices of representing the nation. As Maoist music becomes more and more a part of Nepal's musical mainstream, it will be interesting to see how the relationships between choices of musical genre and political message relate to changing conceptions of state and nation under new political realities.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thank you to Anne de Sales for inviting me to work on this material, and for her significant work on transcribing and translating the lyrics. Hikmat Khadka also contributed significantly to transcribing and translating the songs, and Ram Kumar Singh's musical ear was invaluable in helping me with finalizing transcriptions and musical analysis. I am grateful to Khusiram Pakhrin for engaging so thoughtfully with my emailed questions, and for taking the time to meet with me in Kathmandu. Research and writing were supported by a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ethnomusicology at Oxford University.