From Pungyen to Palyul: Recentering Identities Through Alliance and Music in Trans-Himalayan Nepal

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FROM PUNGYEN TO PALYUL: RECENTERING IDENTITIES THROUGH ALLIANCE AND MUSIC IN TRANS-HIMALAYAN NEPAL

by

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B.A., Naropa University, 2013

A thesis submitted to the

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“From Pungyen to Palyul: Recentering Identities through Alliance and Music in Trans-Himalayan Nepal”

Thesis directed by Professor Brenda M. Romero

Abstract

In the remote Himalayan valley of Nubri, in Nepal’s Gorkha district, ethnic Tibetans have developed a rich body of song tied to the region’s landscape and sacred sites. This area is undergoing rapid demographic change as youth migrate to Kathmandu seeking education, disrupting the process of transmission of the local song repertory. Simultaneously, Nubri youth who find themselves growing up in Kathmandu are encountering new repertoires: those of modern transglobal pop music; Nepali pop and folk music; musics of their fellow *adibasi janajati*, or “indigenous nationalities” (Nepalese citizens, largely of non-Hindu castes and Tibeto-Burman languages, who often refer to themselves collectively as “Himalayan”); and the music of the diasporic exiled Tibetan refugee community. While they are unable to learn the musical traditions of their local villages due to long-term displacement, some youth from Nubri and other Himalayan areas of Nepal are connecting to the roots of their culture by learning a modern exile presentation of traditional Tibetan performing arts at the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (*Lhamo Tshokpa*, or “Tibetan Opera Association”). By assimilating these contemporary and global strains while struggling to maintain connection to their local traditions, these youth and those with whom they ally are recentering what it means to be Tibetan, Himalayan, and Nepali. As in any context of globalizing modernity, indigenous Himalayans, exile Tibetans, Nepalis, and foreigners in Nepal reveal and delineate relationalities of identity in
the alliances they form with one another. This research seeks to document the endangered song repertory of Nubri and to examine discourses of Tibetan, Himalayan, and Nepali identity through the framework of alliance studies in the dynamic musical environment of the Kathmandu valley.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the people of Nepal and Nubri,

and the Exiled Community of Tibetan Refugees of Kathmandu
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank the US Department of Education and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board for awarding me the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, which allowed me to do the bulk of the fieldwork for this dissertation. Thanks also to the University of Colorado Graduate School, the Center for Asian Studies, the College of Music, and the Center to Advance Research in the Social Sciences, for multiple grants that funded the development of my research topic and allowed me to come to Nepal numerous times over the past four years. Without this funding, this dissertation would not have been possible, and I am deeply grateful.

The people who have helped and supported me throughout my life and academic career in ways that ultimately enabled me to complete this dissertation are too numerous to name, but I will try to single out a few here who have been crucial to my success. This must begin with Angela Mariani and Christopher J. Smith, who inspired me to go back to college with the goal of becoming a professor, and who helped and supported me every step of the way. When I began graduate school five years ago at the University of Colorado Boulder, I entered a College of Music with a varied, distinguished, and collegial group of faculty, and a diverse, stimulating, and supportive cohort of students. I immediately knew I was in the right place. I would first like to thank my Thesis advisor Brenda M. Romero for her constant and close mentorship, her close reading of every proposal and draft, her guidance and advice as a friend in navigating the world of academia, and her unyielding support in my every academic endeavor. Thanks to my University of Colorado Committee members: to Jay Keister (and his lovely wife Mami), for introducing me to the field of music and identity in my first doctoral seminar at CU, for teaching me to play the Japanese shamisen, and for steadfast support; to Austin Okigbo, who taught me
the history of ethnomusicology and made critical comments on numerous funding proposals, including the Fulbright-Hays, which I have him in part to thank for being awarded; and to Holly Gayley, who introduced me to the study of Tibetan music through YouTube videos, and provided essential guidance in approaching the translation of song lyrics that has remained with me throughout this project. To my outside committee members: thanks to Anna Morcom for introducing me to the Lhamo Tshokpa and to Boudha musician Pema Wangdi. These contacts have been of utmost importance to my work in Nepal and her generosity in connecting me with them, her firm and critical comments on my chapter drafts have been immensely helpful to me, while her academic writing has been a source of inspiration and an ideal model I can never hope to approach in quality. Thanks also to Geoff Childs, pre-eminent scholar of Nubri, for his kindness and openness in answering the email of a grad student interested in Nubri, and for taking me under his wing and introducing me to the Valley, as well as his many invaluable comments on various drafts and his numerous letters of recommendation. I have heard horror stories from other graduate students about their committees, and my experience could not be more to the contrary. I truly feel I have the best committee in the world.

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headed, and pragmatic advice on how to proceed in funding my research. Galen Murton, I couldn’t have done it without you. Eben Yonetti and Sierra Gladfelter, you are inspirations to me and I can’t wait to see the heights you will reach, which no doubt will far surpass my own. To my professors at Naropa University, Sarah Harding, Lama Tenpa Gyeltshan, Judith Simmer-Brown, Phil Stanley, Mark Miller, Janet Feder, Paul Fowler, and David Kansuke Wheeler, thank you for preparing me for graduate school, and I hope I have done you proud. Thanks especially to Meg Bertoni for teaching me the secret handshake. Thank you to my colleagues in my matriculation cohort at CU, Ruth Opara and Megan Quilliam. The two of you could not have been better classmates and inspirations to me. To my Naropa classmate, erstwhile roommate, dharma brother, and defacto teacher, David Gitlen, I couldn’t have done it without you either! Thanks also to Hojosama Hakubai Martin Mosko and Alxe Noden for providing me a home in Boulder for seven years, and treating me like family. Your support was crucial and will never be forgotten.

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To Lochan Rijal and the staff and students at Kathmandu University’s Department of Music, thank you for offering me affiliation and for your ongoing support—I have surely learned more from you than I have taught. Thanks especially to KU ethnomusicology graduate Samyog Regmi for doing the hard work of creating first drafts of most of the musical transcriptions in this paper. To Pema Dhondrup, who has become a fast friend, thank you for welcoming me into your home, guiding me through Nubri, and for the many musical collaborations we have enjoyed together. To the people of Nubri, thank you for accepting me into your homes and giving me your songs—they are truly a treasure of the world.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. To my mother, Martha Brown, thanks for instilling in me a love of books, folk music, and learning. To my father, Sokuzan Robert Brown, thank you for teaching me about Buddhism, art, philosophy, music, and life. To my sister, Katari Brown, the first PhD in the family, I’m right behind you, sis! To my brothers, Austin, Aaron, and Josh, thanks for your support and for sticking with me through everything (thanks especially to Aaron for helping me to pass music theory!). And thanks to my wife, Nirmala, for being patient with me through this difficult period when I could not offer much certainty about the future or long-term financial security, and for always keeping me honest and my nose to the grindstone. I love you! (Note: all photographs in this dissertation were taken by me.)
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CHAPTER ONE: ETHNOGRAPHY OF NUBRI MUSIC IN THE HIMALAYAS AND KATHMANDU

When I first came to Nepal in the summer of 2014, it was to take an intensive course in Tibetan language at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute (RYI) at the Center for Buddhist Studies of Kathmandu University, located at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling monastery (the “White Gompa”) in Boudha, Kathmandu. At the time, I envisioned my dissertation as based on folk song collection I would conduct either among the exile Tibetans of India or indigenous Tibetan-speaking populations in the Indian Himalayas of Arunachal Pradesh. At the time, Nepal had not even entered my mind as a place to do research. During that first summer, however, I fell in love with Nepal. The beauty, vibrancy, and diversity of the capitol city of Kathmandu captivated me, and brief forays into the surrounding foothills revealed lovely agrarian villages surrounded by terraced slopes, powerful and historic religious sites, and my first glimpse of the towering Himalayas.

I also immediately began to make what seemed like important connections. The many Tibetans and ethnically Tibetan Nepalis I was meeting were excited when I told them of my intended topic, and pointed me to many people and resources in Boudha and greater Kathmandu. One of my “language partners” at RYI was the great master of Tibetan music and dance Sonam Tsering, who became my first dranyen (Tibetan lute) teacher. The father of my Tibetan homestay family, Gönpo Wangchuck, was an experienced and respected performer of traditional song and dance. I discovered that Joseph Faria and Lowell Cook, students at RYI, were the founders of my favorite Tibetan song translation blog, “Call of the White Crane.” Two connections I made at that time led me to eventually write this dissertation. Ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom happened to visit during my stay, and introduced me to the exile Tibetan performing arts institution called
Lhamo Tshokpa, and Joseph Faria told me about a CD of Nubri songs available at the local CD store. On the back of that CD was the phone number of the singer, Pema Dhondrup. I called him—and he answered—and I met him for the first time at his part-time home in Swayambu, Kathmandu. These two connections, with Pema Dhondrup and the Lhamo Tshokpa, became the basis for my research in Nepal.

I returned to Nepal in the summer of 2015, just after the devastating earthquakes of that spring, to do preliminary development of a dissertation topic relating to Nubri and the Lhamo Tshokpa, and to continue language study privately. During that summer I met a young Tamang woman named Nirmala, introduced to me by a friend, who told me she gave private lessons in Nepali language. Eager to learn some Nepali, and to give some work to this very smart and interesting girl, I hired her as a language teacher. After a couple of weeks of lessons, however, it became clear that I could not study two languages at once. I enjoyed her company though, and I knew she needed work in the chaos and disruption following the earthquake, so I continued to hire her as a guide and interpreter when I needed to go places or buy things in the city. We soon fell in love and were married in January of 2016. By this time, less than two years after coming to Nepal, I felt a lifelong commitment to the country and its peoples.

In May of 2016 I returned to Nepal again, and that summer I took the course in Nepali language at RYI. After that I remained in Nepal and began my fieldwork in Boudha. Besides learning the *dranyen*, I also studied the *sārangi*, the Nepali fiddle, from Bharat Nepali, and started listening to, and reading about, *dōhori*, the antiphonal courting songs of the hill villages. Through this period, my love of all things Nepali grew, and I knew I was in the right place for my research. This was confirmed in October, when I was awarded the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship to fund one year of fieldwork in Nepal. I began the
process of requesting official research permission to visit Nubri, a restricted area, and in the meantime acquired a trekking permit to go there for four and a half weeks. This trip was wonderful. I hitched a ride on the helicopter of another research team, and traveled through the entire valley with them for three weeks. Since I was confident I would be back for a longer stay, I did not press the issue of collecting songs at first, but rather focused on meeting people, learning as much as I could, and making friends. After the other researchers left, I remained another ten days with Pema Dhondrup in his home at Tsak village. Here I was able to participate in the daily lives of the villagers, including a series of religious festivals and teachings led by Pema Dhondrup’s brother, Khenpo Tsultrim Tendar. I was also able to record 15 songs, in addition to one I recorded in Sama village at the beginning of my trip, and to get reliable texts for ten of them. With Pema Dhondrup, I walked to Arughat, a hike of three ten-hour days, and caught the bus to Kathmandu, confident that I had a good start on my project of documenting songs.

Over the next two months, I worked in Boudha, attending all rehearsals and events of the Lhamo Tshokpa, conducting interviews and having conversations, and transcribing song texts and melodies from Nubri. When the time came by which I should have received research permission to return to Nubri, I made inquiries through Fulbright-Nepal and Kathmandu University, who contacted the Home Ministry. Word soon came that the government had not even opened my package yet! After a few days they informed me that some documents were missing from my application, so I re-created those documents and took them deep into the bowels of Singha Durbar, the home of the Nepal Government. Two weeks later I was informed that permission was denied, with no explanation other than “you have to apply for this permission in advance.”
I was crushed. Fulbright-Nepal advised me to revise my research plan, and after some thought, I came to the conclusion that I could still proceed with my project as envisioned, but I would not be able to do as comprehensive a song collection in Nubri as I had planned. I had a substantial sample of songs and abundant field notes from my trip, and I could still work with the many Nubri natives living in Kathmandu, as well as refocus on the Lhamo Tshokpa. I also realized that the denial of my permission was most likely based on the growing influence of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Nepal. This should serve as a warning to any scholars who want to work with ethnically Tibetan populations in Nepal—you may not receive a warm welcome from the government. Unfortunately, my research proposal, which was required for my fee waiver application, contained the word “Tibetan” numerous times, and this must have been a red flag for a government eager to please China.

In spite of all this, I have been able to write this dissertation, of which I am proud, but which is also only a beginning. I have recently been awarded funding from the Firebird Foundation for the Collection of Oral Literature, to return to Nubri and continue recording songs, and I hope to complete a truly comprehensive song collection in the near future. The relationships I have made with people in Nubri and Kathmandu are more than simply instrumental for my research—they are friendships that I hope will last the rest of my life. I am currently teaching as a visiting lecturer at Kathmandu University and working on designing a study-abroad program for foreign ethnomusicology students. The Department of Music at KU is currently undergoing a transition as they prepare to move to a much larger campus and expand both their facilities and enrollment. I am excited to be a part of their inspired vision for becoming a world-class center for ethnomusicological research and pedagogy, to have the opportunity to work with the brilliant Nepali students and faculty there, and to continue learning about the
diverse music cultures of Nepal. In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss my research sites and populations, methods, and my subjective positionality.

**Research Sites and Populations: Pungyen**

The high Himalayan valley of Nubri runs parallel to the Tibetan border in Nepal’s Gorkha district below the 26,759 foot Manaslu peak (Tib., *dpung rgyan* [pron. Pungyen]). It runs northwest-to-southeast as a gorge of the Buri Gandaki River, which churns milky-blue deep below the southern exposure of the Himalayan divide, draining forested alpine slopes that begin below tree line and dense jungle at lower elevations. Nubri’s four major and eight-to-ten lesser villages of stacked-stone houses among terraced fields lie between the elevations of 3,800 meters at Samdo in upper Nubri, to 1,800 meters at Bi village in lower Nubri, or Kuthang (Childs, 2001). Nubri has had some Tibetan settlement since at least the 13th century, when it belonged to the Tibetan kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang, or lower Ngari. The ruins of a border-taming fort, or *dzong*, from this period are still visible in the upper reaches of the valley (Childs, 2001 and 2004; Rogers, 2008; Khenpo Gyaltsen, 2014). While a Tibetan presence dates back centuries, Nubri also had its original inhabitants, and their place was called Kuthang. The meaning of this word is disputed. It is commonly said that the “*ku*” means “thief,” and that the language, *kuke*, means “thief language,” because it contains many words “stolen” from Tibetan and Gurung (Aris, 1975). However, a local scholar from Kuthang told me that he considers that interpretation derogatory, and that the real meaning of the name is *sku thang*, or “statue plain,” due to the prevalence of stone carvings.\(^1\) Be that as it may, Upper Nubri and Kuthang remain somewhat disparate, with Upper Nubri, especially Samdo, being much more Tibetan, and Kuthang retaining

\(^1\) As of yet, I don’t know whether there is a movement to reclaim the spelling, or if this is the pet peeve of this one
something of its old language, which is endangered. While these two areas have long been treated as distinct by scholars (Aris, 1975; Childs, 2001 and 2004; Rogers, 2008), due both to the longstanding interdependence of the two areas (Childs, 2001: 8-9) and Kuthang’s continuing contemporary Tibetanization, I will use “lower Nubri” and “Kuthang” interchangeably. As recently as the 1970s, while residents of Kuthang adhered to Tibetan Buddhism, ate the Tibetan staple *tsampa* (roasted barley flour mixed with butter tea), and dressed in Tibetan-style robes called *chuba* (albeit with no pants or shoes, somewhat in the manner of the Bhutanese), most ordinary people did not speak Tibetan. I learned this from Khenpo Tsultrim Tendar, who was a child in Tsak in the 1970s, and it aligns with Michael Aris’ experience in 1973 that “it is not easy making oneself understood in Kutang [sic] in standard Tibetan” (50). However, educated lamas from Kuthang have long spoken Tibetan. The 17th century lama Pema Dondrub is known to have learned Tibetan and travelled to Tibet on pilgrimage in 1688 (Childs 2001: 16). Additionally, biographies of prominent Kuthang lamas were written in Tibetan.² Today, while one still hears the Kuthang language spoken there, Tibetan is very common. The people of (especially upper-) Nubri consider themselves “ethnically Tibetan,” but also foreground their local Nubri identity while valuing their status as Nepalese citizens. As such, they are part of the indigenous nationalities, or *adivasi janajati* of Nepal, an assortment of groups that often refer to themselves and their culture as “Himalayan.”³

To date, ethnomusicological studies dealing with traditional music in borderland Tibetan cultural areas have been limited to Ladakh and Sikkim, in northern India (Trewin and Stephens 1987; Salvatori 2005; Dinnerstein 2013; Amit 2015), Bhutan (Kinga 2001), and Amdo, in China (Skal Sang Nor Bu and Stuart 1996; Rdo-rje, Luca, and Stuart 2006; Rdo-rje and Stuart 2008;

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² Geoff Childs, communication with the author, 13 March, 2018.
³ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of indigenous identity politics in Nepal.
Craun 2011; Zla ba sgrol ma, 2012). Scholarly writing on vernacular traditional music in Tibet itself is also rather rare (Tucci 1966; Crossley-Holland 1967; Lhalungpa 1967; Samuel 1976, 1986). Studies of contemporary, popular, and diasporic Tibetan music are a little more common (Diehl, 2002; Morcom, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2015; Dhondup, 2008; Stirr, 2008; Jabb, 2011; Savolainen, 2016; Brown, 2016; Yamamoto, 2017). Within Nepal, only the Tibetan-language folk music of Mustang has been substantially documented (Blumenthal 2013; Gurung 2015), though there have been studies of the songs of the closely related Sherpa and Tamang peoples (Bishop 1973; March 2002). Nubri has been visited by Tibetologists (Snellgrove 1958; Aris 1975), anthropologists (Childs 2001 and 2004; Childs et al 2014), and geographers (Dobremez and Jest 1976; Rogers 2008), but has never been the object of song collection.

I worked with seven singers in Nubri (see Chapter 3) ranging in age from their twenties to their seventies. My main collaborator and guide was Pema Dhondrup, the most famous singer from Nubri and until recently the only artist to have made a CD of Nubri songs. I also consulted with Pema’s brother, Khenpo Tsultrim Tendar, who suggested I work closely with Lama Pema Gyamtsho, a senior lama from Tsak village with vast knowledge of songs, to establish accurate texts for the songs I had collected from illiterate singers.

**Research Sites and Populations: Palyul**

The Boudha neighborhood of Kathmandu (Tib., *bal yul* [pron. Palyul]) is both the center of the Tibetan music scene in Nepal and the site where many Nubri youth learn about such music. The Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (NTLA), or “Lhamo Tshokpa,” is an organization that trains young people in *lhamo* (Tibetan opera), which encompasses song, dance, instrumental musicianship, and costume. The director and all of the main teachers of the Lhamo Tshokpa
were trained to greater or lesser extents at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) in Dharamsala, India, and are members of the diasporic community of Tibetan refugees. Since the 1959 takeover of Tibet by China, the refugee community and government-in-exile have worked hard to preserve and protect Tibetan culture, language, and religion. TIPA has been at the forefront of that effort in terms of performing arts, gradually creating a standardized and modernized version of Tibetan music that seeks to unite Tibetan refugees from various regions and dialects (Diehl, 2002). The Lhamo Tshokpa has, for some twenty years, been an outpost of that effort in Nepal.

Originally, the Lhamo Tshokpa mainly trained children from the refugee community, but in recent years, they have begun accepting large numbers of ethnically Tibetan youth from Himalayan regions of Nepal. This situation is parallel to that of exile monasteries and schools, where a decreasing exile population has created openings for Himalayan Nepalis (Childs 2004). Unlike many of the refugees, these students are Nepali citizens, and come from places such as Nubri, Dolpo, Yolmo, and Mustang, all of which have their own distinct regional identities and song repertoires. The diasporic community of Tibetan refugees has been studied by Klieger (1992); Huber (1997); Dodin and Räther (2001); Anand (2000, 2002, 2003); Misra (2003); Yeh (2007; 2013); Yeh and Lama (2006); McGranahan (2005, 2010); and McConnell (2013). Many have written about the music and performing arts of the exile community, among them Cantwell (1985); Diehl (2002); Ahameda (2006); Morcom (2006, 2015); Fitzgerald (2014); Wojahn (2016); and Henrion-Dourcy (2017a and b).

In Boudha, I worked with the officers, teachers, and board members of the NTLA, who are exile Tibetans, and range in age from thirty to eighty, and with the students, a mix of exile Tibetans and Nepali Himalayans, who range in age from ten to mid-twenties. At Sri Mangaldvip
school I also worked with a contingent of six students who were born in Nubri and are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.

Methods

During my research for this dissertation, I conducted some two dozen semi-structured interviews, and several hours of conversations and music lessons with teachers, performers, and students. My participant observation included attending hundreds of hours of Lhamo Tshokpa rehearsals and performances, as well as other musical performances and community events. I practiced many hours of “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998; Wogan 2004; Kirpalani 2016) in which I spent unstructured time in the company of community members while setting aside my research agenda and bracketing any theoretical frameworks. I also spent many more hours in what I would call “ordinary hanging out,” which took the form of eating meals, walking kora (circumambulation), and just sitting around with friends, with no agenda or thought of gaining any research insights whatsoever. In a way, this was the most valuable, because it allowed me to gain the trust of my informants and forge friendships with them that will remain durable far into the future.

I also gained entrée into the communities where I worked through bi-musicality (Hood 1960). By learning to play the music I was studying, I received not only a glimpse of an “insider’s view” of the music, but was able to participate in multiple musical collaborations that gave me new perspectives on how my interlocutors view the music they play, and to see their methods of practice, performance, and learning. In Nubri, when I played the dranyen for villagers, they instantly liked me and were eager to share songs. Bi-musicality, more than anything except perhaps language ability, has positioned me to continue to go deeper into the musical cultures of these communities as I carry this work on into the future.
I used a Zoom 4N digital recording device to record all songs, interviews, lessons, and many conversations. When I recorded songs I sometimes asked singers to talk briefly about the histories and meanings of the texts. I transcribed song melodies using Sibelius music notation software, with the help of KU ethnomusicology student Samyog Regmi. I transcribed and translated songs, relevant interviews, and portions of conversation with the help of Tibetan language teacher Lekshay Choedrup and Lama Pema Gyamtsho. At times I took copious field notes, and at other times I did not. My process was organic and uncontrived. This allowed insights and questions to arise naturally, and to lead me down avenues I had not previously imagined. Thus, my methods emphasize the “human” in the humanities. While many scholars in the humanities and social sciences adapt scientific methods and theories to answer human questions to great effect, this is not my approach, and I think there should also be room in scholarship for the random and anecdotal. In working this way, I have sought to paint a qualitative picture of Nubri music and the exile/Himalayan interface in the context of performing arts that answers the questions “what do they do?” “How do they do it?” And “why do they do it?” In so doing I have also employed the three levels of ethnomusicological description: the particular, the normative, and the interpretive. In describing particular musical performances, I have compared them to normative standards of performance. By combining my ethnographic observations with the interpretive lenses of alliance studies, transnationalism, and maṇḍala theory, I have attempted to shed light on how music can reveal much about the communities’ ideas about themselves and their identities as groups (Rice 2017: 176).

**My Subjective Positionality: Buddhist Worldview and Maṇḍala Theory**
My philosophical background and worldview have shaped a perspective formed primarily by Buddhism, and this is the most basic lens through which I view questions of ontology and epistemology. Important aspects of this worldview include, for me, the following beliefs: (1) that persons and phenomena have no inherent “self-nature,” or individual, non-interdependent existence; (2) that all conditioned phenomena, that is, phenomena that arise as a result of causes and conditions, are impermanent and have no fixed entity, but are in a constant state of moment-to-moment change; (3) that there are “two truths,” which means that while we operate in the world on the level of the “conventional truth” of persons, relationships, and histories, on the level of “ultimate truth,” all of that is in some way illusory, and that the emptiness, or lack of existence in the way we think things exist—the real nature of phenomena—is simultaneously and interdependantly arising and imbued with luminous awareness that is obscured by our limited perspectives; and (4) the law of karma, or cause-and-effect, which propels all confused beings through a beginningless cycle of rebirths in which they are tied to one another in an all-pervasive net of interdependence.

My Buddhist worldview has also led me to think of cultural and social formations as *maṇḍala*. Originally this is a Hindu-Buddhist idealized two- or three-dimensional representation of the cosmos in the form of a circle, with Mt Meru, the hub of all Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, or the primary tutelary deity, at the center, and the four continents, or directionally oriented gates and subordinate deities, at the periphery. Scholars of South Asia have long used *maṇḍala* theory to describe kingdoms, as in S.J. Tambiah’s “galactic polities,” a term he coined to describe such kingdoms “as conforming to the mandala [sic] scheme in their arrangement at various levels” (1976: 69). Noé Dinnerstein has also used *maṇḍala* theory to illuminate ways...
Ladhaki songs “can be seen to present Ladakhi society as a mandala [sic]” (2013: 73). Such *mandala* often imply hierarchy, as well as a center-periphery dichotomy, and they seem an apt metaphor for thinking about the worlds of Tibetan music, with two competing *mandalas* centered in the PRC and in Dharamsala, with a third, oft-neglected center in Kathmandu. The image also lends itself to arranging various parties through their alliances in interconnected relationships centered around music that are placed in specific localities. Such *mandala* do not have fixed boundaries or centers, and through alliance, various performers of identity can *recenter* them, expressing their own prioritizations and values. It is with this in mind that I use the term “*mandala*” and “recentering” throughout this dissertation.

In working with my research populations, my religious background has helped me to bond with them, and to gain acceptance as a fellow Buddhist. It has also allowed me not to be bothered by their seemingly contradictory use of strategic essentialism (see Chapter 2: 25), since a Buddhist worldview is conducive to holding two opposing ideas in the mind at once without cognitive dissonance. In my case, this is also reinforced by years of meditation practice, which trains the mind to accept whatever arises within it, without grasping it, pushing it away, or ignoring it, which are the three ways we usually deal with thoughts. This is not to say that I am free from judgment or reactivity—as indeed will be shown in the next section—but that I have developed the mental habit of observing such processes in action, which tends to blunt their power.

As an ethnomusicologist I do not see the people I work with as an “Other,” but as myself on the ultimate level. A basic teaching of Tibetan Buddhism is that due to the infinity of *samsarā*, or confused, cyclic existence, all beings have been one another’s mothers innumerable times. This is not only true for human beings from other cultures, but even animals, insects, and
non-physical beings. In my view, I have been thrown together with the people I work with due to our karmic connections from past actions. This also implies the possibility that our roles, as friends and enemies, parents and children, teachers and students, or scholars and informants, could easily be reversed in the future. While I do not succeed in always holding such an enlightened perspective in my mind, it has profoundly shaped my beliefs and ethics, which inevitably influences my interactions both with people and with texts. Ironically, during this project I have encountered Christians both in “the field” of my research sites as I met them on the trail and became aware of their activities, and in the field of ethnomusicology as I researched the literature on Tibetan music and Nepal. These experiences elicited reactions from me of which I am not proud, and caused me to question my own motivations and prejudices.

**Christian Missionaries in “the Field” and in the Field**

When I was first planning to go to Nubri, I started to hear about Christian missionaries working in the valley. When I was on the way back from Nubri I passed through several Gurung villages that had been completely converted and was initially shocked by the experience (see Chapter 2). I learned from Geoff Childs and Brot Coburn, who have been working in Nubri for decades, that an organization called MountainChild was evangelizing in Nubri under the cover of earthquake relief. According to Brot Coburn

MountainChild was founded by an American from Colorado named Jack Reid, and its influence in Nepal grew after the 2015 earthquakes when people were most needy and vulnerable. In an appeal for post-earthquake support, Reid wrote, ‘…We have an unprecedented opportunity to unfold God’s pervasive grace upon areas that have only known martyrdom in the past. The hearts of these unreached are now open and they are crying for help. We are positioned for success through the decades of community-building that now affords us the relational grid to deliver both natural and eternal results.’
MountainChild works with The Footstool Project (from the biblical passage in which God exhorts, ‘make your enemies your footstool’), which is another Jack Reid invention, single-mindedly dedicated to conversion. Its strategy is to send energetic youth to rural posts, while organising short-term mission treks for like-minded Christians from the United States, focusing on the ‘unreached people groups’—Nepalis of the high Himalayan valleys, mainly those of Tibetan ethnic origin.

‘They are raised the Buddhist way—no affection, no emotion, no love, just empty,’ blogged one trekker, referring to the people she met in Nubri. ‘The scenery might be beautiful here, but there is so much darkness! I don’t feel hope or joy here. Everyone is just going through the motions, no direction, just dark despair. So sad….’ (Coburn 2017).

In 2016 Geoff Childs sent me a link to a recruiting video made by The Footstool Project, which although it was posted on YouTube, was obviously intended only for an audience of insiders (the video has since been taken down, perhaps in response to reactions from people from Nubri who had seen it). In the video Jack Reid is shown delivering a sermon intended to inspire young Christians to “…invade the shadowy crags of forgotten peoples…and claim the high ground of Planet Earth for Christ.” Over a background of menacing, apocalyptic music, Reid’s paranoiac cadences rehash colonialist and orientalist tropes of people living in darkness and waiting for salvation from white missionaries. Throughout the video, during passages of text that make “Other” these “unreached people groups,” Nubri people, including Pema Dhondrup, are shown.
MountainChild has been operating in Nubri ever since the 2015 earthquakes and has not been transparent about its proselytizing agenda. The organization signed an agreement in 2015 with Nepal’s Social Welfare Council that gave it open access to Nubri for the purpose of opening a school in Sama village. They have had a continuous presence there ever since, and use stealthy techniques to convert children, some of whom they sponsor to go to Kathmandu for “education,” when in reality, they plan to convert them there and send them back to Nubri as a vanguard.

The rampant ethnocentrism and disrespect for the local culture of the Himalayas that is apparent in their recruiting materials and blog posts is all the more galling to me in light of my denial of research permission by the Nepal government—I want to help the local people safeguard their culture and I am denied, whereas MountainChild wants to destroy that culture and is given free rein! Thinking about this situation and engaging with their materials caused me to come face-to-face with a prejudice of my own which I was not actively aware of—a prejudice against evangelical Christians. This prejudice stems from my upbringing in rural, southwest Michigan, where I grew up Buddhist in the heart of the Reagan-Democrat “Bible belt.” There community members subjected me to regular attempts conversion, which was easy to resist.
because I had the advantage: I understood their religious ideology while they were clueless about mine. I thus developed a deep and largely unexamined feeling of ideological superiority which, when I encountered the missionaries working in Nubri, I found was still operating in my psyche. How, I wondered, could they expect the people of Nubri to trade a superior ideology for an inferior one—a superior ideology that the missionaries did not even understand in the least? I felt little unease in thinking this way until I began to encounter Christians in the ethnomusicological literature.

Early in this century, ethnomusicologist John Vallier coined the term “ethnomusical missionaries” in a critique of ethnomusicologists he saw as using the discipline unethically in service of missionary agendas (2003). Vallier identified two strains of ethnomusical missionaries engaged in “spiritual engineering.” One he termed the “Chenowith School,” after ethnomusicologist Vida Chenowith, who began composing Christian songs in the style of her host community in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s. The other he called the “Heart Music School,” which rather than composing new songs for Christian worship, “subtly refashion already existing indigenous songs so that the refashioned versions contain Christian texts and promote Christian values” (2003: 89). Some he targeted responded directly to this critique (Schrag and Coulter 2003), but Vallier seems to have received little response from the wider discipline. Some of those invested in utilizing ethnomusicological methods to advance missionary aims took his charges seriously nonetheless, and adopted the term “ethnodoxologists” (coined by David Hall in 1997) to describe themselves (Aniol et al 2015; Stallsmith 2015). While I found Vallier’s argument persuasive, and the response of the Christian ethnomusicologists largely unconvincing, I did think deeply about their charge that Vallier was “essentializing the Other” with regard to Christian missionaries (Schrag and Coulter 2003: 101[4]). I came to the conclusion that such
activities were indeed in conflict with the ethics of ethnomusicology, but that if such people instead called themselves ethnodoxologists, they should be free to do so, albeit with the awareness that I still might not like what they do, and might still act to challenge them.

My thinking about this issue took on another layer when I realized I was relying on the work of Christian ethnomusicologists for their findings in Tibetan and Nepali music. A master’s thesis written by ethnomusicologist Wendolyn Craun of Bethel University (2011) was a rare study of folk songs in a Tibetan cultural area (Amdo), and as such I read it carefully. Craun reveals her evangelical Christianity in the acknowledgements section of the paper, but her work is primarily descriptive, shows no trace of a proselytizing agenda, and contains much valuable information. Victoria Dalzell’s PhD dissertation on the Tharu ethnic group of Nepal, is another example of rigorous ethnomusicology that explicitly addresses the author’s positionality as a Christian, and admits that, while she did worship with Tharu who were already Christian, and avoided participating in non-Christian Tharu rituals that she felt would compromise her own spirituality, she made no attempt to convert non-Christians as part of her ethnomusicological work (2015). I learned a great deal from Dalzell’s very impressive dissertation, including the fact that the caricature held by some scholars who study Nepal—myself included—that all Christian missionaries in the country represent foreign interference, is mistaken. Dalzell grew up among the native community of Nepalese Christians, and points to the history of ethnically Nepali missionaries bringing the faith from Darjeeling and Kalimpong by their own agency at great risk to themselves. Perhaps most importantly, Dalzell’s transparent and frank section on her subject positionality as a Christian inspired me to write this section.

As I began to realize I could gain important perspectives, besides just ordinary data and information, from Christian ethnomusicologists, I discovered, while browsing YouTube videos
on ethnomusicology in 2016, that an ethnomusicologist I was heavily depending on in my musical analysis of songs, was a Christian missionary. Ian Collinge seems to have published only two scholarly articles, one on the dranyen and one on a “New Lexicon” of Tibetan music theory derived from the work of modern scholars writing in Tibetan (1993; 1997). Since academic writing on both musical instruments and theory in Tibetan folk music is rare, I latched on to these articles and learned a great deal from them. The dranyen article is still the only source in which I have read an explanation of the Tibetans’ use of the European Chêve system of musical notation. The “New Lexicon” article seemed to provide a way to engage with native concepts, albeit modern and Western-influenced, in analyzing song melodies from a culture with no such traditional theorization. Thus I was shaken after discovering on the internet that Collinge

…leads the multicultural Resonance ministry of WEC International www.wecinternational.org where he trains people in cross-cultural and multicultural music, as well as teaching at All Nations Christian College and London School of Theology. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, Ian also has a Masters Degree in Ethnomusicology from the School of Oriental and African Studies. After [sic] which he researched various aspects of folk music, especially the Dramnyen Lute, producing a suite of worship music resources for new churches across the Himalayas. Between 1988-2000 he lived mostly in Asia, researching indigenous music. Since returning to the UK, Ian has coordinated a DVD and storytelling project using multiple indigenous art forms and has been involved in developing multicultural music in his home church.5

In other words, Collinge is an ethnomusical missionary! My confidence in using his work was further shaken when one of my mentors questioned whether I should rely on him for the simple reason that he is a missionary. While I shared this advisor’s suspicion of Christian ethnomusicologists, and I was disturbed that Collinge did not seem to have been transparent about his missionary work, I had to ask myself: was his work legitimate and valuable, or was it somehow corrupted by his belief in proselytizing or questionable ethics? And furthermore,

Should I abandon his work just because he was a Christian? In the end I decided that Collinge’s work is valuable, and that I should not ignore it, or pretend it did not have the influence on me that it did. I realize that I am vulnerable to criticism for this, but I hope that by being transparent about my own positionality and thought process in relation to these difficult questions will possibly open new avenues of dialogue about the role of ideology in ethnomusicology and the extent to which we can and should try to police ideologies among members of the discipline.

**Dissertation Overview**

Having laid out my research sites, populations, and methods, as well as my subjective position and possible biases, I will present my findings in the following four chapters. I present my main theoretical framework of “alliance studies” in Chapter 2, following ethnomusicologist Beverly Diamond’s 2007 article. After a review of the literature on identity in anthropology and the social sciences, as well as ethnomusicology, I turn to discourses on ethnicity and identity in Nepal, particularly among ethnically Tibetan Nepalis and exile Tibetans. I then discuss the benefits of following Diamond’s model in thinking about identity among the groups and individuals I am working with, and suggest a relationship between alliance studies and applied ethnomusicology. Finally, I give examples of how Diamond’s model can be used “track connections to places, or networks of people” in the areas of “genre formations, technological mediations, language and dialect choices, citational practices, and issues of access and ownership” (2007: 171). In so doing I show how I have taken Diamond’s model and put it into practice in the Himalayan highlands of Nubri and the urban center of Kathmandu to demonstrate how allainces can delineate multiple, constructed, shifting, and overlapping identities among related but distinct groups.
In Chapter 3 I present textual and musical transcriptions of eleven songs I collected in Nubri in November and December of 2016, as well as translations of the texts. I consider each song in terms of what alliances they might reveal or allude to, and their reception among my exile Tibetan music teachers in Kathmandu. I also draw on Ian Collinge’s 1997 article to analyze the melodies according to scaler and modal content, phrase structure, and tonal movement, plus I discuss the genres of the songs and the contexts in which I received them. I also point to ways the song texts use spatialized language to “mandalize” (Makley 2007) the landscape and community of Nubri and assert native hierarchies that resist dominant historical marginalizations. By accompanying presentation and analysis of the song texts with a regional version of Western musical analysis, I attempt to give a complete ethnomusicological explication of this sample of songs from Nubri.

In Chapter 4 I turn my attention to the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (NTLA), or “Lhamo Tshokpa,” of Boudha, Kathmandu as a rich locus of identity discourse and alliance-building between exile Tibetans and Himalayan Nepalis, including those from Nubri. After giving detailed background on lhamo (Tibetan opera) and the history of official performing arts organizations in exile, I look at how exile Tibetans and Himalayans negotiate issues of relative cultural authority and ideas of authenticity by drawing on shared cultural models and logics to articulate differing versions of identity based on the instrumental needs of each group, which also reflect changing political and economic conditions in Nepal.

In Chapter 5 I return to examining Nubri songs, this time as mediated through technology and collaboration, in the form of five songs from the CD of Nubri singer Pema Dhondrup, for which he has produced YouTube videos. Once again, I present transcriptions and texts of these songs, and analyze them in the same way as the songs in Chapter 2. In addition, I analyze the
visual imagery in the videos for their semiotic and symbolic content, and note how Pema and his
exile Tibetan collaborators have modified the songs sonically to signal alliance with the exile
Tibetan community. I also interrogate the song texts for spatialized language that indicates
andalization and recentering. Finally, I look briefly at a video directed by Pema Dhondrup of a
Nepali pop song that is set in Nubri with Nepali actors in Tibetan dress. I find that such videos
are a rich source of information about how Pema Dhondrup wants to position himself and
express his Nubri identity in relation not only to exile Tibetans, but to other Nepalis, Westerners,
and global youth culture.

In Chapter 6 I reiterate my conclusions from the preceding chapters and summarize how
this dissertation contributes to ethnomusicology by expanding the use of Diamond’s alliance
udies theory to revitalize the study of music and identity, thus showing that music remains a
uctive point of entry for exploring issues of identity. I also discuss how this study deepens
nderstanding of Tibetan and Himalayan music and society in the rapidly changing context
of globalizing modernity. Finally, in a brief Epilogue, I explain my ongoing work and future
ans for research in these areas, especially in terms of collaborative projects of applied
nomusicology. In completing this dissertation I feel I am only just continuing on a lifelong
ourney that will no doubt take me deeper into the music cultures of Tibet and the Himalayas,
and in that sense, this paper is merely preliminary. While I have depended on many
nowledgeable collaborators for my information, transcriptions, and translations, I take full
sponsibility for any oversights or inaccuracies contained in this document. I beg the
ness of the learned for any mistakes I have made.
In undertaking field research on the folksong repertory of the Nepalese Himalayan valley of Nubri, its intergenerational transmission and recontextualization, and subsequent resignification, among the exile Tibetan community of Kathmandu, I knew the complex story I would end up telling would revolve around identity. Identity is a fraught word, which nevertheless seems inescapable when thinking about music’s place in culture (another fraught word), but that seems to solidify concepts as they form, resulting in something cartoonish and one-dimensional. In reading ethnomusicological hand-wringing over the problematics of the term, I never had to go through the same contortions as the scholars I was reading. Coming as I do from a philosophically Buddhist worldview, I didn't have to read Hume or go through a postmodern crisis to know that the self, and thus the identity, has no more than a passing, momentary, operational existence, with no inherent, non-dependent existence whatever. That was just an unexamined assumption of mine.6

I didn’t know a better way to think about identity, however, which seemed so crucial to how we use music and how it functions for us, than to think and write about it as if it were a real thing, that each of us has, and that we construct, or maintain. When I read Beverly Diamond’s “The Music of Modern Indigeneity: From Identity to Alliance Studies” (2007), that all changed. Here was a model that would allow me to think—in a sense—about identity, but not in the static way I had before, which didn’t seem sufficient to give depth and meaning to the multifaceted

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6 One of the core tenets of Buddhism is the doctrine of “no-self,” (Skt., anātman), which holds that what we call the self is merely a continuum of momentary consciousnesses that, together with the psycho-physical aggregates, creates the illusion of a solid, permanent, independent, “inherently existent” self. The related doctrine of “emptiness” (Skt., śūnyatā), holds that all phenomena are empty of self-nature due to being in a web of mutually-dependent, simultaneous arising called “interdependent origination” (Skt., pratīyāsamutpāda).
discourses of identity I was sensing among my research populations and their societies. While many have cited Diamond’s article, none, with the possible exception of Rehanna Kheshgi (2016), have thus far committed to employing it as a primary framework. I hope to contribute to the development of alliance studies in ethnomusicology by using her concepts to analyze my research.

In this chapter I will lay out how I have employed Diamond’s model, and give concrete examples of how I am applying her concepts to my experience and data. I will discuss why I think alliance studies is particularly compatible with applied ethnomusicology, and why I agree with Diamond that it promises to be a more fruitful way for ethnomusicologists—and presumably other cultural scholars—to think about human phenomena that have seemed to revolve around identity in new, more flexible and contingent ways. Before doing that I need to discuss music and identity.

“Identity” in the Social Sciences and Humanities

The concept of the identity of persons has appeared since at least the 17th century in philosophy, in the work of such thinkers as John Locke and David Hume (Gleason 1983). Etymologically it derives from the Latin idem, and means “sameness.” Its use in philosophy was originally in regard to the problem of the “unity of self” as the idea of the soul began to be challenged in the Enlightenment and “identity” was used to describe an empirical process by which the self maintained an appearance of continuity over time (ibid.: 911). The use of identity as a technical term in philosophy bled into the vernacular, where it denoted the specific characteristics of persons or physical things. While the idea of ethnic identity was first employed by Johann Gottfried Herder, in German, in the 19th century—specifically in relation to music,
we will see below—It was not until the 1950s that the English term was first used in the social sciences, where it began to be associated with group identity.

According to Philip Gleason, psychologist Erik Erikson (1963, 1968) was the main source for the diffusion of the term, and the first to define it not only in the Freudian sense of ego-identity, or the individual, internal identity of the self, but also as the process by which that self is shaped by the collective, external, interactions of culture and society resulting in the formation of group identities. Erikson’s term “identity crisis” referred to the developmental stages when such external identifications come to the fore. In addition to Erikson, sociologists associated with role theory, reference-group theory, and symbolic interactionism began to use the term with diverse definitions, including linking it with *ethnicity*. By the 1960s, says Gleason, “the word *identity* was used so widely and so loosely that to determine its provenance in every context would be impossible” (1983: 918). While Eriksonian psychologists continued to stress the boundedness, interiority and continuity of identity, a position that came to be known as “primordialism,” sociologists of the symbolic interactionist school, such as Erving Goffman, increasingly stressed the external, interactional, behavioral, and contingent nature of identity as a process of constant maintenance, a stance that Gleason calls “optionalism” (1983: 919).

Since the 1970s, post-structuralist deconstruction of the “metanarrative of the identical subject” by the likes of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists alike moved toward speaking of identity as multiple, fluid, fragmented, and shared. (Sökefeld 1999: 417). Rather than the “sameness” or continuity denoted by earlier scholars, identity came to mean “difference” in that it only exists in relation to what it is not, both within and outside the individual. According to James Côté, the number of articles with the keyword *identity* has doubled each decade since the 1940s in the databases PsychINFO and SocAbs,
resulting in tens of thousands of such entries as of 2006 (2006: 3-4). This burgeoning of identity studies led to a plethora of critical theorizations, especially from feminist, gender, and cultural studies, that pointed to the intersectionality of multiple subject positions like gender, race, class, etc., that further subverted the old primordialism and even challenged the “soft,” or constructivist conceptions of identity that add so many qualifiers as to lose the ability to explain strategic essentialisms employed by populations studied (e.g., Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Strategic essentialism is defined as “…a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Guha and Spivak 1988: 13, emphasis in original), that “accepts Western, dominant premises” and focuses on difference (Sökefeld 2001: 535).

In the 1990s and 2000s, scholars drew on “ethnotheoretical models,” or native concepts (Fischer 1999); critiqued “identity fetishism” (van Beek 2000); destabilized the “distinction between ethnographer and ethnographic subject” (Segal 1996: 431; Carnegie 1996); challenged the “discursive authority” of constructivist approaches like the “Invention of Tradition” (Briggs 1996); considered differing conceptions of “the person” cross-culturally (Dumont 1980; Ram 1992; Ahearn 1999; Robbins 2002; Smith 2012); pointed out the problem of reification and questioned whether to dispense with “identity” as an analytical category (Handler 1994; Brubaker and Cooper 2000); proposed reinserting consideration of “the self” into anthropological and sociological discussions of identity (Sökefeld 1999, 2001; van Meijl 2008); and attempted to devise a practical and precise taxonomy of identity within the social sciences (Côté 2006).

In attempting to rehabilitate the concept of identity in social anthropology and to refine its usefulness, Martin Sökefeld sees the “duel hermeneutics” of identity—the “duality” of its “essentialist and constructivist readings”—not as a weakness, but a strength (2001: 538).
Sökefeld answers critics of identity studies Handler (1994), and Brubaker and Cooper (2000), who problematize violation of the discursive boundaries of Bourdieu’s separate spheres of practice and analysis by scholars dealing in “soft” conceptions of identity in relation to “hard” conceptions professed by members of research populations engaging in strategic essentialism. By revalorizing concepts of self and agency in thinking about identity, Sökefeld concedes that identity is a concept that “must be explained,” but points out that this is also true of “culture,” “person,” and “self,” and notes that Handler himself employs such “fictions” uncritically in order to “anchor his reasonings” (531). More significantly, to my mind, Sökefeld cites the globalization of the idea of identity, which has escaped the academic discourse and is claimed by people everywhere as they resist neoliberal and nationalist hegemonies even while engaging in self-essentialization:

If people insist on a certain communal identity, they do so not because they entertain certain psychological or sociological categories but because issues of power and resistance are today intrinsically connected with identity. Identities are frequently voiced in subnational context where not full-fledged self-government is at stake but still the protection or allocation of more or less specific rights. To insist on identity is also to insist on certain rights and to be denied an identity implicates a denial of rights. Thus, immigrants demand the right to “protect” or “preserve” their identity which may include demands for school instruction in, among other things, their mother tongue and religion. People may of course also claim a separate national identity, implicating the necessity of a more general autonomy or even political independence. The recognition that identity is a matter of claims, rights, and power has resulted in the replacement of a simple concept of identity in many cases by the notion of politics of identity (534, emphasis in original).

Sökefeld argues that the “Janus-faced semantic structure” of identity allows for the simultaneous truth of both essentialist and constructivist positions, and that the move toward seeing identity as delineating difference—supplemented by plurality and intersectionality—is key in understanding that no identity is singular, although they might sometimes be presented, or even believed, as such for operational purposes. For me, this understanding foreshadows Beverly Diamond’s concept of alliance studies perfectly, as it foregrounds the relational nature of identity while still
acknowledging the role of individual agency in forming and defining alliances. If anthropology could be defined as “the study of group identity,”⁷ in which the importance of the self and agency have been reasserted, ethnomusicology can be seen to have followed along a similar path since it was linked with anthropology by Alan Merriam (Merriam and Merriam 1964).

“Identity” in Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicologists have been using the term “identity” for a long time, often without explicit definition or reference to similar work.⁸ The term was used by an ethnomusicologist—Mantle Hood—as early as 1958 (Warden 2015: 31), and reached its height of popularity in the 1990s. While Hood was explicitly referring to social identity, the dichotomy between individual vs. group, cultural, or social identity has been an issue in ethnomusicology, and in humanities scholarship in general, ever since. This dichotomy was brilliantly represented by historian Harold Mah in his deconstruction of the public, performative, personal identity of Johann Gottfried Herder, the man who invented the idea of ethnic identity (2003). Mah shows that Herder’s personal identity, while he busily argued for an essential “German” identity, was not solid, but was derived from a pastiche of models of idealized French and German identities. Mah says that while conventional wisdom has long held Herder to be an unwavering, rather one-dimensional exponent of German nationalism (in opposition to French-derived Enlightenment cosmopolitanism) actually his identity was constructed of contradictory “phantasies” that appeared in “the public sphere” to make different—sometimes contradictory—arguments. In the end, Herder’s own attempts to control his public image were no real match for the “phantom authority” of the public sphere. Such contradictions between individual and group identities are

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⁷ Ben Joffe, communication with the author, January, 2018.
⁸ I thank professor Jay Keister for introducing me to many of these texts in his “Music and Identity” seminar at the University of Colorado.
part of what makes the subject of identity so fundamental and intractable and its definition so elusive.

In an influential 2007 article, “Disciplining Ethnomusicology: A Call for a new Approach,” Timothy Rice made a harsh assessment of the state of theoretical discourse in the field of ethnomusicology based on his survey of articles in the journal Ethnomusicology dealing with the theme of music-and-identity over a period of 25 years ending in 2006. His findings were that, of the sixteen “idiographic ethnographies” (there was one “theoretical paper” in the corpus), none of them even defined identity as “a category of social life and of social analysis,” much less cited previous work on the theme either from within ethnomusicology or from without. Rice saw this as a huge oversight with negative implications for the field in terms of “intellectual and explanatory power” (318). While Rice’s critique of the lack of actual discourse about identity was cogent, the small sample size on which his argument was based—exclusively articles from Ethnomusicology—and the somewhat alarmist tone of his “call to arms” belied the fact that some music scholars had been defining and theorizing the concept of identity, albeit in individual and disconnected ways.

In his book, Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation (2008), Thomas Turino, perhaps answering Rice’s call to arms, defined the interrelated terms self, identity, and culture, and described the complex interactions of nature and nurture that combine to form our working identities in many different layers of meaning. Turino reasserted the importance of music for formulating and exhibiting our social identities and disambiguated the terms, defining them in relation to each other and through a common locus of habits. For Turino, the self is “a body plus the total sets of habits specific to an individual that develop through the ongoing interchanges of the individual with her physical and social surroundings;” identity is “the partial selection of
habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to others by oneself and by others;” and *Culture* is “the habits of thought and practice that are shared among individuals” (92). He then divides this concept into two, which he calls *cultural cohorts*, or the smaller sub-groups people divide themselves into, and *cultural formations*, or the larger societies, countries, or classes the cohorts exist within. Finally, he defines *habits* as tendencies “toward the repetition of any particular behavior, thought, or reaction in similar circumstances or in reaction to similar stimuli in the present and future based on such repetitions in the past (ibid.). These definitions still seem useful today, especially insofar as “identity” and “self” are conflated, and “culture” is treated as monolithic.

In 2003, Keith Negus had defined identity as “the characteristic qualities attributed to and maintained by individuals and groups of people,” and identified three questions that had been central to identity scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s: Do individuals have fixed natures, or do their personalities change? Do identity labels have any meaning? Are there multiple identities? Negus asserted that the study of music can contribute to understanding these questions, and set out his theoretical idea: that *essentialist* ways of looking at identity—that it is fixed, with inherent qualities—were giving way to *constructionist* ways, which Negus called “non-essentialist”—that identities are constantly constructed in a dynamic “articulation” between society, circumstance, and the individual.

Negus set out to weaken the essentialist argument in part by referring to debates about the racialization of the term “black music,” using as an example his characterization of Simon Frith’s assertion that black music is essentially somatic, spontaneous, contains call and response, and so forth. Negus then turns to Philip Tagg, who argued that there are no essential characteristics that can be assigned to black, or European, music that cannot be found in other
places and times, and that comparisons of the two are based on “highly selective stereotype[s]” (104). Negus endorses this non-essentialist position, but argues for caution in using the term black music, negotiating a “middle way,” as it were, between Frith’s essentialism and Tagg’s nihilism by drawing on Paul Gilroy’s nuanced and pragmatic use of the term as relating to changing diasporas of the black Atlantic world. In the end, Negus argues that there is no “intrinsic link between the lives of fans, the meaning of musical texts, and the identity of a particular artist.” Rather, that they should be treated as an interconnected continuum, which is moderated through a mutual process of “articulation,” a concept which he draws from Stuart Hall’s reading of Marx. Through a non-essentialist outlook, and using the conceptual tool of articulation, Negus says that the kinds of questions he has been talking about can be raised without assumptions about social labels and styles of music.

This kind of anti-essentialism is a recurring theme in ethnomusicological writing about identity. It has gone hand-in-hand with the concept of “identity construction,” and really started out as part of the postmodern project of deconstructing everything. In the words of Stuart Hall, identities were not even constructed by ourselves, but “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (1996). For Simon Frith, the idea of identity construction, in terms of both individuals and groups, was both unified and undermined: “they [social groups] only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment” (1996: 111). Richard Walzer’s 1992 study of the Catholic polka mass connected the disjunctive intersections of the polka mass to the postmodern de-realization experienced by ethnic communities. Walzer was critical of the nihilism that naturally

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9 This debate reminds me of Nāgārjuna’s Buddhist philosophy of the “Middle Way,” in which any postulate contains the flaws that lead to its refutation. On another level Nāgārjuna would negate the very terms and framing of this debate, since for him, the question of whether identities are fixed is long settled.
resulted from postmodernism’s penchant for the destabilization of concepts such as identity, and warned against assuming that just because some new combination of identities, cultures, or historical orientations might seem incongruous to a researcher, it might make perfect sense to the people who are using it.\(^1\)

The postmodern onslaught on the idea of identity construction did not make it go away. In the 21\(^{st}\) century it has been informed by attention to class and performativity. Daniel Traber’s critical historiography of the identity construction of suburban youth involved in the L.A. punk scene from 1977-83 characterizes them as enacting self-marginalization by identifying with an essentialized underclass (2001). Ten years later, Grace Hale was using similar language in her history of the American folk revival movement of the 1950s and 1960s, in which middle-class white youth “tried on” the identity of an oppressed other (2011). In 2013 Sylvia Alajaji analyzed the role played by music in constructing, mediating, and negotiating multiple strands and levels of identity among the Armenian exile community in Beirut, in which she saw a Gramscian “incubational moment” (241), where “spatial and temporal hybridities” (236) were utilized to forge new, more realistic, Armenian identities. Some recent dissertations in ethnomusicology either offer extensive new theorizations of identity (Warden 2017), or simply employ the word without much comment to denote how ethnic groups use outer signs to set themselves apart from other groups (Senungetuk, 2017).

Ethnomusicologist Nolan Warden has put forward a definition that takes into consideration the semantic range covered by many disparate definitions: “concepts about groups and individuals and one’s relationship to them.” I believe this is a good definition since, as Warden claims, it “allows for [the discussion of identity from the points of view of] both…representation and interpretation,” and because it treats identity as a concept—from a
\(^1\) Again, we are reminded of Nāgārjuna, as Walzer’s critique of Nihilism superficially echoes his.
Buddhist point of view, ultimately unreal. However, Warden’s choice of the word concept has to do not with ontology, but with ideology. Because of its association with branding, he employs it to signal that he “entertain[s] the possibility of a deeply embedded capitalist influence in the very concern for identity in both commercial and academic realms” (2017: 33).

Warden’s theorization of identity is well-thought-out and useful for untangling the subjective/objective conundrum, or the insider/outsider perspective, and is also neo-Marxian in that it treats identity—a concept—as a “virtual object” that can be “actualized in myriad tangible commodities or other virtual objects” and can be commoditized, with the labor that produced it traded for exchange value (2017: 41). His model is comprised of three “modes” or “forms,” of identity: participatory, presentational, and commodity. The participatory involves the emic perspective, and is “coterminous with what [the group sees] as meaningful practices.” The Presentational has the possibility of including the participatory, nonetheless is “usually a step removed from the people and their practices, but requires at least some knowledge of participatory Wixárika (Huichol—the indigenous Mexican group Warden studied) identity in order to create a selective presentation.” The Commodity mode is “primarily a commercial one, often taking a product or commodity form. It is distinguished from the other modes by being relatively disconnected from the people it purports to represent” (35). This scheme allows for discussion of identity as insiders and outsiders use it in various ways—ways that are not always directly connected and that are sometimes at odds. Of course, it is possible for cultural insiders to engage with identity through all three modes.

While some scholars have called for moving beyond identity in music research, it does not seem to be going away (a recent Google Scholar search of “music” and “identity” since 2013 returned 133,000 hits). Warden’s work demonstrates that fresh approaches are still being taken to
identity theories, with the potential to revitalize it as a framework of inquiry indefinitely. Additionally, in my work, “identity” is a salient theme, invoked often by my informants and collaborators in reference to their own projects and agendas. So, while I am reluctant to stop talking about identity completely, I agree with Beverly Diamond that identity is perhaps “not the best concept” with which to think about “how a globalized vision of modernity” is changing indigenous music, and “how…indigenous musicians [are] re-visioning [or recentering] their post-colonial position in the world at this juncture” (2007: 169).

**Tibetan and Himalayan Identity in Nepal**

Having said that, the people with whom I have been working are deeply invested in concepts of identity, and engage in strategic essentialism as part of their nationalist and sub-nationalist agendas. This is a form of the “politics of identity” described by Sökefeld, cited above. They come from two communities—indigenous Tibetan-speaking people from Nubri (Aris 1975; Childs 2001, 2004; Rogers 2008), and diasporic exile Tibetans (Huber 1997; Dodin and Räther 2001; Anand 2000, 2002, 2003; Norbu and Dhondup 2001; Diehl 2002; Misra 2003; McGranahan 2005, 2010; Stirr 2008; McConnell 2009; Morcom 2015; Yeh and Lama 2006; Yeh 2007, 2013). “Indigenous” is a loaded term, but one which has a lot of currency in present-day Nepal. The definition, from the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, is thus:

> those [people] which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. (UNWGIP 2012) (Diamond, Szego, and Sparling 2012).

In the context of Nepal the term can refer to a number of groups. Nubriwas (i.e., people from Nubri) are part of the *adivasi janajati* (indigenous nationalities) of Nepal. These are largely
Tibeto-Burman speaking groups of Buddhist or Shamanistic religion who predate the high-caste Hindu ruling elites of Nepal in their own territories and often refer to themselves as “Himalayan.”¹¹ Since the end of the Panchayat era (1960-1990), when ethnic identification was criminalized in many ways in a project of Nepali nationalism, indigenous groups have participated in an explosion of identity politics. Himalayans have founded ethnically based parties and organizations, many of which operate under the umbrella organization called Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN). These groups and their collective activism were instrumental in contributing to the ultimate success of Maoist insurgents in overthrowing the monarchy in 2006, after a ten-year war. The indigenous fight for equal rights and more autonomy in a new constitution has been hampered by the contradictions of essentialist ideology, as well as being betrayed by entrenched elites, who forced through an unsatisfactory constitution in the wake of the 2015 earthquakes (Toffin, 2009; Ismail and Shah 2015; Snellinger 2015; see also Gellner 2007).

The adivasi janajati movement has been “driven, fundamentally, by anti-brahmanism [anti-high-caste] and the overwhelming presence in public life of bahuns” [hill brahmins], who are represented in government and social institutions well out of proportion to their numbers in the population (Gellner 2007: 1825). Some in the movement have also attempted to organize around Buddhism “in order to oppose the presumed Hinduism of the parbatiya [Khas/Arya of the hills] high castes” (1825), but this excludes janajati who identify as Hindu, shaman, or Christian. The movement has also practiced strategic essentialism by accepting dominant narratives of indigeneity from the global discourse that frame indigeneity in contrast to settler colonialism, and define the indigenous as the original inhabitants of a particular place. In fact, some of the groups that identify as indigenous in Nepal have been shown to have arrived here relatively

¹¹ The “territories” of these groups are, for the most part, now home to highly diverse populations (see Toffin 2009).
recently, and to antedate other groups in their areas, such as the Sherpas, who are believed to have migrated from Tibet in waves in the 13th and 14th centuries (Bhandari, et al 2015), and the Tamang, who are dispersed throughout the country and have no single “homeland” (Gellner 2007: 1827).

The *janajati* are not simply defined in terms of their aboriginal claims to specific homelands, however, but have adopted a range of criteria that define them largely against the dominant Hindu castes. Pasang Yangji Sherpa writes: “According to NEFIN (2009), each indigenous nationality or Janajati has the following characteristics:

- A distinct collective identity;
- Own language, religion, tradition, culture and civilization;
- Own traditional egalitarian social structure;
- Traditional homeland or geographical area;
- Written or oral history;
- Having ‘We’ feeling—a sense of self-identity
- Has had no decisive role in the politics and government of modern Nepal;
- Who are the indigenous or native peoples of Nepal; and

These criteria emphasize the marginalization of indigenous groups at the hands of the high-caste Hindus and reiterate the belief that indigenous peoples “are who they say they are” (Sherpa 2006: 4, citing Bodley 2008). While a history of political, economic, linguistic, and religious dominance of these groups goes back centuries, the current discourse must be seen as arising out of a reaction to the Panchayat-era nation-building, with its mission of “One King, One Country, One Language, One Dress”, which was a project of homogenization of social and political
structures by the dominant caste group” (Bhattachan 2012: 13). During the thirty-year period between 1960 and 1990, indigenous systems of political organization, language, dress, and other outward expressions of ethnic identity were suppressed, resulting in their impoverishment. Thus, after the Panchayat era was ended in the wake of the *jan andolan* (people’s movement) of 1990, indigenous groups sought to reclaim their cultural practices in an explosion of identity politics which, though it was nominally unified through such organizations as NEFIN, also resulted in atomization as groups asserted specific, localized identities. In this context, the use of the term “indigenous” by Himalayan groups can be read to mean “non-Hindu,” more than to mean “aboriginal,” in that it is mainly a way for these groups to position themselves against the high-caste Hindus, who still dominate society and politics in spite of political gains made in recent years.

Nubriwas, and other ethnic Tibetans inhabiting the high mountainous areas along the Tibetan (Chinese) border have been largely on the fringes of the indigenous movement, which has been dominated by groups from the hills, due to their relative isolation and small numbers. However, many identify with indigenous struggles and seek to assert local-specific identities. Various indigenous Tibetan-speaking groups, formerly designated as *Bhotia* in Nepal, have never considered themselves a single ethnic group, and they distance themselves both from other Nepali indigenous groups and from exile Tibetans in favor of local identification (Ramble 1997). Even for *janajati* in Nepal, who are originally not part of the Hindu caste system, and whose aim in identity politics is ostensibly to be free from it, caste is an important element of identity. Indeed, “what is your caste” is one of the first questions Nepalis ask each other upon meeting (Gellner, 2001; 2007).
Diaspora is a term that ethnomusicologists and other students of global cultures cannot escape, and that, like “identity” and “indigeneity,” demands critical reflection. As Tina Ramnarine points out, diaspora is always defined as much by specifics as by commonalities:

While diaspora has something to do with ‘history’ it is also about ‘newness’. Ethnographic research has encompassed both modes, from analysis of historical specificity, musical memory and the preservation of tradition to the musical creativities, new performance spaces and new musical sounds of diasporic practices. The former mode reminds us that diasporas are historically specific and that the past shapes a sense of diasporic identity while the latter prompts us to question the rigidities and essentialisms of ‘diasporic identity’. The politics of diasporic identities often articulate with the politics of national, postcolonial and/or minority identities, leading to fresh sets of specificity and rigidity in thinking about diaspora (2007: 2).

The imperative of survival for many diasporic groups often entails essentialist thinking—both for members of the groups themselves and for outside observers. If we take the definition of diaspora to be “The condition and experience of a group of people living outside of their homeland and remaining connected to it in meaningful ways,” and understand the term as specifically referring “to a dispersion, scattering, or movement of people who share cultural practices and ethnic identity as well as a consciousness of displacement that oftentimes involves socio-political forces beyond their control” (Habib, Grove Music Online), then the global exiled community of Tibetans, consisting of refugees from, and since, the Chinese takeover of 1959 and their descendants, led by the Dalai Lama and Government-in-exile (Central Tibetan Authority, or CTA) in Dharamsala, India, certainly qualifies.

The term “diaspora” has undergone a broadening of meaning in scholarship since it was first widely used in the mid-20th century (Butler 2001; Brubaker 2006; Faist 2010). Originally, it “referred only to the historic experience of particular groups, specifically Jews and Armenians” (Faist 2010: 12), and necessarily denoted a dispersion from a homeland by force. As scholars in more and more disciplines began to use the word, migrant groups such as African, Caribbean,
Indian, Palestinian, and Haitian have been labeled diasporas, and specific types of diasporas, such as nationalist, labor, linguistic, and religious diasporas have been conceptualized (Brubaker 2006: 2). Some scholars have worried that the term has thus lost meaning to the extent that it may no longer be useful as an analytic category, and that the proliferation of the term is simply “due to the ‘sexiness’ of the discourse of diaspora in academia” (Butler 2001: 190).

Nevertheless, several criteria still remain that distinguish diasporas from just any group of migrants: multiple sites of dispersion; multigenerational dispersion to those sites; and processes of identity maintenance tied to an imagined homeland. While the exile Tibetan case conforms to the more traditional definition that implies coercion, looser definitions align with the phenomenon I have observed, in which some exile Tibetans in Nepal seek to rhetorically include Tibetan-speaking Himalayans, at least in terms of sympathy, under the umbrella of their diaspora. Additionally, Tibetans in exile work to some extent in concert with those inside Tibet towards “diasporic nationalism” (Misra 2003); they “continue to live as refugees and avoid assimilation into the host societies” (Anand 2000: 275); and the exile government has “worked hard to forge a national Tibetan identity to supercede divisive regional and sectarian identifications” (Yeh 2007: 250). In speaking of a Tibetan diaspora, I do not assume that it is literally a “thing,” or a “space,” in the sense Axel warns against. Indeed, assuming “that diaspora, rather than a community of individuals dispersed from a homeland, may be understood more productively as a globally mobile category of identification,” and its context “a process productive of disparate temporalities (anteriorities, presents, futurities), displacements, and subjects,” is in line with my internalized assumptions from Buddhist philosophy that such concepts are merely terminological—convenient handles which have nothing to say about entities (Axel 2004).
The project of cultural survival in exile—essentially, though not exclusively (Clifford, 1994), nationalistic in nature—has been carried out in terms of music by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) in Dharamsala (as well as its autonomous outpost in Nepal, the Lhamo Tshokpa) as the reconstruction and presentation of an artificially unitary version of a pre-1959 Tibetan nation and culture (Diehl 2002; Morcom 2011). Besides ascribing to the “Three Regions” of Tibet a modern national character which they never really had (Van Schaik 2011), the presentations of the Government-in-exile and its cultural agencies have also elided differences between so-called “settled refugees,” who fled Tibet in the twenty years immediately after the invasion, and “new arrivals,” who escaped Tibet since 1990 (Yeh 2007; Yamamoto 2017). This is not to deride or diminish the accomplishments of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Government-in-exile, or TIPA, all of which have been necessary and largely successful for the endurance and solidarity of a people robbed of their country. Instead, I am merely trying to account for the essentialist language used by members of the exile community in Nepal to describe their relationship to Tibetan-speaking groups of Nepalese citizens with whom they interact. As mentioned above, such strategic essentialism goes hand-in-hand with nationalism, not only in the post-colonial period, but stretching all the way back to the Romantic period of the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe.

**Toward Alliance Studies**

Beverly Diamond’s solution to the problematics of identity is to move towards “Alliance Studies,” a term she coined. This would entail a focus that is completely relational, encompassing not just how people understand, construct, and maintain individual or collective identities, but the alliances in which those understandings and actions operate, opening up “genre formations, technological mediations, language and dialect choices, [collaborations], and issues
of access and ownership” to scrutiny (2007: 171). At the same time it would expose and explain “patron discourse,” which “exoticizes” “distinctive” sounds, and which she feels has regulated identity studies in ethnomusicology. Diamond does not pretend hers is a completely original idea—she acknowledges “ethnomusicologists who focus on process, agency, and intersectionality,” and “theorists of diaspora who explore transnational flows and systems through which culture circulates in a world where both people and data move more rapidly than ever before” (ibid.). James Clifford actually touched on the metaphoric location of identity within relationality in the early 1990s—coincidentally in reference to similarly labeled populations to those in my study: “Diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by ‘tribal’ peoples” (1994: 307; see also Gellner 2001, 2007). Grace Hale has also called attention to alliance as a frame or context for identity: her analysis of the identity-construction of privileged whites, as they appropriated music of an essentialized “folk” is really the history of the interracial alliance between white middle-class youth counterculture and Southern African-Americans engaged in a struggle for freedom (Hale 2011). I believe that where Diamond is original is in her assertion that “our alliances produce our identities” (Diamond 2007: 171, emphasis mine).

The people with whom I have worked—the teachers, students, ordinary people, musicians, dancers, and singers, from both the Tibetan exile community and from Nubri as well as other Nepalese indigenous groups—are constantly forming myriad alliances and being “implicated” in others. Indeed, they often “define their identities through gestures of association, connection, inclusion, and sameness” (Linford 2016: 96). Exile Tibetans recruit Himalayan

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12 Diamond takes the term from Penny van Toorn, who defines it as “a set of normative expectations and ways of listening in non-Aboriginal society within which minority voices must struggle for audience” (172).
Nepalis to fill their monasteries, boarding schools, and music associations; Nepalese Himalayans look to exile Tibetans for cultural and religious training; Tibetan youth partner with Nepali youth to form bands to play Western and Western-inspired pop music; a Nubri singer makes a CD of Nubri songs with all the backing instruments played by exile Tibetans, and also makes music videos set in Nubri, but with Nepalese and other foreigners appearing in Tibetan dress. These alliances also extend to myself. Not only have I been a music student of Tibetan and Nepalese teachers, I have also been asked to help with grant writing, Western music education, guitar lessons, as well as to participate in musical collaboration—all of which I have enthusiastically accepted. All of these alliances form dynamic fields in which discourses of identity are articulated, negotiated, contested, and combined (and again, despite spatialized language, I am not thinking of it literally as space). This is rich material if we want to explore how people use music to imagine, express, and communicate who they are in relation to everyone else in the real, complex, messy, ever-changing world of “globalizing modernity.” Thus, following Diamond, I look at songs collected in Nubri “as theory not as objects to which we might apply theory,” and how they and other music might “define relationships” in a scene of multifarious alliances such as the Lhamo Tshokpa (2007: 171). I also consider my own implication in these relationships, not as problematic, but as an opportunity to help my friends, teachers, and collaborators in whatever ways I can under the banner of “applied (or collaborative) ethnomusicology.”

Alliance Studies as Applied Ethnomusicology and its Implications for a “Collaborative Ethnomusicology”

From the beginning of this project, I intended to function as an “applied ethnomusicologist,” and to look for ways my research activities could bring “material, symbolic, and political benefits for the research population, as its members have helped define these” (Seeger 2008: 278). Seeger seems to have taken this language directly from the American
Anthropological Association’s 2002 El Dorado Task Force’s statement on collaborative ethnography which, in addition to “giving back” to research populations, calls for collaboration on a much deeper level, in which “there a full give and take, where at every step of the research knowledge and expertise is shared” (quoted in Lassiter 2005: 84). While I have not reached this level yet, as I continue my research I hope to find ways not only to use my privilege to benefit the populations I work with, but also to collaborate completely in terms of formulating research questions, theorization, data collection and analysis, and the production of ethnographic texts, which has the potential to further decolonize both applied ethnomusicology and alliance studies.

That applied ethnomusicology involves an outside (read: Western) scholar helping marginalized groups implies that we should think about going beyond the idea of applied ethnomusicology, which still contains some residue of colonialism in its inherent power differential, and move toward a “collaborative ethnomusicology.”

While fully collaborative ethnography is still an ideal that I have not realized, I have not been able to avoid engaging in alliances with my collaborators that, while they may not have had much benefit yet, at least have that potential. One conventional applied project I implemented early on was called “Instruments for Nubri.” I commissioned five *dranyen* to be made in Boudha and arranged for their distribution to four schools—one in each major village—of Nubri. While this might seem a one-sided transaction, I consider it an alliance of collaboration. I was given the inspiration for this project directly from a woman in Sho village, who, after playing my *dranyen*, kept repeating wistfully “I haven’t played in nine years—oh, I wish I could buy one.” While persuading me to buy her a *dranyen* was not her intention, her words—and her playing—deeply affected me. The fact that there are very few instruments in Nubri was brought home to me, along with the realization that this was something I could easily do. So I created an Indiegogo
campaign and raised the majority of the cost. Three months later there were community dranyen housed in four schools and one in the hands of this woman from Sho. This also tangentially benefitted the instrument maker in Boudha, who got a big order, and the friend whom I paid to carry the instruments to Nubri and distribute them. Later, I raised more funds and gave instruments both to Pema Dhondrup and Dawa Dhondrup of Tsak village.

I was also asked to help the Lhamo Tshokpa with grant writing. So far I have helped them to polish the English language of two grant proposals they had already drafted. Even though the author of these proposals, an officer of the Lhamo Tshokpa, has very good English, writing such a proposal in a second language is daunting, and as a native speaker with experience in writing proposals, I was easily able to improve the proposals dramatically. These proposals were submitted through the Tibetan Government in Exile, and sent on to the Tibet Fund in New York for submission to the State Department of the United States, but unfortunately, cuts in funding by the current administration meant that there were no funds available. However, this alliance between the Lhamo Tshokpa and me is established, and I feel obliged to continue to help them in their search for funding into the foreseeable future. They sought out this alliance because they feel that I, as a Western academic, should be well-positioned to help them locate and secure sources of funding, and while that is technically true, the kind and amount of funding they need is not easily come by, and is complicated due to their underground status, as they are not legally allowed to receive donations from INGOs. Nevertheless, I think they are somewhat disappointed that I have not yet gotten results!

I have also found myself drawn into alliances in which I am sharing my knowledge with my collaborators and others. I have given guitar lessons to Nubri and Tibetan youth, as well as lectures on Western music to Nepalese ethnomusicology students at Kathmandu University,
affiliated institution. Jaco van den Dool has found that young Nepali musicians trying to learn unfamiliar Western pop musics in an era when “Musics and Musical practices fuse into hybrid forms” under the influence of transnational flows, “must overcome both social constraints and various musical challenges before they can actively involve themselves in learning new music styles” (2016: 107). By seeking alliance with me, these youth gain skills and knowledge they would otherwise have less access to, and position themselves in relation to transnational commercial culture not only as consumers, but as potential producers of global pop, rock, or jazz music. At the same time, I am learning much from them, not only about Nepali pop and folk music, but about the global pop scene from which I am somewhat removed, even though an ethnomusicologist, due to age and interest. Thus we have become indelible parts of each other’s lives, a fact that will continue to affect what we do and think in terms of music in to the future.

Alliance has also taken the form of musical collaboration. I have performed with the Nubri singer Pema Dhondrup on several occasions. I have accompanied him on dranyen in his home village of Tsak, to the delight of his fellow villagers, and backed him up on guitar at a large wedding party in Kathmandu. On that occasion, one song we played was a Nepali pop song, Khani Ho Yhamu, by Trishna Gurung (see Chapter 5: 192). By choosing to perform this song with me, Pema was signaling multiple levels of positionality to his audience. By placing it in a program that mainly contained Nubri and Tibetan traditional songs and Tibetan pop songs, he placed himself simultaneously in Nubri, the Tibetan diaspora, and Nepal. By using the accompaniment of a Western guitarist, he also connected himself to the globalizing modernity outside, but also within, his own country.

While these alliances may appear to be random and haphazard, and may not rise to the level of methodological rigor of some of the approaches outlined in The Oxford Handbook of
Applied Ethnomusicology (2015: Pettan, Titon, Eds.), I believe that they show that it is very hard not to end up with some kind of applied element if one is forging genuine relationships with collaborators in the spirit of reciprocity. The ideal of objective distance that was once imagined by our forebears in the field is unattainable, and would not be useful even if we could attain it—the conditions, including globalizing modernity, will not allow it.

Alliance Studies “On the Ground”

If, as Beverly Diamond suggests, alliance studies is a better framework for understanding indigenous (and I would add diasporic, since it also applies to the exile Tibetans with whom I have worked) modernities, how would such a framework be employed “on the ground?” Diamond says that alliance studies “might look at ways that concepts and social relations of the past are embedded in the present” and “track connections to places or networks of people.” She proposes a model in which six different “foci” cut across a continuum from “mainstreamness” to “distinctiveness,” to account for the fact that indigenous (or in the case of my study, also diasporic) musicians might both create music that “sounds indigenous” (distinctive) or that adheres to pop or other familiar genres (mainstream), and that the artists might make different choices in those situations (2007: 172). Keeping that continuum in mind, I will now briefly discuss each of Diamond’s six foci and how they are relevant to, or how I have applied them to my project. Where possible, I will give a brief example, each of which will be explicated in later chapters.

Genre Formations

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13 Initially, Diamond gives five foci, but she quickly adds “collaboration,” which she associates with “genre formation” and “citational practices.” I include it along with the latter.
Diamond associates genre formation first with commodification—the creation of marketing categories—the area where she feels “patron discourse” is most salient. She quickly adds, though, that various “mediators” are “implicated in systems of labeling and categorization” (2007: 171). In the case of Tibetan and Himalayan music, at least of pop and folk genres, it “is not profitable, and even though it is pop [or folk] music and monetised, it is not ‘commercial,’ and in fact is seen and structured more as ‘community work.’ Exile Tibetan pop music thus cannot be located outside of capitalism, yet at the same time it is not in and of itself capitalist” (Morcom 2015: 274). Thus genre categories in Tibetan and Himalayan music are created for communal, rather than commercial reasons. When the Lhamo Tshokpa performed at Himalayan Fest near Boudha in 2017, they carefully included songs from the “Three Regions” (chol kha gsum) of Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, which comprise the regional variation ascribed to the Tibetan national imaginary by TIPA and the CTA, and by extension, the Lhamo Tshokpa. This reinforces alliances that go back to the beginning of exile, and remind the refugee Tibetans present that Tibetans are one people under the Dalai Lama. The fact that Kham and Amdo songs are not sung in local dialects is partly due to the fact that most of the teachers and senior artists of Lhamo Tshokpa, or their forebears, are from central and western Tibet and do not speak those dialects, and the teachers there are trained by TIPA, which teaches them this way (Morcom 2011). It also stylistically mirrors the constructed unity of the pre-1959 “nation” and sends a subtle message about who the cultural gatekeepers are in the exile community—the remnants of the “old Lhasa” aristocracy that has historically dominated exile culture (Diehl 2002). Interestingly, this same pattern can be seen in the nationalist musical remodeling project of the Panchayat regime (Henderson 2002), whose remnants are still visible today, in the practice of teaching Nepali students “folk dances” derived from hill ethnic groups, but sung in the lingua
fanca of Nepali, thus “standardizing across rather than within language groups” and reinforcing the dominance of ruling elites through language choice.¹⁴

In a YouTube video of a song called “Dzema Kusuk Dem Dem” (mdzes ma sku gzugs ldem ldem), or “Supple-bodied Beauty,” Pema Dhondrup of Nubri positions himself in several ways related to genre.¹⁵ First, the title of the video begins with “Nubri Song,” and is entirely shot in the stunning environment of Nubri, making clear from the start that whatever the traditionally conceived genre of this song (probably la gzhas, or “love song”), it is presented as by and for Nubriwas. At the same time, the instrumentation of the song consists of the dranyen (lute), and yangching (hammered dulcimer), two of the four instruments of the traditional “Lhasa ensemble,” which provide the standard sound of TIPA music and are, in fact, played by a TIPA-trained refugee musician on the recording—an actual alliance between Himalayan and Tibetan that reveals their deep relationship, and adds to layers of indirect TIPA influence on Nubri through Tibetan pop music. The music is thus marked instrumentally as traditionally Tibetan. On a third level, while the song starts out sounding very traditional (in that it consists entirely of traditional acoustic instrumentation), or “distinctive,” on several later verses Pema breaks into rap. This signals a broader alliance with Nepali and global youth culture, without alienating traditionalists. Thus the video invokes three genres at the same time: Nubri song, Tibetan song, and hip-hop. The music remains stripped down, with just the two acoustic instruments, and with the rap overlay the sound straddles the “mainstream” and the “distinctive” simultaneously. To take the global alliance a step further, a young male Westerner, dressed in Tibetan (Nubri) garb, also appears in the video, clowning with Pema in a couple of scenes. This shows that foreigners

¹⁴ Geoff Childs, communication with the author, 13 March, 2018.
too can participate, if only they visit, an important alliance for Nubri as tourist dollars are a significant part of its income.

**Technological Mediations**

As Diamond says, “technological choices made during recording, arranging, or mixing processes help determine genre alliances and related associations that listeners may make in a multi-valent manner” (2007: 171), and opens the music up to influence by studios and producers, who often use their own standard sounds, procedures, and musicians. In 2015 the Lhamo Tshokpa produced a DVD of *nangma*, or “classical” Tibetan songs with a grant from the Tibet Fund of New York, an organization that works with the government-in-exile to distribute funds, primarily from the U.S. State Department, to exile Tibetan projects and needs. This series of six song videos was professionally produced on the stage of a high school in Kathmandu with state of the art lighting, sound, and cameras. The Lhamo Tshokpa assigned its core troupe of professional artistes to the performances, dressed in their finest costumes. The overall effect was surprisingly polished for being filmed on a high-school stage, and highlighted TIPA aesthetics exclusively. The regulation costumes representing the Three Regions appeared on the appropriate songs, and the performers employed TIPA-style melodramatic stagecraft. The alliance foregrounded here was with the global exile community, which allowed for the project to be funded. Since the Lhamo Tshokpa is founded and administered by exile Tibetans who are not citizens of Nepal, they are not able to officially register as a non-profit group. Therefore, avenues of funding are extremely limited. They depend on organizations like Tibet Fund, as well as small private donations, to cover their operating costs. The grant they received for this project paid for the production and covered their overhead during several months of rehearsal, and gave
the performers a small stipend. Maintaining alliance with the global exile community by aligning with the official ideology is just good financial sense.

The previously mentioned video of Pema Dhondrup, as well as his entire CD, which the song is drawn from, is another example of how technological mediation can position multiple alliances. The CD is titled “Nubri Toshe Tashi Drayang” (nub ri bstod gzhas bkra shis sgra dbyangs), by “Nubriwa Pema Dhondrup.” The songs are all either newly composed or traditional folk songs that often reference or index Nubri in some way in their texts. The musical accompaniment, however, is played on the traditional instruments of central and western Tibet by TIPA-trained exile Tibetans. Thus the music can be heard as either indigenous Nepalese Himalayan, or Tibetan, or both, possibly by the same person. An alliance is both enacted by the actual musicians on the recording, and signaled through layers of sound and text.

**Language and Dialect Choice**

For Beverly Diamond, dialect choice, rather than “an identity performance,” is an “alliance-making activity” (2007: 178). All the people in my study are multilingual. In Kathmandu at a wedding for a friend from Tsum valley (an ethnically Tibetan valley adjacent to Nubri, but with a different dialect), when Pema Dhondrup sings a Nepali pop song for a range of Nepalese guests, accompanied by myself on the guitar, he is music-making alliances with other Nepalis, in the *lingua franca* of Nepal. Comprehension is an important delimiting factor, even within a linguistic community, such as when youth lack proficiency in the native language. At Lhamo Tshokpa, many of the younger students are Himalayan Nepalis who have spent most of their childhood in Kathmandu. Though they know Tibetan, they are presumably more comfortable in Nepali. Lhamo Tshokpa classes are conducted exclusively in Tibetan, however, letting the students know that if they want to participate in this alliance, from which they will
gain respect from their mastery of cultural knowledge, they have to be proficient in the language. This can also be seen when Dawa Döndrup, of Tsak village in Nubri, sings the song “Pasang Bhuti” (see Chapter 3), which contains Nubri dialect words like “pam” (spam) for “attractive” and “ka-o” (ka’o) for “belt.” Use of these words can exclude not only Tibetan speakers from other groups, but youth who lack language skills, from full understanding. This is where music is capable of filling the communication gap by educating youngsters in their local dialects.

**Collaboration and Citational Practices**

Collaboration and citation are closely related, “yet quite different in some ways, as a form of alliance,” and “cast power relations differently within the alliance studies model” (2007: 171). When Diamond speaks of power relations, she is really speaking of control. TIPA or the Lhamo Tshokpa might appropriate control in citing a song in their performance as an “Amdo song,” even though stylistically, it might not satisfy a listener from Amdo. In the case of citation, it is done at a distance. The Amdo listener doesn’t really have a chance to respond. Citation can also be used to create continuity with the past, as when Pema Dhondrup introduces a song in performance by saying “this is a very old Nubri song.” No one has the ability to check whether it is old or not, with the possible exception of insiders who might know—his audience has to take his word for it. Many other kinds of citation are possible. One more example is the use of drums and bells in Pema Dhondrup’s video and recording of “Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang” (nub ri bstod gzas bkra shis sgra dbyang), or “Auspicious Melody Nubri Praise Song.” Non-monastic folk song does not generally use these instruments, which are usually reserved for liturgical

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16 “Gaining respect from friends and family for acquiring cultural knowledge” is one of the main reasons Himalayan youth have told me they spend their Saturdays learning performing arts from exile Tibetans.

17 Pema Dhondup Lama, “Nubri Song, Nubri Toshi by Pema Dhundup Lama,” YouTube video, 4:45, posted by PHOTO STATION May 26, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRAmiBv5g5Q.
music. Their use here “cites” their association with religious ritual to underline the importance of Buddhism to Nubri’s (and Tibet’s) culture.\(^\text{18}\)

Collaboration is the most obvious form of alliance, and I discuss it in depth in Chapter Five, so I won’t say much about it here, other than to point out that all of the examples I have given so far involve multiple collaborations. It also involves me more, or at least in more conspicuous ways, than the other foci, especially when it comes to my conception of applied ethnomusicology, as discussed above. It also casts as alliance the musical collaborations I have engaged in, and plan to continue, with some of my Nepali and Tibetan partners—which have been very fulfilling for me as a musician, besides benefitting me as a researcher by building trust and comfort between members of the communities and myself.

**Issues of Access and Ownership**

In Diamond’s words, “indigenous music and dance as intellectual property is hardly a new concern” (2007: 186). With the file sharing capabilities of the internet and the well-established pirating culture of South Asia, it would be intuitive to think that Tibetan and Himalayan artists like Pema Dhondrup and the Lhamo Tshokpa would be at risk of losing money, but as Anna Morcom has shown, there is no money to be made even in Tibetan pop music, much less in traditional music. There is virtually no market for this music outside its own communities, and artists often spend their own money to produce CDs and DVDs. This does result in some income for recording studios, producers, and session musicians, but the artists themselves stand to make very little. Because Tibetan music is not inherently part of the capitalist system, but has to operate within it, artists like Pema Dhondrup and organizations like the Lhamo Tshokpa must navigate many of the same procedures that anyone trying to make it in

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\(^{18}\) I discuss this song and video in some detail in a forthcoming article in *The American Music Research Center Journal* titled “Meaning, Melody, and YouTube in Irish and Tibetan Traditional Musics.”
the global music industry must go through—hiring, scheduling, and rehearsing musicians, booking studio time, organizing manufacturing and printing, managing social media accounts, securing performance venues and dates, and—in a perfect world—copyrighting material. I say this because I don’t think there is any formal copyright on the Lhamo Tshokpa’s DVDs, and I know there is not on Pema Dhondrup’s CD. So why make these DVDs and videos if there is no profit? In both cases the motivation is essentially political—these videos are instrumental in projecting the group identities the parties want to promote, while at the same time enhancing their status as culture bearers.

Since, at this point, no one stands to make meaningful money by commoditizing this music, it is probably not a problem. Since much of the music is traditional, it would presumably come under public domain anyway, but some of it is newly composed and all of it is arranged. In addition, the artists would be entitled to the mechanicals (royalties per copy) on the actual recordings. If, for some reason, these recordings did start making money, the artists might have another problem—they might face resentment from their own communities. As Anna Morcom points out, artists like these are making music for communitarian reasons. The traditional material they draw from is considered the property of everyone, if it is considered property at all. The musicians might sometimes make some money by performing, but as Morcom also says, this is more often than not done for charity. The ownership of the music is, perhaps, indicative of the biggest alliance of them all.

When Pema Dhondrup was guiding me back to Kathmandu from Nubri, a four-day trek, we were waylaid in a Gurung village called Jagat, one day’s walk from Nubri, by an evangelical Christian missionary. This missionary prevailed on Pema to stay for two days and perform in the village Christmas pageant. He even begged me to stay and perform as well, saying “we really
need Pema to perform here because all these people are his fans, and they really want to see him sing!” But I was anxious to get back to Kathmandu and declined. Pema declined as well, telling the missionary that he had promised to get me back to the valley. The missionary came back after making a phone call and said to Pema “okay, you get your friend home and in two days we will send a helicopter to pick you up in Kathmandu and bring you back for the performance.” I was shocked that they were willing and able to spend that much money—a helicopter charter can cost as much as $4,000—and I was a little surprised at first that Pema wanted to do it. Pema is a devout Buddhist and he has expressed concern about the progress being made by missionaries in his area—missionaries who sometimes do their illegal evangelizing under the cover of aid organizations (Coburn 2017).

Later, I realized that of course Pema would perform for this Christmas pageant. Christian or not, these villagers are not only Pema’s loyal fans, but his neighbors, friends, and community. Pema has been walking this road all his life and knows everyone in that village personally, and is very close with some of them. I doubt the missionaries paid him much, if anything, beyond his expenses, and he would not have expected it—that is not why he is doing what he does. The villagers in Jagat are mostly Gurung and for the most part don’t speak Tibetan. Pema communicates with them in Nepali, and probably would have sung some Nepali songs in his set. He would have done this all for the sake of alliance, though he would probably just call it “friendship” or “helping out” (sometimes the same word—rogs pa—in Tibetan) I consider it an unforgivable ethnomusicological blunder that I did not stay two more days to see and document the event.

Conclusion
In this chapter I traced the history of identity studies, both in the wider social sciences as well as in ethnomusicology, and tried to show the path I have taken to what Beverly Diamond has dubbed “alliance studies.” I have explained my understanding of that model and detailed how I am applying it to my ethnographic project. To date, though many have cited Diamond, and some have employed her paradigm to some extent (i.e., Klassen 2007; Hillhouse 2010; Guilbalt 2011; Knudsen 2011; Conn 2012; Forsyth 2012; Perea 2012; Bissett Perea 2012; Renner 2012; Warden 2015; Linford 2016; Senungetuk 2017), and one dissertation has employed it extensively (Kheshgi 2016), I have not yet found an example in the literature of anyone actually using Diamond’s model as the primary framework of a dissertation. I hope that my research can contribute to a developing field of alliance studies, as I believe it has a great deal of promise as a theoretical framework to rejuvenate the perennial topic of identity in ethnomusicology.

As is mentioned above in the context of diaspora, music is necessary for the survival of diasporic communities like the Tibetans. I believe this is also true for indigenous communities like Nubri who, in some ways, are quite diasporic once they migrate to Kathmandu. Indeed this holds true for any community, marginalized or not. Thus we can think of music—and likewise alliance—as adaptive. Musical alliance is essential to the survival of human groups, and since human beings are social animals, by extension, human individuals. As ethnomusicologist Brenda M. Romero eloquently writes:

> Survival can imply more than the violence associated with the “survival of the fittest” and social Darwinism. Let us imagine that sage humans have contemplated these things in the past and over millennia have developed musical intellectual concepts big enough to save the humans from themselves, precisely because those sages have understood music as a force for surviving in the world. Others have apparently seen this as evolutionary or pre-modern behavior…They seem to fail to see the value of the immediacy of this behavior for basic survival in contemporary life: why should group behavior be less coded for survival now, than in the remote past? (2015: 127-128)
The answer is, it shouldn’t. We live in an era of late capitalism, in which neoliberal ideology seeks to penetrate and dominate every corner of the earth, when more and more folk music and other common cultural goods have been commoditized and made to create value for the owner classes. “Performers can also be seen to be increasingly framing themselves and being framed in discourses of entrepreneurship as they develop careers in post-Fordist flexible capitalism,” and “copyright regimes have been instituted in more and more of the world” (Morcom 2015: 277). Yet, we are still possessed of the instinct for alliance—with the intuitive knowledge that without connection to family, friends, and community, we are nothing.
When I set out to collect a sample of songs from Nubri, I intended to record in as many villages as possible. My initial trip in November and December of 2016 was accomplished on a trekking permit, which is required since Nubri is within the restricted Manaslu trekking area. Due to my not being able to return a second time, as discussed in Chapter 1, the songs I have collected so far are almost all from Tsak village in lower Nubri (Kuthang), which is where I was able to spend the most time. One might then ask why I did not title this chapter “Songs of Tsak,” and it is a good question, especially considering that for most of history, Kuthang was not even considered part of Nubri, and even had—and has—a different language. My first answer to this would be that Kuthang and Nubri are not mutually exclusive. Kuthang has undergone a process of Tibetanization since at least the 16th century, and the use of Tibetan language has grown over the last four decades. Since at least the 1990s, Kuthang has been included in Nubri in the minds of many who live there. My main informant and guide, Pema Dhondrup, is from Tsak, yet bills himself as a “Nubri singer.” He calls the songs he sings Nubri songs, and when he was introducing me to local singers, he told them I wanted to hear Nubri songs. Perhaps that is why I did not hear any songs in the Kuthang language. When I asked Pema Dhondrup if there are any songs sung in Kuthangke, he said yes, but Lama Pema Gyamtsho, a highly educated lama from Nubri and an expert on local songs, categorically denied this. I will have to go back to Nubri before I can investigate this further. Although I sometimes heard groups of people conversing in Kuthangke, people usually spoke Tibetan (this may well be because they knew I spoke Tibetan), and some members of the community, such as Pema Dhondrup’s wife, Pema Dekyi, have married into Kuthang from the more Tibetan upper Nubri, and do not know the Kuthang
language. The second answer I would give is that this is only the beginning of my project of documenting the songs of Nubri. I plan to return in the near future and record songs in all the villages of the valley. Having said that, the songs I have recorded mark the first time any songs from Nubri have been formally documented by an ethnomusicologist.

Nubri music is part of the wide variety of musics that are often termed, for the sake of convenience, under the umbrella of “Tibetan music,” which includes somewhat disparate musics from far-flung regions of the Tibetan cultural domain, from Amdo to Tö, as well as closely related areas outside Tibet, like Bhutan, Nepal, Ladakh, and Sikkim. This music, while it has many dialects, is generally melodic, strophic, modal, and heterophonic, and also includes the liturgical music of monasteries and of non-monastic yogis (ngakpa). This liturgical music, according to Polina Butsyk, has been written about and theorized for centuries in the Tibetan language. But when she talks about the “traditional music culture of Tibet,” she is actually referring only to liturgical music culture:

Tibetan music theory works of the 11th-19th century contain many valuable sources, in which are contained descriptions of the elements of the traditional musical culture of Tibet. In them we find theoretical generalizations in the field of musical aesthetics and philosophy, compositions, performance practices, instructions and training, symbolic musical signs and their functional specifications. Their appearance shows that the Tibetan musical culture of the considered period already had reached a stage in its development distinguished by complex structures of genres, set systems of rules concerning making musical material and performance, and functional and significant variety of musical works (2016).

There are no such treatises in Tibetan about what is often called secular music—the non-liturgical music of the ordinary people.

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19 According to Geoff Childs, Kuthangke is still in primary usage in Tsak, Kok, Gyayul, and Bihi (communication with the author, 13 March, 2018).
20 Excerpt translated from Russian by David Gitlen.
The categories of “sacred” and “secular,” which have been long used in Western musicology, are misleading in discussing music in Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist cultural areas. In these cultures Buddhism permeates every aspect of society, and music is no exception. While the liturgical music of the Buddhist monasteries and the vernacular song and dance of the laity are quite separate, the songs used by the ordinary people in celebrations, weddings, and work are infused with religious content. Thus in general I will follow Anna Morcom in referring to these separate realms of music as “monastic” and “non-monastic” (Morcom 2004), although “liturgical,” “para-liturgical” and “non-liturgical” are also useful categories. In this dissertation I will often refer to Tibetan traditional non-monastic music as “folk music,” in spite of that term’s problematization in ethnomusicological and folkloric scholarship (Wilson, 1973; Keil, 1978; Dorson, 1978; all cited in Henderson, 2002). While the term has baggage of nationalism and nostalgia, it is popularly understood in the Western world to mean the traditional, orally transmitted, music of the common people. It also has an equivalent in the Tibetan language, mang lu (dmangs glu), literally “folk song,” which is understood, at least in exile, in very much the same way (although this, too, is problematic as the term is probably modern and has been appropriated by the PRC to mean “revolutionary people’s song” (see Morcom, 2004). That term has, however, “largely faded in the post cultural revolution period.” In general, Tibetans refer to non-monastic song as lü shay (Tib., glu gzhas, or “song-song”), or lü or shay individually (in Nubri, they usually say lü, whereas in Kathmandu, most people I know say shay). This is what my interlocutors understand as “folk song,” thus it is useful as a concept to refer to the vernacular songs of the people, used for entertainment, work, or social rituals such as marriage and festivals. However, it should not be taken to imply antiquity. Even though some songs may indeed be old, much of this music is relatively recently composed, or has new texts applied to

21 Anna Morcom, communication with the author, September 2017.
older melodies. While genres of folk song vary somewhat regionally, overall there is a lot of commonality. Genre in Tibetan folk music has been touched on to varying degrees by ethnomusicologists over the decades (Tucci 1966; Crossley-Holland 1967; Lhalungpa 1969; Samuel 1976, 1986; Collinge 1993, 1997; Morcom 2004; Craun 2011; Zla ba sgrol ma 2012).

Following is a partial list of Tibetan folk song genres, some of which overlap, and not all of which exist in all areas:

- praise songs (*bstdod gzhas*), or songs from the Tingri area (*stod gzhas*)
- wedding songs (*khrung glu gzhas chen*)
- work songs (*las zhas*)
- beer songs (*chang gzhas, chang glu*)
- call and response (*gab tshig*)
- sad songs (*skyo glu*)
- songs of homesickness (*pha yul dran glu*)
- circle-dances (*sgor gzhas*)
- dance songs (*khrab gzhas, bro gzhas*)
- lullabies (*phru gu snyal yag gi gzhas*)
- love songs (*la gzhas, brtse gdung gi gzhas, dga’o gzhas*)

I found several of these genres in Nubri, and I can only assume the others are sung there as well—which I hope to document in a follow-up project to this dissertation research.

While musicologists have paid serious attention to the theory and structure of Tibetan liturgical music (Ellingson 1974, 1979a, 1979b, 1986, 2003; Canzio 1976), very little musicological analysis has been done on Tibetan folk music. This is partly because unlike monastic music, Tibetan non-monastic music traditionally has no explicit theory, notation, or treatises. Tibetan culture tends to assign low status to folk music, resulting in a lack of Tibetan-language writing on the subject—a situation that historically mirrors Western music scholarship. Trewin and Stephens (1976) and Dinnerstein (2013) have done detailed work on Ladakhi music, but that is, as Dinnerstein quotes Francke (1904), “so entirely different from Tibetan music and dancing that non-Tibetan influences must be suspected” (Dinnerstein 137). Ian Collinge goes

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22 List partially drawn from Craun.
into some detail on a “new lexicon” for Tibetan music being developed by native scholars in
Tibetan-language sources, especially Dge ’dun (1989, 1993), and Zhol khang Bsod nams Dar
rgyas (1992, 1996), which goes a long way toward describing a modern, native-generated music
theory for non-monastic music (Collinge 1997).

While ethnomusicologists and their forbears since Alexander J. Ellis in the late 19th
century have seen the problems in applying Western music theory to non-Western musics, and in
recent decades much effort has been expended to “de-colonize” the discipline, avoiding
hegemonic Western concepts and seeking to foreground “native” music theories, there is always
the danger of overcompensation. Terms that might have utility can be unnecessarily abandoned,
in favor of neologisms, for fear of imposing Western assumptions as universal. Just as we can
use English grammatical terms, such as verb tenses and cases, to describe non-English grammars
without assuming those grammars behave in the same way as English, I believe we can use
musical terms, such as scale and mode, when we deem them applicable, to describe the workings
of many non-Western musics without carrying over the baggage those terms may have in
Western music theory contexts. As Collinge points out, since such terminology is generally
lacking in Tibetan folk music, some modern Tibetan scholars have sought to create it, largely
influenced by Western music theory. Indeed, since Tibetan musicians within Tibet and in the
diaspora adopted the Chevé system of numerical notation in the 1950s, a certain amount of
Western music theory has become inextricably entwined with their traditional music (Collinge
1997: 94). Having said this, there are some terms I use—particularly “major” and “minor” in
terms of scales—that carry associations in the West with moods like “happy” and “sad.” While
these scales are undoubtably major and minor in their form, more work needs to be done to find
out if Tibetans have similar associations or make differentiations between the two. In using the terms I do not mean to imply that they do.

In Collinge’s system the degrees of the major scale are represented in writing as numbers 1-7, which are then pronounced and sung according to Western solfege syllables do, re, mi, and so forth. Thus they are using a “scale” by definition, and it seems unnecessary to coin some other term, such as “collection-of-notes,” to avoid imposing Western ideas. Similarly, the term “mode” seems germane when discussing the collections-of-notes of different interval structures used in Tibetan melodies, since this music is now learned and taught with a “fixed-do” system. Thus some melodies are said to start on do, some on re, and some on la—exactly analogous to Western modes. Therefore, I will use terms such as scale, mode, interval, etc., or the modern (or not-so-modern) equivalents Collinge lists from modern Tibetan scholars, with the caveat that I am using them in the context of Tibetan folk music, without all the implications they carry in Western music. Similarly, I will use terms such as tonic, modulation, and dominant to describe hierarchical movements in melody, without implying the presence of functional harmony, which is unknown in Tibetan music traditionally. That being said, modern Tibetan and Himalayan musicians are not ignorant of harmonic music, and blend it freely with traditional music. Artists like Tsering Gyurme and many others mix traditional and Western instruments in traditional and quasi-traditional melodies with functional harmony without compunction. I believe the reason this works so easily is that Tibetan melodic language is in some ways similar to that used by many folk musics of Europe and elsewhere in the world.

One confusing point in Collinge’s article is his [mis-]use of the term “absolute pitch.” Rather than referring to a fundamental frequency, he is talking about the “fixed-do,” which is actually relative in terms of pitch. Thus he does not say anything about intonation, tuning, or
temperament, which are completely untheorized in Tibetan music. It may be that an implicit theorization as such exists within the music itself, prior to Western influence, but it is far beyond the scope of my study to comment on that, although it is an interesting question. I would leave it to scholars with much more knowledge of acoustics and mathematics than myself. I am comfortable in saying that, in using electronic tuners and midi instruments, modern Tibetan musicians adopt equal temperament by default, and no one seems to be bothered by it. In instances when I am referring to what Collinge calls absolute pitch, I will use the term “fixed-do.” With those caveats I will describe the aspects of Collinge’s article that I will use in analyzing the melodies of Nubri songs.

According to Collinge, “Many Central Tibetan songs are based on anhemitonic pentatonic modal structures. Some are hexatonic and a few heptatonic. Only in certain regions or in certain song genres is there much use of the semitone interval” (102). Let it be said that when the scale is hexi-or heptatonic, as it is in most changlu, the semitone is necessary. Bear in mind that Collinge’s scheme is a “native” conception, in that it is a translation of Dge ‘dun’s work, but that it is modern rather than traditional—traditionally there is no such theory.
The terms for the scales (gdangs) are lnga ldan gyi gdangs (pentatonic), drug ldan gyi gdangs (hexatonic), and bdun ldan gyi gdangs (heptatonic). Collinge also lays out the five pentatonic modes (also gdangs), which Dge ‘dun takes from the Tibetan translations of the Indian scale degrees, and are thus named after their respective modal tonic. Therefore a pentatonic scale starting on diatonic scale degree 1 is called drug skyes; on scale degree 2 is khyu mchog; on scale degree 3 is dri ‘dzin; on scale degree 5 is lnga pa; and on scale degree 6 is blo gsal.

Collinge further explains that Tibetan songs can have one or more secondary, or “modal tonics,” called “ma dra” (ma sgra), or “mother tones” in addition to the “song tonic” or “dzodra” (gtso sgra) (104). A “resting tone” on a ma dra tonic can be similar to a cadence, while moving to a secondary mode for one or two measures can be thought of as a “temporary modulation.” In practice, it is not clear if all of these modes are employed in traditional music. In Dge ‘dun’s model, these are the modes of a pentatonic scale, resulting in different intervallic structures for each mode. Since most of the songs I recorded in Nubri are hexatonic, Collinge’s pentatonic modes are not usually directly applicable to them. However, the concept of mode does

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tonic</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Tonic</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Intervals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ག ར</td>
<td>(drug skyes)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>123-56</td>
<td>2, 2, 3, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ག ར</td>
<td>(khyu mchog)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23-56-1</td>
<td>2, 3, 2, 3, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ག ར</td>
<td>(dri 'dzin)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-56-12</td>
<td>3, 2, 3, 2, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ག ར</td>
<td>(lnga pa)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56-123</td>
<td>2, 3, 2, 3, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ག ར</td>
<td>(blo gsal)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6-123-5</td>
<td>3, 2, 2, 3, 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Five Tibetan Pentatonic Modes

Figure 2: Collinge's table of modes (1997, drawn from Dge 'dun 1989)
seem to apply, especially when considering how melodies lie on the dranyen. The Tibetan conception of pitch and scale are largely based on the modern use of Western solfege syllables, each of which, other than do, has only one position on the fingerboard. Thus no matter what the mode, the note names remain fixed, which means that in practice where a tune is played on the dranyen behaves in a modal fashion. For example, if the tonic, or “home note” of a minor pentatonic melody is d’ rather than a’, it corresponds to the Western Dorian mode, because it starts on re, even though there is no actual difference in the interval structure between Dorian and Aeolian in pentatonic form. Note that this differs from Dge ‘dun’s pentatonic mode scheme because rather than five modes based on the notes of a pentatonic scale, what I am describing are two structurally identical pentatonic modes based on the second and sixth degrees of a seven-note major scale. This is what Collinge is describing when he talks about pentatonic mode one, or druk gyä (the same as pentatonic major), being the same when transcribed up a fourth. The minor pentatonic mode in Dge ‘dun’s scheme is mode 5, or blo gsal. These are the only two pentatonic modes which appear in my collection of Nubri songs. While I can’t apply Dge ‘dun’s pentatonic modes to many of my melodies, I will employ the terms “mother note,” “song tonic,” “resting tone,” and “temporary modulation.” If the tune is pentatonic, I will indicate which of the modes in Collinge’s table it resembles.

I have transcribed all my examples in the key signature of C in order to expose sharps or flats that deviate from the diatonic scale. In other words, if the tune is minor I write it in A minor, and if it is major, I write it in C major. This has no relation to the actual pitches sung, although coincidentally it is often close. As noted above and in Collinge, transposition of a fourth results in a duplicate intervallic structure, but with a different tonic in terms of fixed-do, thus a minor mode with a D tonic corresponds to the European Dorian mode, and a major mode
with a G tonic corresponds to Mixolydian. I will use these terms as well, if I think it relates to how the melody would be played on the *dranyen*, and if it sounds to me like the European mode.

When I was beginning this project, I was working on the thesis that Nubri songs would be unique; that the relative isolation of the valley would have produced repertoires of song specific to the place. Early on, several people contradicted that idea. Tsoknyi Rinpoche, an important lama from Nubri, when I told him of my thesis, said “I think you are going to find that Nubri songs are mostly that same as Tibetan songs.” Since Rinpoche is from upper Nubri, and his family is among the more recent arrivals from Tibet, I thought he might be speaking from that point of view. Khenpo Gyaltsen of the White Gompa, from Sama village, whose brother is a noted singer, also told me that while there are songs that are specifically from Nubri, with lyrics that reference the place, he thought that the melodies and style would be very similar to Tibetan songs. Khenpo Mingmar Dorje, from Tsak village in lower Nubri (Kuthang), also said that he thought that Nubri songs would be “the same” as Tibetan songs. This suggests that Nubri music might be more similar to “Tibetan” music than I expected, and also that many from (especially upper-) Nubri identify as ethnically Tibetan. When these informants speak of “Tibetan” songs, I assume that they mean songs from *Tö (stod)*, or “upper” Tibet, meaning the Tingri area, with which Nubri is closely connected, but they are probably also thinking of diasporic Tibetan folk and pop music, which blends folk-like melodies and texts with midi sounds, drum sets, and bass guitars.

Tibetan songs often employ spatialized language that exokes the hierarchies of the *manda*ła. This “mandalization process” (Makley 2007; cited in Gayley 2016b) has been seen to “recenter” Tibetan masculinities and agency (Gayley 2016b: 23-24) and to de-center the

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23 I have since found out, through Geoff Childs’ work, that while Nubri was indeed hard to get to, it was never truly “isolated.”
hegemonic narratives of the PRC by placing lamas in higher, or central, positions. I argue that through such spatialization, Nubri songs recenter Nubri in relation to Nepal, and exile Tibet as a valorized highland culture in a similar mandalization process. In the translations that follow, I will point to such spatializing language and the recentered hierarchies it suggests.

The Nubri songs in my study include sixteen songs I recorded November and December 2016. Of the songs I recorded, fifteen were recorded in Tsak village, one in Sama, and one in Prok. Of these, I have as yet only been able to acquire reliable texts for eleven, so those are the ones I will be discussing here. Six of the eleven are changlu, or alternately changshay, which literally means “beer songs.” Most of these are hexatonic. They are generally slow in tempo and highly melismatic, with religious subject matter, and are usually sung while seated, during parties or celebrations, though they can also be sped up and danced to in a khrab gzhas (dance song) section. If they are sung while dancing, the singers/dancers join arms and sing the song first at its stately tempo while gently swaying and stepping to the pulse. Then, after a cry of “la so!” they will begin doing the brisk steps of the khrab gzhas, which creates a percussive effect of stomps and shuffles. The shuffling sound is often imitated with vocables that sound something like “sa nyi-sa shi” in the manner of a stage whisper. This can be heard in “Ya Shupay Kelsang La,” sung and danced by Lama Mingmar and Pema Dhondrup of Tsak village.

While changlu are literally drinking songs, they are considered to be an offering, creating rten 'brel or auspicious connection among the community, ennobling the singers and listeners through uplifting subject matter. They are usually called changshay by exile Tibetans, and as ethnomusicologist Wendolyn Craun has pointed out, following Ellingson, the terms glu and gzhas are “designated within separate categories” of the traditional Indo-Tibetan classification of arts and sciences (2011: 78). This suggests to her that they may once have had quite different
meanings. However, both words mean “song,” and are used interchangeably. The fact that so many of the songs I heard were changlu is notable, and may be due to the fact that I was there during the season for dumche, one of the three largest festivals of the annual cycle, when alcohol was being consumed in large quantities, a situation that calls for the singing of changlü.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Scale/Mode</th>
<th>Singer/Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drolma’i Lhakhang Nang La</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic major (with alternating sharp 4th degree)</td>
<td>Anonymous, Sama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palyul Nay Töshay</td>
<td>Töshay</td>
<td>Major pentatonic (druk gyä)</td>
<td>Lama Pema Gyamtso, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi Takpa’i Kul Dep</td>
<td>Töshay</td>
<td>Major pentatonic (druk gyä)</td>
<td>Lama Pema Gyamtso, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsang La</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic Minor/Major</td>
<td>Lama Pema Gyamtso, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chang Shay Nor Min</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic Minor</td>
<td>Lama Pema Gyamtso, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metok Chöpay Dro Shay</td>
<td>Droshay</td>
<td>Heptatonic Mixolydian</td>
<td>Lama Pema Gyamtso, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasang Bhuti</td>
<td>Droshay</td>
<td>Minor pentatonic (blo gsal)</td>
<td>Dawa Dondrup, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangdakpay Chö La Kyab Su Chi</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic major</td>
<td>Lama Mingmar, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya Shupay Kelsang La</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic minor</td>
<td>Lama Mingmar, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dro Ya E</td>
<td>Changlü</td>
<td>Hexatonic Lydian</td>
<td>Nangmang Bhuti, Tsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prok Lullaby</td>
<td>Lullaby</td>
<td>two-note chant</td>
<td>Jhangchuk Sangmo and Nyima Sangmo, Prok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Songs collected in Nubri

Thus I did find that Nubri songs are very close to other Tibetan songs I have heard, played by refugee musicians in Kathmandu and on recordings and YouTube videos, in style, genre, and melody, but that there are some songs that make explicit reference to the locale, and some that
use Nubri dialect, which is said to be 70% intelligible with “standard” Tibetan. In the following sections I will provide transcriptions and translations of these songs, describe the contexts in which I recorded them, and analyze the melodies and texts.

“Drolma’i Lhakhang Nang La (In the Temple of Tara, the Savioress)”

The first song I recorded in Nubri is a changlu sung by a young man of about 30 in Sama, the second-highest village in the valley. He seemed very shy about singing into my recording device, and insisted on going into my room and closing the door tightly. While initially I mistook this for a charming bashfulness, I later found out the real reason for his reticence—the father of the village headman had passed away the day before, and it was now taboo for anyone in the village to sing until the body was cremated. Therefore this is the only song I recorded in Sama, which was disappointing because my guide, Thinley Lama, had already identified several prominent singers for me to talk to: May Gyangpo, Ai Nangsel, Dawa Bhuti, and Tashi Lhamo. He found a local guide, Tsewang Norbu, to take me to these singers, but because of the recent death, they all refused to sing for me. Tsewang Norbu is about 35-40, with a tough and leathery, but handsome, face. He was very interested in my dranyen, which he didn't seem to actually know how to play, but which he carried around, strumming on it. He treated it very casually, which made me a little nervous, hanging it by the strap from a nail in the porch post when he was through. Later, Tsewang Norbu brought this young singer, whose name I have withheld due to his (albeit reluctant) willingness to break the taboo, to see me.

This singer wrote down the text of the song for me, but later other informants disputed his interpretation. He wrote “‘gro ba’i lha khang nang la,” or “in the temple of the wanderer”

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24 Niajing Liu, conversation with the author, 2015. Actually, there is no “standard” Tibetan, but what is meant by this is probably some combination of Lhasa and “refugee” dialects. Coincidentally, a friend from Amdo, who has lived in Kathmandu for many years, told me that when he went to Nubri he could understand “70%” of what people said to him, while they could understand him perfectly.
which is a little confusing. ‘Gro ba literally means “wanderer,” or “one who goes,” but the semantic meaning is “transmigrator [in samsāra, or confused, cyclic existence]”—in other words, an ordinary sentient being. A temple would never be built to an ordinary being, so this interpretation is likely to be wrong, even though it comes from the source of the song. It was suggested to me by Tibetan language teacher Lekshay Choedrup that the true meaning must be “sgrol ma’i lha khang nang la,” or “in the temple of Tārā, the protectress bodhisattva.” The two pronunciations in Tibetan, roughly “droway” and “drolmay” respectively, would be easy to confuse, especially since final consonants are often only subtly pronounced. I was actually warned later, in Tsak village, lower Nubri, about this very possibility by Khenpo Tsultrim Tendar, who said that due to the large number of homonyms or near-homonyms in the Tibetan language, combined with the villagers’ general lack of literacy, or at least spelling skills, I was likely to be given erroneous texts by my informants even though they would be singing songs they had known all their lives. Thus because Khenpo Tsultrim specifically told me this text was mistaken, and Lekshey Choedrup suggested it should actually be about Tārā, I have revised the text accordingly.

།། !ོལ་མའི་“་ཁང་ནང་ལ།།
“In the Temple of Tārā”

ཀུང་ལུམ་བདེ་ཟོད་ཅེས།
སངས་སོང་།
གུས་པའི་“་ཁང་ནང་ལ།
ཅེས།
ལེགས་ཞེས་ཀྱི་སྙིང་ལེགས།

Greenery was planted in the water
And green sprouts arose
In Green Tārā’s temple
I supplicated the statue
The victors of the past established
Greenery without measure
In Green Tārā’s temple
I supplicated the statue

Outside a wall surrounds
A wall surrounds the greenery
In Green Tārā’s temple
I supplicated the statue

Inside the statue of the deity is established
A field of one hundred thousand deity statues
In Green Tārā’s temple
I supplicated the statue

The use of “sgrol ma” (Tārā) makes sense on another level too—the association with greenery.

Ārya Tārā is a bodhisattva born of the tear of Avalokiteśvara the bodhisattva of compassion. In Tibetan/Himalayan Buddhism, Tārā is also considered a Buddha as well as a protector and has twenty-one manifestations, each of different colors with different attributes. Green Tārā is the most commonly depicted, and this is the form that is referred to here. She is supplicated to dispel fear and destroy obstacles in the fiercely loving manner of a mother. In Tibetan legend, the
Nepali wife of king Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po), Brikhuti, is said to have been an incarnation of Green Tārā (Sharma 1983; Van Schaik 2011). Thus she can be seen as one embodiment and signifier of the importance of Nepal to Tibetan Buddhism. The planting of trees might represent the planting of karmic seeds, which given the right conditions, will proliferate like a beneficial field of a hundred thousand deity statues.

The spatialized language in this song suggests a maṇḍala of Green Tārā. Images of water and greenery index the elements of water and earth, and the proliferation of sprouts resulting from their combination denote the fertility inherent within them. The boundary of the maṇḍala is delineated as a wall which is “outside,” while inside “the statue is established” (i.e., it is in the central position), and is surrounded by 100,000 deities. This is a classic form of a maṇḍala in Tibetan Buddhism, in which the primary meditational deity is surrounded by other deities, which in this case, could be various forms of Tārā.

Melodically, this song is typical of changlū from Western Tibet, and is very likely not specific to Nubri. It has an even number of 64 beats, and is in the hexatonic major scale (skipping the seventh degree) with an alternating sharp fourth degree. The sharp fourth degree gives this song, and others that I recorded in Nubri that share it, a Lydian feel that has put off one of my TIPA-trained exile Tibetan music teachers in Kathmandu, who said on hearing the note, “these village people don’t know do-re-mi!” This implies that the Nubriwas are making a mistake in singing the sharp fourth degree, which does not seem to be done by educated exile Tibetans, who depend on Western solfege with a fixed do, whether in major or minor modes, from which they do not seem to deviate (Collinge, 1997).
Whether this kind of modality has been educated out of exile Tibetans and is still preserved in the Himalayan villages of Nepal, or whether it is unique to Nubri is a question I cannot yet answer, though I suspect the former. If we look at this sharp fourth degree with Collinge’s idea of “fluctuating modal structure” in mind, we could consider the g’ in mm. 8 through the middle of mm. 10 to be a dzo dra song tonic, which is the focus of a temporary modulation to the fifth (Inga pa) mode (bearing in mind that Collinge’s mode names are, strictly speaking, for pentatonic modes only) for the duration of those two-and-a-half measures. This is repeated in mm. 13-15. Thus the sharp fourth scale degree of the song tonic mode becomes the sharp seventh of the secondary mode.

“Palyul Nay Töshay (Kathmandu Pilgrimage Praise Song)”

The next five songs in this chapter were given to me by Lama Pema Gyamtsho, a monk at Serang Gompa and a neighbor of Pema Dhondrup. Lama Pema was visiting Tsak, his home village, to participate in a three-day dumche (grub mchod), or harvest-time prayer festival, along with Pema Dhondrup’s brother, Khenpo Tshultrim Tendar, the local ngakpa (married priests)
lamas, and other monks from Serang. Lama Pema did not become a monk until the age of thirty, after his wife passed away. Before that he was well known as a singer and dancer, and knows many songs as well as their dance steps. After the dumche was over, we stayed for several days at the hotel owned by Pema Dhondrup’s family, the Kuthang Longha Stone Bridge Hotel, which stands alone in the middle of thick forest, with the Buri Gandaki gurgling through a deep cataract just yards away, and waterfalls all around. During this time, Lama Pema sunbathed during the brief three hours of midday sunlight in the bottom of the canyon, and wrote the texts of the songs he had recorded for me the night before. He also demonstrated some of the dance steps, but demurred at having me film him since it would be inappropriate for a monk to be seen dancing in such a way—an instance when the sacred/secular divide seemed suddenly more fitting.

Figure 4: Lama Pema Gyamtsho (left) and Khenpo Tsultrim Tendar during a special dumche in Tsak

The first song Lama Pema sang for me is called “Kathmandu Pilgrimage Praise Song” (bal yul gnas bstod gzhas). While this song does not refer specifically to Nubri, it is all about Kathmandu, and expresses Nubri’s orientation toward Nepal as a sacred land and the importance
of its stupas. Again, spatiality and directionality are implied and hierarchies are established: the stūpās are the father and mother; the smaller stūpās are the sons, and Kathmandu is perceived as a maṇḍala, with the sound of the feminine principal as a “golden shawm” placed in the “upper parts.”

“Kathmandu Pilgrimage Praise Song”

Seeing pilgrimage places at the wedding
I vividly encountered Kathmandu

An amazing spectacle arose
I received great blessings at the stupa

Boudha stupa is the great father
Swayambu is the great mother

The excess earth and stone between them
Are the happy sons

In the upper parts of the capital Kathmandu
I heard a golden shawm
It wasn't a golden shawm
It was the speech of the mother and the ḍākinīs

The supreme pilgrimage places
that are not found in other worlds are there

The verse that says

Boudha stupa is the great father
Swayambu stupa is the great mother
The mud and stone that was left over between them
Are the happy sons

iterates the creation mythology and hierarchy accorded to the sacred sites of the Kathmandu valley not just by Nubriwas, but by Tibetans generally. For them, Boudha is the most important site in the valley. This is not surprising, considering it lies on a historical trade route to India that bypassed Swayambu and Kathmandu entirely, and was an important stopover point for Tibetans plying that route for centuries. Although Tibetans would have visited all the sacred sites in the valley on pilgrimage, and both stupas were renovated by a lama from Kham, Rigdzin Tsewang Norbu, in the eighteenth century (Ehrhard 1989), Boudha has long held higher status. This may be due to the fact that the hereditary abbots of Boudha, the “Chini Lama,” descendants of a Nyingma lama from Szeshuan who was given the position by Jung Bahadur Rana in 1859 (Dowman 1993), were important middle-men in a system of tribute payments between Tibet and Nepal (Childs, communication with the author, 13 March, 2018). For the Newars, on the other hand, Swayambu is the center of the universe, and Boudha is far less important. The “happy sons” refers to two smaller stupas, the Dhando Chaitya at Chabahil, about one mile from

25 Father Gregory Sharkey, communication with the author, 4 August, 2017.
Boudha, and Kathe Simbhu at Sigha Baha in Thahiti, about two miles from Swayambu, which are said by Tibetans to have been made from the leftover materials from the two great stupas, and to have “self-arisen” after the materials were dumped in those locations. This differs from the origin stories of these two stupas among the Newars (the Tibeto-Burman-speaking original inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley). For them, Dhando Chaitya “was built by Ashoka's daughter (Charumati), and Kathe Simbhu was ‘pulled’ to Kathmandu by the tantric powers of Vakvajra.” For the Newars, Swayambu is the self-arisen stupa, which is indeed the meaning of its name. The last line of the song, “The supreme pilgrimage places that are not found in other worlds were there” (in Kathmandu), shows the high reverence in which the Kathmandu valley is held by the Nubriwas—these supreme pilgrimage sites are not only not found in other countries or lands, but they are not even found in other worlds. This places Nubri in relation to Kathmandu and Nepal. That this is one of the first songs given to me by Lama Pema signals the importance of Kathmandu to these Nepali citizens, and hints at an alliance with Newari Buddhists of the valley which, though longstanding, has certainly increased in recent decades.

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26 I have also heard that both the smaller stupas are “leftovers” from Boudha stupa.
27 Father Gregory Sharkey, communication with the author, 4 August, 2017.
28 The large scale establishment of Tibetan monasticism in Nepal has led to an increase in connections between Nubri and Kathmandu (see Childs 2004), but Newar craftsmen also built statues in Nubri in the early-mid 20th century (Bue 2002).
This song is in the major pentatonic mode (drug syes), a very common scale for songs from all Tibetan cultural areas, as well as many other cultures in Asia and around the world. Its phrase structure is ABA’, with A (mm. 1-4) and B (mm. 5-8) having sixteen beats apiece and A’ having twenty. In terms of modal fluctuation, while the song tonic is c’, it also has a ma dra of d’ (re) in mm. 2, 5, and 9. It has fifty-two beats, which comes out to thirteen measures when written in four-four time, which seems to be a recurrent pattern in the songs I have recorded in Nubri. This asymmetrical form usually results from phrases of varying lengths, as in this case where the A’ phrase extends the final cadence with a melisma, making the transition from mm. 8-9 seem very much like cadential elision.

“Mi Takpa’i Kul Dep (Encouragement [to think about] Impermanence)”

Though most of the songs Lama Pema sang for me are remembered from his youth, he composed one of them. This underlines the fact that songs sung in Nubri are of varying age—some are probably ancient, but many are more recently composed, with known authors (see “Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang,” Chapter 5). In terms of genre, this song is a töshay, or praise song, a common Tibetan genre. By composing a song with an overtly Buddhist theme in this
genre, Lama Pema may well be marking it as Tibetan. In it, he exhorts Nubri youth to turn their minds to the Dharma. First, however, Nubri is explicitly placed in its spatial orientation in Nepal, and between India and Tibet, and surrounded by snow mountains in the manner of a *maṇḍala* that also has the dimension of height, implicitly valorizing the highlands:

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||เชิ่น ที่อยู่ในภาษาที่เหมาะสม||
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"Encouragement [to think about] Impermanence"

Please listen!
On the border of India and Tibet
In the north of Nepal
Surrounded by snow mountains
In the land called Nubri

Please listen!
Young men and women who live there
Change your attitudes to the dharma
Life has no permanence or stability
Consider the fact that we don't know when death will come
Please listen!
Having abandoned the agitated mind of anger
Practice diligence with respect to the three gates of virtue
Loving friends of great affection
Offerings of song and dance
By those skilled in singing pleasantly
Amazing song and dance!

The message of the song is a stereotypically Tibetan Buddhist one—life is impermanent; we do not know when death will come; this precious human birth is our one chance to practice dharma and liberate ourselves and others from infinite cyclic existence. This message can be heard in countless songs from diverse Tibetan and Himalayan cultural contexts, but here, Lama Pema is explicitly directing it to Nubri youth. His song specifically references place within a conventional form recognizable across the Tibetan diaspora, thereby fusing universal theme and localizing discourse, solidifying the local while inviting and enabling alliance with diverse culturally Tibetan peoples. There is not a special melody for this song, but Lama Pema said it could be sung to any melody that would fit, and Pema Dhondrup suggests “Kelsang La,” but had difficulty trying to fit the text into that melody. It occurred to me that Lama Pema may have intended to use the melody from “Palyul Nay Töshay” since he gave me both texts together. If the incipit, “sön dang la” was repeated before every two lines of text, this would work perfectly, resulting in seven strophes.

“Kelsang La”

This is another changlū that was sung for me by Lama Pema Gyamtsho. “Kelsang La” can either mean “Dear Kelsang,” or “How Lucky.” In this song, since it is alternated with
“Metok La” (which is also a proper name meaning flower), I lean toward the interpretation that it is being used as a form of address. The fact that it is also used in the sense of “lucky” (skal bzang song), strikes me as a kind of wordplay. The song talks celebrating a good harvest and the fact that this good harvest was made possible by performing rituals: planting prayer flags and drawing a swastika in grain. The luck is increased because a new granary has been built, auspiciously providing storage for the bumper crop. There is also a sense of emplacement, in which the landscape is marked in four directions with sacred symbols of good fortune.

Dear Kelsang!
This year the harvest was good!
Kelsang La!
What good fortune
We made a new granary
Dear Kelsang!
Dear Metok!
We made a new granary
How Happy we are!
Dear Kelsang!
We made a new granary
Dear Kelsang!
We drew a swastika with grain
How lucky we are!
Dear Metok!
We drew a swastika with grain
May our fortune increase!

Dear Kelsang!
On top of the grain swastika
Dear Kelsang!
They say there is a golden prayer flag planted
How lucky we are!
Dear Metok!
They say a Golden Prayer flag is planted
May the Buddha’s teaching increase!
Dear Kelsang!
On top of the golden flag
Dear Kelsang!
They say the flag lines are stretched in four directions
How lucky we are!
Dear Metok!
They say the flag lines are stretched in four directions
May the Buddha’s teachings increase

When the prayer flags are stretched in four directions
How Fortunate!
Dear Kelsang!
The person who planted the flag became happy in mind
Dear Metok!
The person who planted the flag became happy in mind
May happiness increase

As subsistence farmers who supplement their livelihoods by trading (Childs, 2001, 2004; Rogers, 2008), the people of Nubri have a great deal invested in the harvest, which can be precarious due to the threat of early frost or hail. This changshay is thus a song of thanksgiving as well as
aspiration. Its singing sows the seeds of auspicious connection among the community while expressing humble thanks for a bountiful harvest and, implicitly affirms continued good fortune.

This melody is hexatonic, but is quite ambiguous as to the song mode due to a number of ma dra, or “phrase ending resting notes” other than the song tonic. The song tonic would seem to be d’ (re), because it is the first note of almost every phrase. This mode thus corresponds to the tones of the Dorian mode, and the final ma dra is c’, which is the seventh scale degree of D, giving something of the feel of a half-cadence. However, the phrases of the melody go through a series of ma dra, leading to uncertainty about what is going on in terms of tonic. The structure is ABA’CDECD, with a total of 76 beats. The beats are divided among the phrases as follows: A (8); B (12); A’ (8); C (8); D (12); E (8); C (8); D (12). The modal fluctuation begins on phrase A (mm.1-2), which starts on D (here it is shown approached from and moving to a neighbor-tone f’, but this is interchangeable with A’ in measure 6), and ends on a ma dra of g’. Phrase B (mm. 3-5) has an initial tone and a ma dra of f’. Phrase A’ again, has a ma gra of g’. Phrase C (mm. 8-9) has a ma dra of a’, and phrase D a ma dra of c’. Phrase E (mm. 13-14) has a ma dra of c’.

Phrases C and D are then repeated. Thus, while the song seems to be in the second mode, essentially hexatonic minor, it goes through the following pattern of resting tones expressed in scale degrees of that mode: fourth; third; seventh; fifth; seventh; seventh; fifth; seventh.
The overall effect of this constantly shifting tonal center and phrase length is a delightful sophistication and stateliness. It takes over six minutes to sing in its entirety, and is one of the longest recordings I made in Nubri. This song would very likely be heard during dumche or harvest festival time, when ceremonies of offering are done all day by lamas in the village temple, after which villagers sing and dance all night.

“Changshay Nor Min (It’s Not a Jewel)”

“Changshay Nor Min is another changlü sung by Lama Pema Gyamtso. Like many changlü it has a moral message—that one should appreciate not only the sky, but also the sun, moon, and stars; not only the lama, but the monks and nuns; not only the ministers, but the ordinary people; and not only the parents, but the children. All should be treasured as if they were precious jewels (nor bu). This echoes the revered objects of Buddhist refuge, the Three Jewels (kun chog gsum), or Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The last verse refers to “one’s kind parents.” This is a trope that is especially used in Tibetan Buddhism to teach the development of
bodhicitta, or “awakening mind,” and compassion by contemplating that in an infinite cyclic existence all beings have literally been one’s mother numerous times and have been infinitely kind and loving.

The subjects of the verses of this song correspond almost exactly with the subjects of verses in the genre rten 'brel gyi glu, or songs of auspicious connection recorded by Noé Dinnerstein (2008, 198-219). For example, “rten ‘brel lnga pa (The Five Auspicious Signs),” which says, in verse 1, “Now we can be proud of both the sun and moon;” in verse 2, “We can be proud of those lamas that guide us;” in verse 3. “We can be proud, of that great lord” (high minister); and in verse 4, “We can be proud of our fathers and mothers” (2008: 200-203). While there are historic connections between Ladakh and Ngari, the ancient kingdom of which Nubri was once a part, these are different genres from distant quarters of the Tibetan cultural world, and they have in common core values of the Tibetan worldview. These elements are placed in spatial hierarchies of “up” (the sun and moon in the sky), “down” (the grains of the earth), and in the descending order of their appearance in the text (the lama, high minister, and parents), outlining the mandalic relationships among them.

||ཆང་གཞས་ནོར་མིན།||
“It’s not a Jewel Changshay”

Look up to the skies
Don't say there’s no jewel
The Sun, Moon, and Stars of the sky
If they are not jewels, what are they?
Look down to the earth
Don't say there’s no jewel
All the grains of the earth
If they are not jewels, what are they?

In front of the root guru
Don't say there’s no jewel
There are all the monks and nuns
If they are not jewels, what are they?

In front of the chief minister
Don’t say there’s no jewel
There are all his people
If they are not a jewel, what are they?

In front of one’s kind parents
Don’t say there’s no jewel
There are all their sons and daughters
If they are not jewels, what are they?
The “grains of the Earth” refers to the precious five grains (’bru lnga). As Khenpo Gyaltsen says, quoting The History of the Ngari Kings, “since the fertility of the land is unspoiled, the five agricultural crops, barley, buckwheat, millet, peas, and beans are all abundant” (2004, author’s translation).

The melody of “Nor Min” is similar to “Kelsang La’ in its phrase structure but much more circumscribed in terms of modal fluctuation:

![Figure 7: “Changshay Nor Min”](image)

This melody is very clearly based on re, making it similar to Dorian, with d’ as the song tonic. Phrase 1 (mm.1-7) is fourteen beats long and ends on the ma dra f’ (fa). Phrase 2 (mm. 8-13) is 12 beats long and ends on the song tonic. Phrase 3 is a repeat of phrase 2, and phrase 4 is a repeat of phrase 1. Phrase five and six are both repeats of phrase 2. Thus the phrase structure is ABBABB, with the 76 total beats divided by phrase into 14, 12, 12, 14, 12, and 12 beats.

“Metok Chöpay Dro Shay (Flower Offering Dance Song)”

The final song given to me by Lama Pema Gyamtso is the most unusual, mainly because it is in triple meter. Tibetan songs often have a triplet-feel to the division of the beat, resulting in
a loping “swing,” but at best this could be represented as compound meter—the pulse is usually duple. This song sounds very much like a waltz rhythmically. When I asked one of my informants from Lhamo Tshokpa about this, he replied that it might be a gur (mgur), a song of realization. These are songs, in a tradition partially inherited from the Indian vajrayāna Buddhist dōhā, which Tibetan masters have composed to express their enlightenment and to teach the people around them (Kapstein 2003). The most famous composer of gur is Milarepa, the eleventh-century saint to whom a text called The One-hundred-thousand Songs is attributed. Milarepa’s hagiography mentions that he visited Nubri, and his pilgrimage sites are held in high esteem there. It is probable that lamas from Nubri have written gur over the centuries, and it is possible Lama Pema has sung one for me without informing me of its significance.

Much has been written on the poetic structure of gur (e.g., Sorensen 1988; Jackson 1996; Sujata 2005; Gamble 2011; Divall 2014), which resembles folk song more closely than classical poetry (Sorensen 1988), but as yet I have not been able to find any sources on the musical structure of gur. Two Milarepa songs I recorded in 2009, sung by Lama Tenpa Gyaltser, originally from Manang (who now teaches at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado), also have triple meter. At the time I notated “Song of View, Meditation and Conduct” in 15|8:

\[\text{Figure 8: "Song of View, Meditation, and Conduct"}\]

And “Song of Mahamudra (Monastery Style)” in 3|8:
Both of these had a triplet feel—rather faster than “Dance Song of the Flower Offering,” and with much simpler, three-note melodies suitable for monastic liturgical chanting. I have heard of more ornate melodies for gur, and my Lhamo Tshokpa informant sang one from an opera—in which they are sometimes diagnostically sung by a yogi character—and it was indeed in a waltz-like triple meter.

Lama Pema’s song also has enigmatic and esoteric references that could also point to its being a gur. “Dro Shay” (bro gzhas) usually means “dance song;” however, these are usually in duple meter. While Lama Pema’s song could conceivably be danced, it is a little on the slow side. Could the word have a different meaning here? Drowa (bro ba) also means “taste” or “flavor,” which aside from its conventional meaning, is a technical term in the dzogchen (rdzog chen) teachings of the Nyingma lineage. It is used to describe the “natural state” realized by the dzogchen practitioner—“the state in which there is no difference between good and bad. In the state of contemplation, these opposites have the ‘same taste’… good and bad then have the same flavor” (Norbu, 2006). Could the title, then, be “Song of the Taste of the Flower Offering,” in some kind of reference to dzogchen? Be that as it may, this song also begins with spatial positionality—“up yonder, the high mountain”—which subtly ascribes value to the highlands.

Figure 9: “Song of Mahamudra”

“Dance Song of the Flower Offering”
Up yonder, the high mountain
Up yonder, the high mountain

If you ask how high
It appeared to me as eight conches and four pillars of turquoise

Lotus flower, golden bee
Lotus flower, golden bee
Golden bee, turquoise bee

Noble daughter of the gods, please come and enjoy my offering!
Noble daughter of the gods, please come and enjoy my offering!

Please come and accept my pure samaya offering
Up yonder, the high cliffs

Most of this text is obscure. The high mountain appearing as conches and turquoise pillars suggests the “pure perception” of an accomplished yogi—the only possible author of gur. The conch is one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, as is the lotus flower of the next verse. The lotus flower could also be a reference to Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), the eighth-century Indian yogi who founded Tibetan Buddhism, whose name means “Lotus-born.” Guru Rinpoche is also the nominal founder of the Nyingma lineage—the predominant school in Nubri, which has many pilgrimage sites associated with him. Golden bee (Sertrang), which
suggests honey, might be a euphemism for nectar (Skt., *amṛta*; Tib., *bdud rtsi*), or ambrosia, the “King of medicines,” but Sertrang (*gsar sbrang*) is also the name of the mountain that demarcates the southeast (and lower) boundary of Nubri (Serang Himal). This mountain is also the site of a Guru Rinpoche pilgrimage and a monastery, Serang Gompa, built near it. A flower and bee are often used to represent lovers, which might suggest that rather than a *gur*, this is a love song. (Sorensen 1988: 256; Gayley 2016b: 138). Who the “noble daughter of the gods” might be is unknown, but if this were indeed a love song, it could refer to the object of affection. Inviting the noble daughter to enjoy the offering is thus homologized to the bee enjoying nectar (Gayley 2016b).

“*Samaya*” (*dam tshig*) are the vows between a guru and disciple in *vajrayāna* Buddhism and the relationship created by those vows. *Samaya* is a topic often mentioned in *gur* texts. When pressed on the genre of the song, Lama Pema insisted it was just “a song.” As far as I know, songs always belong to specific genres. Since *gur* are songs of realization written by realized masters, could Lama Pema simply be demurring out of humility, not wanting to claim such realization? Be that as it may, all of this is speculation on my part, and in the end I must take Lama Pema at his word that this is simply a dance song.

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29 This can also be spelled *gsar thang* (Golden Plain), but which spelling is correct is unknown. Either way it seems to have been corrupted to “Serang” (Aris 1975: 58-59).
As mentioned above, triple meter is unusual in Tibetan folk music. Melodically, this song is also a little unusual in the context of the songs in this sample. It is heptatonic, containing all seven notes of the diatonic scale and although its starting note is d’ and final note is c’, I believe it is in a mode that corresponds to Mixolydian in Western terms. This is a matter of opinion, because it has an equal number, in terms of beats, of phrase ending resting tones (*ma dra*) on g’ and c’. However, it clearly begins with a song tonic of g’ (*sol*). If we look at the first phrase (mm. 1-8), the first measure is based around d’, and the resting tone is g’. When, in the middle of the second phrase, we get an f’ (mm. 11), the major flavor of the melody starts to blur. Phrase three (13-19) begins on g’ and seems to end on c’ — the same relationship (a fifth) as between the first and last notes of Phrase 1 — but returns to g’ for the last word of the line of text (*jung*) in mm. 18 and 19, in a bit of “cadential elision.” This phrase is repeated with slight variation and
again elides into a virtual repeat of the entire form with a once-more varied C. Thus the phrase structure is ABCC’A’B’C’”C”, with the distribution of beats 24, 12, 21, 16, 23, 18, 18. The differences in length among different iterations of the same phrase are due mainly to cadential elision in mm. 25.

“Pasang Bhuti (Song of Two Relatives)”

One morning while staying in Tsak I found Pema Dhondup cutting and peeling fresh pine boughs and sticking them into the space between the wall and ceiling of his kitchen. He said this was for lhasol, a household puja to be done later that day. Two other men, who I hadn’t formally met, but one of whom was one of the ngakpas in the previous day’s dumche ceremonies, were making tormas (offering cakes)—cones of tsampa (barley flour mixed with butter and tea) with spikes of butter and discs of crackers, as well as three animal figures, including a yak. Kunsang Nangsel, the aged ngakpa who was to perform the pūjā, is also a knower of old songs, according to Khenpo. As I sat with an anointment of butter on my head many people came and went from the house in preparation—possibly fetching more arak! Kunsang Nangsel put raw wool around his head like a crown and began tossing a mixture of corn and tsampa into the ceiling and into the fire, into which Pema Dekyi had placed a large number of fresh pine boughs. He then began chanting incantations more or less ignored by the rest of the house, who were engaged in lively conversation. After lunch Kunsang Nangsel, Khenpo, Pema Dhondup and I sat on the porch in the sun along with Dawa Dhondup, who had brought a small dranyen and whistle, both of which he had made. This small dranyen, called tungna in Nepal, where it is played by Tamangs, Sherpas, and others, is about 30” long, has three strings with both a skin-covered and a wooden-covered bout. Dawa Dhondup’s was made for six strings, like a regular dranyen, but was missing
a tuning peg and was strung with only three. The finial was a carved garuda head. The whistle was bamboo and about 10” long, with seven diatonic holes.

Figure 11: Kunsang Nangsel performs *lhasol pūjā*, Tsak village

Figure 12: Dawa Dhondrup’s homemade *dranyen*
Dawa Dhondrup played several songs on his *dranyen*, and his rhythmic style is unusual compared to standard ways of playing the instrument as understood in the exile Tibetan community. According to music teacher and performer Tenzin Namgyel, there are three main rhythmic styles from Tibet—Ü-Tsang, Kharag, and Amdo—and Dawa Dhondrup’s style does not fit into any of these. His instrument too, is not the standard Lhasa-style long necked version, with three courses of strings in a re-entrant tuning, but is shorter, built for 5 strings (though he strings it with 3), and does not have a re-entrant tuning. This is more like the *tungna* of Nepali Himalayan groups like the Tamang, Sherpa, and Yolmo. Dawa Dhondup’s Himalayan-style instrument and non-normative (from Tenzin Namgyel’s point of view) style of playing might reflect influence from the Nepal side, or might simply be because he built his

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30 This is doubtful, as there are likely many more local styles of *dranyen* playing. However, this is Tenzin Namgyel’s explanation of the major styles he learned at TIPA. See below for a discussion of TIPA’s standardization of style.

31 “*Tungna,*” the word for the lute in Tamang, is the name for the instrument throughout the Nepal Himalayas. I am told it derives from the Tibetan *rdung len,* “to sing and play.”
instrument and learned to play it by himself, with no instruction of any kind. Nevertheless, the reference to Nubri custom, use of dialect words, and distinct rhythmic approach make this song a good example of a specifically Nubri song, but one which also signals degrees of connectedness and difference to Tibetans of other groups.

Of the several songs Dawa played for me on his dranyen and flute, I was only able to get a text for one. In this song, “Pasang Bhuti” (spun gnyi kyi gzhas, or “Song of Two Relatives”), a boy talks teasingly to a girl, Pasang Bhuti (pa sangs bu ‘khri). While the two use the kinship terms a co (elder brother) and nu mo (younger sister) to address each other, this does not necessarily imply that they are actually siblings. In Tibetan culture, as in much of Asia, kinship terms are used to address anyone, regardless of actual relationship. The title of the song, “Song of Two Siblings,” does not preclude the possibility of marriage between the two, since in Himalayan cultures, cross-cousins are often eligible to marry. Due to the flirtatious nature of the text, and the association of the name “Pasang Bhuti” with reproduction, it may in fact be a gab tshig antiphonal song of courting. While it is ambiguous who is addressing whom in the song text, it seems to be something of an incestuous dialog, with the “elder brother” rousing his “sister” from sleep, making a fire and drinking beer and tea, and exhorting her to wash his hair. Two verses constitute a somewhat esoteric exchange involving Mt. Sumeru, which suggests sexual innuendo—he is the mountain peak and she is on top. By saying “I will always stay here unchanging” the brother affirms the stability of their relationship. Following are several verses in which the sister uses complimentary pairs in a way often done in love songs—she is the hat on the head of the manly youth; the earring in his ear; the chuba (robe) on his body; the belt on his waitst; and the dance he dances. The name of the girl has a particular connotation in Nubri. It is common in all Tibetan cultural areas to name children after the day of their birth. Thus Nyima,
Dawa, Mingmar, Lhakpa, Phurbu, Pasang, and Pemba (the days of the week) are all common names. If the girl is first-born, or second or third in a string of girls born, or the family wants another son for some other reason, it is common to give her the second name of Bhuti (bu ‘khrid), or “bring-a-boy,” in hopes that the next child born will be a brother (Childs, 2003). In Nubri, however, this practice is considered, in the manner of an aspiration prayer, to increase the likelihood that the girl will give birth to a son once she grows up and is married. The second name, Bhuti, is said to be especially likely to be given in Nubri if the girl is born on Friday (Pasang), although Geoff Childs’s statistical study does not support the latter.\(^\text{32}\) The song also uses Nubri dialect words, like “ka-o” (ka ’o) for belt, and “pam” (pam), for attractive or becoming (len po). Beverly Diamond describes the use of dialect as an “alliance-making activity,” that positions the singer in relation to his own and other groups—not only those outside his own, but perhaps even youth of the same group who might lack indigenous language skills (2007: 178). While this song lacks the explicit mandalization of some of the songs above, it does mention Mt. Sumeru, the center of the cosmological mandala of Buddhism and Hinduism.

“Song of Two Relatives (Pasang Bhuti)"

Pasang Butri has not arisen, I’m getting up Pasang Bhuti I’m Getting up Pasang Bhuti

\(^{32}\) Pema Dhondrup, conversation with the author, July, 2017. Geoff Childs points out that, while “this may be PD’s impression,…it is not evident in actual naming practices. From my most recent Household survey, among women named Pasang only 7 of 52 had the second name Buti (13.5%). Roughly 11% of all other women named for a day of the week had a second name Buti. The difference is negligible” (communication with the author, 31 March, 2018).
Pasang Butri has arisen, I’ve lit a red fire
I’ve light a good fire!

The red fire is lit, I’m drinking delicious tea and beer
I’m drinking delicious tea and beer!

While I’m drinking delicious tea and beer, please wash my hair
Please wash my hair

Elder Brother on Mt. Sumeru, I am on the mountain peak
I am on the mountain peak

Little sister Pasang Bhuti, I will always stay here unchanging
I will always stay here unchanging

On the head of a manly youth, I am the becoming hat on your head
I am the becoming hat on your head

On the ear of a manly youth, I am the attractive earring charm

33 Sumeru is not an object of cognition for ordinary beings (so sor skye po), it is located (rgyang chad inga brgya la dpag tshad gcig) in the middle of 160,000 visual distances (dpag tshad khri brgyad mtsho nang la yod red dpag tshad khri brgyad nam mkha’ gtegs yod red), or 80,000 under the sea and 80,000 up in the sky.
The attractive earring charm

On the body of a manly youth, I am the attractive chuba
The becoming maroon chuba

On the waist of a manly youth, I am the attractive belt
The attractive grey belt

Dance, manly youth! I am the attractive dance
The attractive dance of three hundred steps!

Because the melody of this song is minor pentatonic, it would be classified as in the blo gsal mode in Collinge’s table. However, since it begins and ends on d’, it has a “song tonic” of re, if played on the dranyen, and is thus similar to a pentatonic version of Dorian mode. A ma dra (mother tone) of a’ predominates in mm. 2 and 3, replaced by a ma dra of g’ in mm. 4 and 5. The g’ ma dra is repeated in mm. 9 and 10 as the second phrase is reprised. A ma dra of A (sol) is also striking in the pick-up bar. Overall, to my ear the tune could imply a V-I-V-IV-I harmonic structure.34

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34 While it may seem inappropriate to attribute Western harmonic structure on music conceived as purely melodic, modern Tibetans and Himalayans, like the rest of us, cannot escape globalizing modernity, and are thus exposed to harmonic music constantly, in the form of Western pop, Bollywood, and their own modern pop and folk-influenced music. Indeed, if exile Tibetans or Himalayans were to produce a pop-inflected version of this song in Kathmandu, I am certain they would add these chords.
The presence of a pick-up bar is notable. While it is partly a function of imposing Western notation on this music, it really seems to make sense for this tune. Perhaps it could be dispensed with by notating it in 2-4 time, but that would disguise the fact that beat one of four is distinctively strong in Dawa Dhondrup’s playing. Such a pick-up is unusual in terms of the Tibetan music I have studied—this is the first time I have seen it. This, combined with the rhythmic distinctiveness described above, this song is remarkable as an example of Nubri—and particularly lower Nubri—style.

“Yangdakpay Chö La Kyab Su Chi (I Go for Refuge to the Excellent Authentic Dharma)”

Two songs were sung for me, and their dances demonstrated, by 30-year-old Lama Mingmar of Tsak village. Lama Mingmar is a local ngakpa of the Tsak Gompa, and acts as umdze (dbu mdzad), or chant master there. As a non-monastic cleric Lama Mingmar has no compunction about singing and dancing folk songs, and is respected for his ability and knowledge in the village. One song he sang for me (accompanied by Pema Dhondrup) illustrates the ubiquity of Buddhist subject matter in changlû beer songs. Even when Nubri people are partying, their religion is in their thoughts. The most basic vow in Buddhism, and indeed, the
way one “becomes” a Buddhist, is by “taking refuge” in the three jewels, the Buddha, or the awakened teacher, the Dharma, or the teachings of the Buddha, and the Sangha, or the ordained community of Buddhist monks. “Refuge” is akin to the idea of faith in Western religions—it means putting oneself completely in the care of Buddhism.

The song starts with “Sön dang la” (gson dang lags), or “Please listen!”, a common incipit in this sample of songs that announces imminent moral instruction. The first verse refers to the six-syllable mantra (magic formula) of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, om mani padme hum. This mantra invokes Avalokiteshvara, for whom Manipadme is an epithet. The meaning of mantras are not the point for the Buddhist practitioner for the mantra’s power is believed to be inherent in its sound, but they do have meaning. In this case, the literal meaning is to address Avalokiteshvara, the

“[possessor of] jewel and lotus,” for these indeed are the objects most frequently held by the bodhisattva in his iconographic representations. Om and hum are purely symbolic expressions, not capable of translation, but commonly used in the formation of mantras. They are interpreted in many ways, according to context, but are generally taken as utterances bridging the gap between mundane and sacred planes of experience (Kapstein 1997: 71).

In terms of the levels of meaning of the syllable ōm, on the inner level, it consists of four sounds, represented by the letters a, u, and m (Tenzin Gyatso 2009), which represent the above mentioned “three gates of virtue.” In Buddhism and Hinduism, ōm is believed to be the sound of the universe. On the secret level, it contains the other five syllables within itself. Thus one can chant the mantra of Avalokiteshvara merely by uttering “ōm.”

The song goes on to exhort the listener to not be lazy “like a cow,” but to take heed of impermanence and practice the dharma now, in this life.35 This is one of the most common tropes

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35 Geoff Childs points out that bovine references may be “a common way of calling someone not just lazy but also too dull to study religion,” citing similar language in Milarepa’s descriptions of Nubri (communication with the author, 14 March, 2018).
of Tibetan Buddhism. Indeed, this idea is instilled in the preliminary practices (sngon ‘gro) of all four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism as “the four thoughts that turn the mind” (blo ldog rnam bzhi) away from samsaric occupations and toward the dharma. Before a student can advance to higher practices, he or she must contemplate these four thoughts: (1) precious human birth, or the fact that we are blessed, through our karma, with the only type of birth that enables us to practice the dharma; (2) impermanence, or the fact that these conditions will not last, and if not taken advantage of, will be wasted; (3) karma, or the fact that our present actions will affect our future; and (4) suffering, or the fact that our samsaric existence will never be satisfactory, and the only way to remedy this is to practice the dharma (Mingyur and Tworkov 2014). These ideas have long permeated Buddhist texts and sermons, and would be immediately familiar to any Tibetan Buddhist. The song implores the listener to visualize Avalokiteshvara, to recite his mantra unceasingly, and most poetically, to “Write the six syllables on fine paper” and “Offer it to the hand of the Lord of Death.” Contemplation of impermanence and the certainty of death is not only one of the preliminary practices known as the four thoughts that turn the mind, but is a universal element of texts known as “Stages of the Path” (lam rim) in Tibetan Buddhism, in which such practices are codified.

ལོག་སྐེལ་ཀུན་མོ། །
“I go for Refuge to the Authentic Dharma”

སྐེལ་ཀུན་མོ། ། ཡོ་ཏོ། །
Please listen! The secret ōm has (the five syllables): ma ni pad me hung
I go for refuge to the excellent authentic dharma

སྐེལ་ཀུན་མོ། ། ཡོ་ཏོ། །
Please listen! Don’t habitually sleep like a cow, get up!
Without sleeping, make offerings to the excellent deity

(dance song)

Please listen! Meditate on Avalokiteshvara with undistracted body
recite without distraction, enumerate the six syllables

Please listen! Write the six syllables on fine paper
Offer it to the hand of the Lord of Death

Please listen! There is no point in worldly deeds
While we are here we have to practice dharma

Such texts lay out a process for practicing Buddhism in discrete levels. The first is the contemplation of the rarity of acquiring a precious human birth, and the imperative to use the opportunity meaningfully before its inevitable end. As Donald Lopez says, “Since it is possible to accumulate the causes of future happiness now, this fear of death serves to motivate religious practice. If one fears death now and is moved by that fear to take action to establish the causes of

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36 A “precious human birth” is one that is endowed with “leisure and opportunity.” Leisure means being free from the eight impediments of being born in one of the non-human realms of samsaric existence, e.g., hell, animal, hungry ghost, demigod, or god; or being born as a human but in a border region (an uncivilized area), without faculties, or in a region where Buddhism has not spread. Opportunity means being endowed with the five personal opportunities: being born human, in a country where Buddhism is known, having all one’s faculties, being free from the five grave sins (“patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, intentionally wounding a Buddha, and causing dissension in the sangha [the community of monks]”); and having five conditional opportunities: “the appearance of a buddha, his teaching the doctrine, the doctrine remaining to the present, followers of the teaching remaining, and the people of the area providing spiritual and physical support out of love for others” (Lopez, 1997: 423).
an auspicious rebirth in the next life, one can then die without fear” (1997: 424). The text of this song seems to draw on these ideas.

In terms of melody, this song is hexatonic major, with a song tonic of c’, and ma dra of g’ and a. The phrase structure is ABCC’. A has 12 beats with a ma dra of g’; B has 8 beats with a ma dra of c’, C has 16 beats with a ma dra of a; and C’ repeats C but resolves to c’ as a final note. The total number of beats is 52, a seemingly common number in this genre, which results in 26 measures of 2/4 time. This covers the form of the song version of “I go for Refuge to the Excellent Authentic Dharma,” But Lama Mingmar also performed the trapshay (khrab gzhas), or “dance” for this song.

Figure 15: “Yangdakpai Chö la Kyap su Chi”

As noted above, changlüü are generally slow and stately, and are often sung while seated,
but they are also often dance songs. Typically, the first couple of verses are sung at the slower tempo and melody by singers, with arms interlocked, sometimes in a loose circle with women on one side and men on the other, sometimes in a semicircle or line. At some point, the leader shouts “laso!” and the dancers begin stepping to a faster tempo, with syncopated shuffling and stomping, which functions as percussion, and is mirrored by loudly whispered vocalizations that echo the shuffling sounds of the feet. The whispering can often sound like counting, as in “shik nyi sum shik,” or in the case of Lama Mingmar on this song, “shik-shik-shik-shika-shik-shik-shik-shika” (mm. 29-30). The rhythmic notations in my transcription show the overall effect of the combination of vocables and stomps during the vocal rests, and the stomps during singing. The melody sung as a trapshay is a crunched, condensed version of the song melody. These trapshay melodies can sound quite different, but they actually tend to preserve initial and final notes, contours, and proportions of the phrases in the song versions. In this case, the only variance from the form ABCC’ is the fact that B is repeated (mm. 39-41); the A part still starts on a’ and ends on g’ (mm. 32-35). B starts on d’ and ends on d’ to c’. C is the only slight variation in that it starts directly on c’-d’ whereas in the song version the initial syllable goes from a’ to d’ to c’. As in the song version, the C part, after first ending in a ma dra of a’, is repeated and finally ends on c’. The trapshay covers 13 measures of 2/4 time—exactly half the 26 measures of the song version.

“Ya Shupay Kelsang La (I Respectfully Submit to Kelsang)”

In another changlū sung by Lama Mingmar, enigmatic references are made that are reminiscent of the gur genre. “Ya Shupay Kelsang la” literally means “to the Kelsang to whom I am speaking upwards,” or who is on a higher level than myself in terms of respect. This is difficult to render in English, but I think “I respectfully submit” conveys the meaning of the
phrase. Whatever the meaning of the obscure content of the verses, it is being respectfully asserted to someone named Kelsang. At the end, it becomes clear that this is, at least in part, a song about Milarepa, the supreme gur-composing yogi of Tibet. Again, a mandala is invoked through directionality and spatial hierarchy in terms of a “high mountain peak,” which on the left is “like a snow-lion and tiger,” and on the right is “like a garuda and dragon.” These are the “Four Dignities,” which symbolize the four elements from which all composite phenomena are made in the context of rlung rta (wind horse), or space—here represented as the blue sky.

“I respectfully submit to Kelsang”

If you look at the high mountain peak
The blue sky is like the wings of the garuda

There is a mountain of the eastern lake
There is the lake of the eastern mountain

On the left, it’s like a snow-lion and tiger on the white cliffs
on the right it’s like a garuda and dragon
(Dance song)

I respectfully submit to Kelsang
Put the golden saddle on that horse, the stallion
On the saddle there are turquoise decorations up to the stirrups

I respectfully submit to Kelsang
On top of that sits a person
Milarepa! How wondrous!

The melody is again hexatonic, but this time it is in the mode based on the sixth scale degree, blo gsal, corresponding to the C Aeolian, or A minor, with the 4th degree, or F, skipped:
Figure 16: “Ya Shupay Kelsang La”

Melodically, as well as textually, this song seems to be related to “Kelsang La,” with which it shares its primary motive (fig. 10, mm. 1-2; 7-8). The song melody has a total of 68 beats and a phrase structure of ABCC (this refers to the song verse, not the trapshay section): the distribution of beats across these phrases is 8, 6, 10, 10. The ma dra, or resting tones are d’, a’, a’, a’. In the trapshay section, the melody becomes purely pentatonic, with the b’ disappearing. Phrase A here is half the length of the song version, with the same compass and contour. After a lengthy (7-8
bar) percussive dance section, phrase B is also half the length of its song version counterpart, again with the same initial and final notes and contour. At this point (mm. 54-59) the percussive dance accents the upbeat, which it returns to during the singing of the final phrase in both its iterations (mm. 55-71). Phrase C is also exactly halved in length in the trapshay version of the tune. Tibetan music teacher Pema Tenzin also knows this song and believes it comes from central and western Tibet.

“Dro Ya E (Are You Going?)”

One night while I was staying in Tsak village, Pema Dhondrup took me to two houses to meet singers. The first was Tashi Dekyi. She had two daughters, one of whom is a nun, and two sons, all between the ages of 5 and 15. She was very shy to sing, and fed me tea and arak as she procrastinated, nervously alternating between cooking and washing dishes. When she finally sang a beautiful changlü, her kids were quite embarrassed and tried to stifle their laughter. By the time we left, it was quite dark and Pema led me over a rough, winding path to another house nearby, of Lhakpa Tsewang and his wife, as well as their daughter-in-law, Nangmang Bhuti and her 2-year-old son. After serving us tea, they listened as Pema explained my project to them. They agreed to sing for me, but of course not immediately. Before we had gone to either of these houses, Pema had taken me with him to a meeting of some of the men (and one woman) of the village concerning the next evening’s planned tse wang (long-life empowerment) at the gompa. A few minutes after arriving at Lhakpa Tsewang’s house he got a call and had to excuse himself to go back to the meeting. “I’ll be back in ten minutes,” he said, leaving me alone with the family. I did my best to converse with them, asking such questions as I could. The young mother
asked if I wanted *arak*, and when I replied in the affirmative, the grandmother, who was busily spinning wool yarn, said “when the *arak* flows, the songs flow!”

Apparently, they didn’t have much arak prepared, so Nangmang Bhuti brought out the distilling set-up: three large copper pots that seat inside one another. *Chang* (a kind of beer) is put into the lower one, cold water in the top one, and because the top container is conical in shape, alcohol from the *chang*, which evaporates faster than water, is condensed into the middle one. Nangmang Bhuti brought in fresh cow dung, mixed it with ash from the fire, and used it to seal the joints between the three vessels. She added corn cobs to the fire to intensify the heat and settled down to tie the tassels on a bright red *ga-o* (the Nubri word for *kerak*, or belt/sash) she had woven. The grandmother continued winding spools of yarn for the loom as the baby toddled around looking for trouble while Lhakpa Tsewang went out to milk the cow. Thus we passed the hour and a half until Pema finally came back!

Figure 17: Nangmang Bhuti makes *arak*, Tsak village
When he finally returned it was well past our appointed dinnertime at Pema’s house, so I rose to leave, thinking this visit was a bust for collecting songs. But Nangmang Bhuti said “the arak is ready—doesn't he want any arak?” and Pema sat back down, resigned to being even more late for his wife’s dinner. The arak was delicious, and as the grandmother had predicted, its flowing soon led to the flowing of songs. Lhakpa sang a changlüh, which was fairly long, pausing occasionally to remember the words. Then Nangmang sang another.

Unfortunately, of the songs I recorded that night, I have only gotten the text to the one sung by Nangmang Bhuti, which was dictated to me later by Pema Dhondrup. Though it is called “Dro Ya E (’gro ya ae), which means “are you going,” this phrase functions somewhat as vocables, in that its semantic meaning does not seem to be important to the text. The song talks about the three types of deities, or beings, to whom flower offerings should be made: first, the high goddess Wangmo Gyaltsen (dbang mo rgyal tshan—Lady Victory Banner) who, rather than being a heavenly goddess (lha), is probably an earth goddess (sa gzhi lha mo), which reside in the landscape and are propitiated to ensure good harvests and to ward off natural disasters. Second, the middling “demons” (btsen), Yama Yumtso (ya ma yum tsho), which with the spelling I was given could refer to the twelve Yama goddesses, which are local spirits, though not necessarily btsen. If spelled g.yu mtsho (turquoise lake) there could be some connection to Lake Yamdrok in Central Tibet, or some other lake, though seems somewhat doubtful. A third possibility is that this is a single btsen spirit named Yama Yumtso. Finally is the naga (glu) below, Tsona Rinchen (mtsho sna rin chen), which is likely a local name. Nagas (skt.) are the serpentine spirits of water, earth, and low places, that protect the environment and must be appeased to prevent diseases and to ensure wealth. While probably referring to these deities’ physical location in terms of above, between, and below, the scheme of highest, middling, and
lowest according to which the beings mentioned in this song are classified is very common in Buddhist texts in referring to many kinds of beings—for example, human beings are often said to be of high, middling, or low ability and should thus practice the proper level of Buddhist teachings. In this case, the beings referred to are the ones to which flower offerings are made, so the hierarchical relationships outlined are in relation to one another, not to any other kind of being that is not on the list of those to propitiate. The spatialized language here mandalizes these beings in the context of a specific ritual. These beings are commonly propitiated in many culturally Tibetan areas. The term “flower offering” may also have special significance in Nubri. Michael Aris says

Throughout Tibetan cultural areas, incidental offerings are made in terms of cash or kind, their quantities being prescribed by traditional codes of behavior, but in Kutang and Nubri it is simply a flower—surely the purest symbol of offering—that is presented to the lama. It is interesting to note in this regard that the common circumlocution used in literature for offerings made in terms of cash or kind to a high religious personage is in fact the word “flower” (me tog) (Aris 1974: 57).

Offerings to propitiate mountain gods, earth-spirits, and nagas can include flowers, but often consist of food and drink, incense, mantras, and the like. Reading the above passage from Aris makes me wonder if, rather than being a metaphor for all kinds of offerings, the flowers referred to in the song are meant to literally be the only offering to these beings.

Are you going?
The best flowers, are you going?
are offered to gods above
Are you going?

Are you going?
That god is Wangmo Gyaltsen, are you going?
Please make her happy
Are you going?

Are you going?
The second-best flowers, are you going?
Are offered to the demons between
Are you going?

Are you going?
Those demons are the Yama goddesses, are you going?
Please make them happy
Are you going?
Are you going?
The third-best flowers, are you going?
Are offered to the nagas below
Are you going?

Are you going?
That naga is Tshona Rinchen, are you going?
Please make him happy
Are you going?

This song, with its elaborate ornamentation and very free meter was the most difficult to transcribe, and my transcription does not capture Nangmang Bhuti’s voice in its delicacy, openness, freedom of rhythm, ornaments, and delivery. While the time signatures I have used throughout my transcriptions have been somewhat arbitrary, and should not be construed as communicating anything about how the singers might view their songs metrically, this one is even less meaningful. I have transcribed it in 6/8 to reflect what I hear as a triple micropulse within a duple beat. While Nangmang’s rhythm is very free, a definite stress is discernable on the notes of longer duration, and this time signature reflects that for the most part. Notable exceptions are the e’ tied across bars 6 and 7, and the rest on the downbeat of measure 12.
Structurally, the melody consists of four phrases. The motive is established in the four-beat phrase A (mm. 1-2), which starts on an a-c and ends on a resting tone of g’. Phrase B (mm. 3-7) begins on g’ and winds down through an f’# melisma to a resting tone of d’. This could be thought of as a temporary modulation to D before the phrase jumps back up to g’ and before coming to rest on c’. The third phrase starts on c’, goes up to d’ and finally down to g. The fourth phrase, A’, is a cadential version of the original motive. A version of that motive, which is always on the words “dro ya e” (are you going?) is also embedded in phrase B from the middle of mm. 6 to the end of mm. 7, where it is interrupted by a breath before leading into Phrase C. Phrases C and A’ are then repeated with the same text in every strophe. Thus the song starts and ends on c’, with a phrase pattern of ABCA’, and a pattern of resting tones (ma dra) of g’, g’, d’, c’, g, c’, g, c’, and has a range of an octave from g to g’.

Figure 18: “Dro Ya E”
The scale is hexatonic with a sharp fourth degree, and no seventh degree. In Western terms, this is a Lydian mode. Unlike Tsewang Gyurme’s “Drolma’i Lhakhang Nang La,” in which both the sharp and the natural fourth degree appear, this song has only the sharp. When that note appears in the melody it is striking, and appears alternately on the words dang po, gnyis pa, and gsum pa (first, second, and third best), and on the first syllable of the second name of each deity (e.g., Wangmo Gyeltsen) in successive strophes. While connecting musical events such as melisma with the importance of certain words of the text is common in Western music since at least Gregorian chant, I have always resisted doing so with Tibetan songs, since they are strophic and the text changes with each melodic iteration. Here however, the surprising sharp fourth degree occurs on the most important words of each verse—almost the only words that change from one to the next, signaling probable musical or social significance.

The occurrence of the sharp fourth degree is surprising not only to me, but both of my Tibetan dranyen teachers visibly reacted at the moment they heard it, and both seemed to think it was a mistake. Nangmang Bhuti was clearly singing this note intentionally. She sings it in the same place on every strophe in a melisma that begins with f# and ends on e, accentuating the sharp fourth by sliding sinuously down to the third. Anna Morcom told me that she has heard this note sung at TIPA, so it must exist in songs from other Tibetan areas, but my Tibetan music teachers, both of whom received at least some training at TIPA, did not like it. The sharp fourth degree is very common in Nepali folk music. My sarangi (Nepalese fiddle) teacher, Bharat Nepali, taught me the tune “Resam Phiriri,” probably the most famous Nepali folk song, in the same hexatonic Lydian scale. Incidentally, he also wrote it in Chevé notation, with the Western solfege syllables spelled in devanagari script, writing fa as fi to indicate the sharp. While I don’t mean to imply a connection between this Nubri song and the Gandharva melodies of the
foothills, it is interesting to note that the sharp fourth degree exists in disparate music cultures across the Himalayas.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{“Trok Nay Yinpa’i Thrugu Nyel Ya Gi Shay (Lullaby from Prok)”}

The final song I am including in this chapter is a lullaby (\textit{phru gu snyal yag gi gzhas}—literally “song for putting a child to sleep”). This was sung for me by Jhangchuk Sangmo and Nyima Sangmo in the guest house belonging to Jhangchuk’s father, Amchi Dorje, in Prok, lower Nubri. Both Jhangchuk and Nyima are women of about 30 years old and unmarried. As full-time research assistants to Geoff Childs and E.A. Quinn, they are nearly inseparable, traveling the length of the valley each month to collect data. They were extremely shy to sing for my Zoom recorder, and could barely suppress giggles long enough to get through this very short song. Each of them sang it for me once. The first thing that is notable about this song compared to all the others I heard is its brevity. It is only two lines of text: “Baby go to sleep; sister will give you a horse.” Within this short text two words of Nubri dialect appear—\textit{achi} (\textit{a ci}) for sister, which is ordinarily \textit{ache}, and \textit{angpa} for baby, which is usually \textit{thrugu} (\textit{phru gu}) in Tibetan.

\begin{quote}
\textit{།།“ོ་ནས་ཡིན་པའི་&་’ི་(ལ་ཡག་གི་གཞས།།}

\textit{Lullaby from Prok}

\textit{ཨོ་ལོ་ཨོ་ལོ་ཨང་པ་གཉིད་ཅིག་ལོག་དང་།}

\textit{ཨ་ཅིས་&ན་པ་)་གཅིག་+ད་ཡོང་།}

Roll over, roll over, Baby go to sleep
Sister will give you a horse
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} One U.S. music theorist, the late George Russell, theorized a concept he called Lydian chromatics, claiming the Lydian mode as more peace-oriented than the historically prominent western Ionian mode that became the basis of western functional tonality, which is based on harmonic hierarchies that lead from home away to a place of tension and then back home to rest—a metaphor for imperialism, according to Russell (1959 [Romero, communication with the author, 15 April, 2018]).
It is also melodically striking, because it contains only two notes, and is more reminiscent of Buddhist chant than the melodious folksongs I had been hearing. I couldn’t help but notice a compelling similarity to a Zuni lullaby collected by ethnomusicologist David McAllister in New Mexico in 1950 and included in Jeff Todd Titon’s *Worlds of Music* (2015). Rather than repeated rhythmically, it would be sung intermittently, as many times as necessary to get the child to sleep. The word “sister” could also be changed depending on the singer’s relationship to the baby. Thus “mother,” “brother,” etc., could be used.

![Musical notation]

A lo a lo ang-pa nyi jik lo dang lo a ji ngen-pa ta jik treyo treyo treyo

Figure 19: “Lullaby from Prok”

### Conclusion

A few things can be inferred from this small sample of songs collected in Nubri. First, *changlū* are one of the most popular song genres for entertainment and exhibition. While I was visiting around the time of *dumche (grub mchod)*, or harvest festival, a time when *changlū* can be expected, most of my informants sang for me during the daytime, in private—in other words, not in a celebratory environment, and they still overwhelmingly chose to share *changlū* with me. This suggests that *changlū* is a high-status genre that Nubriwas would like to represent their musical tradition by foregrounding. On the other hand, since I was an honored guest, this may have simply been the most appropriate genre to sing for me. This is a question for future field research.
Second, *changlū*, and indeed other Nubri songs, use a range of modes and rhythmic patterns. Phrase lengths vary widely, with lengths of 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, and 24 being common, the diverse combinations of which result in asymmetrical phrase patterns, of which 52 beats is the most common. Occasionally there are odd-numbered phrases, such as 21- and 23-beat phrases in “*Metok Chöpay Dro Shay*.” Most *changlū* in my sample are hexatonic in modes on the first, second, fifth, or sixth scale degrees, and sometimes become pentatonic as *trapshay* (dance songs). The only heptatonic song in my sample is “*Metok Chöpay Droshay*,” which is also unusual in its triple meter, and may be from the *gur* (*mgur*) genre. The one song in my sample that was accompanied instrumentally (aside from those from Pema Dhondrup’s CD), “*Pasang Bhuti*,” is also unusual from the point of view of my musically educated exile Tibetan informants due to its non-normative *dranyen* rhythm. This could be attributable either to Nepali influence on the musician, Dawa Dhondrup, or a result of his own originality. Exile Tibetans were also suspicious of the sharp fourth scale degree in some songs, voicing the opinion that it was a mistake owing to a lack of musical education.

Furthermore, Nubri songs have a lot in common with Tibetan songs generally, especially those from Western Tibet, and some are even shared. Some have shared melodies and Nubri-specific texts, while some are completely unique to Nubri. Many use Nubri dialect words and refer to local landscape, pilgrimage sites, or customs. Nubri songs tend to lack the polish of exile Tibetan preservationist presentations of folk music because they are used in an indigenous, participatory, village-based cultural context rather than as cultivated or presentational performances for cosmopolitan diasporic audiences. For these reasons, Nubriwas and exile Tibetans have a lot to offer one another in terms of alliance. Tibetans can benefit from the vast repertoire that is held in Nubri that has not been subjected to the sinocization they allege within
the PRC (which is disputed by Tibetans from Tibet). Nubriwas can benefit from exile Tibetan companies like Lhamo Tshokpa incorporating Nubri songs into their repertoire, transmitting them to dislocated Nubri youth, and performing them for audiences in Kathmandu, India, and beyond. Nubriwas may or may not welcome the polishing effect that the exile Tibetans would presumably want to have upon them and their music, since it indicates an asymmetrical power relationship in which the exile Tibetans have the authority, but the process of negotiating that has the potential to benefit both groups by forcing them to articulate their differences and similarities, their connections and disjunctions, in ways that help them think about who they are in relationship to one another, and to the globalizing world of ever-becoming modernity. Finally, these songs, like many Tibetan pop and folk songs, contribute to a mandalization process through spatializing language, directionality, and hierarchical relationships.
Founders of the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (NTLA), or “Lhamo Tshokpa,” were newly arrived Tibetan refugees in the Gyaleling refugee camp in Solukhumbu in 1962, in the wake of the full Chinese takeover after the 1959 uprising and the Dalai Lama’s exile in India. At that time the NTLA was called the Tingri Manka Lhamo Tshokpa (TMLT), and consisted of a few Tibetan refugees knowledgeable in lhamo and other performing arts, who began practicing and teaching opera in the camp.\(^{38}\) In those early days there were not many people who were skilled, but two main expert founders were Nyima’i Öser and Bu Pelden.\(^{39}\) According to Khangkar Wangchuk, a founding member, who arrived in 1959 in Solukhumbu from Tingri, Tö, Western Tibet, the Tibetan refugees found that the lhamo practiced by the local Sherpas was “a little different” than what they were used to in Tibet, and preferred to preserve what they thought of as “pure Tibetan” performing arts. Gradually they began reconstructing opera scripts from the memories of various people who remembered certain lhamo roles. They also made efforts to collect songs from the various regions of the Tibetan Plateau.

This was part of a movement that began in Kalimpong India, where the Kyormolung (skyor mo lung) opera company, one of the official lhamo troupes from the Lhasa area, had a history of appearing long before the diaspora (Norbu and Dhondrup 2001). Thus there was a long-established community of lhamo enthusiasts in Kalimpong when the mass exodus of Tibetans began in 1959, and this town, which is near the borders of Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, received many refugees with experience in opera, including some from the Kyormolung.

\(^{38}\) Ache Lhamo (a lce lha mo), or “older sister goddess,” is translated as opera, and is usually called “lhamo” for short.

\(^{39}\) nyi ma’i ‘od gsser and bu dpal ldan (Kangkar Wangchuk, interview with the author, 7 April, 2017).
troupe itself. These refugees, together with local ethnic Tibetans, established a performing arts group in order both to educate people on the plight of the Tibetans and to fund support for the large number of arrivals (ibid.). According to Jamyang Norbu, former director of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA),

After the establishment of the Tibetan government-in-exile at Mussoorie in 1959, and its relocation to Dharamshala [sic] in April 1960, this embryonic performing troupe in Kalimpong was summoned to Dharamshala to become the official performing arts institute of the Tibetan government-in-exile and was called the Tibetan Historical and Cultural Drama Party (bhod ki gyalrap rigshung zlos-gar tshogs-pa) which was later changed to the Tibetan Music, Dance and Drama Society, or Bhod ki Dhoegar Tsokpa (bhod ki zlos-gar tshogs-pa) in Tibetan. This later became the present Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, which still claims its founding date to be the 11th of August 1959 (at Kalimpong) and boasts of being the first Institute of its kind to be established in exile (Norbu and Dhondrup 2001).

Kyormolung was the only semi-professional troupe in the early to mid-twentieth century hailing from Ü (dbu), or the Central Tibetan region of Lhasa, with most of the others hailing from Tsang (gtsang), which is farther to the west; this affected the style of lhamo that came to predominate at TIPA (Henrion-Dourcy 2017b). It should be noted that the refugees who founded the Kathmandu Lhamo Thsokpa were all from western areas, especially Tingri.

After the establishment of an official performing arts body by the government-in-exile, such groups, generically called “lhamo tshokpa,” sprang up in at least seven or eight refugee communities in India and Nepal, with explicit support of the Dalai Lama, and at least some connection to the forerunners of TIPA (Norbu and Dhondrup 2001). The Tingri Manka Lhamo Tshokpa was one of these, and though it remained somewhat peripheral to the exile community, which was predominantly in India, the TMLT also acknowledged its positionality in Nepal early on, by defining itself against the lhamo tradition of the local Sherpas of Solukhumbu. It continued to grow, and by the 1970s, many of its members had moved to Kathmandu. In 1976 it

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40 For more on the fundraising function of lhamo, see Dikey Drokar 2008).
was formally established as the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (*bal yul bod kyi lha mo tshog pa*), and from the early 1980s began working with the CTA-sponsored refugee boarding schools in the Kathmandu Valley, such as the Namgyal Middle and High Schools and Srongtsen Bhrikuti Boarding High School. These schools only opened up to Himalayan Nepalis around 2000.\(^{41}\)

Thus, though the NTLA has in the past worked with some students from Himalayan Nepal, it was originally an organization run by and for exile Tibetans.

In 1993 TIPA revived the annual lhamo festival, called Shoton (*zho ston*, or “yogurt fest”), in honor of the Dalai Lama. The festival had traditionally been celebrated near the Dalai Lama’s summer palace of Norbulingka since the 17\(^{th}\) century (the festival was also revived at Norbulingka in Tibet around the same time, but obviously, without any mention of the Dalai Lama. See Dikey Drokar 2008). The NTLA performed for the first time for His Holiness at this event, but did not stage a full opera. Instead 5-6 performers did only *lhamo* dance excerpts with no singing. The Lhamo Tshokpa was then guided by its main teacher, Sonam Tsering (d. 2015), who received substantial training at TIPA and was an expert in every aspect of *lhamo*, including singing, costumes, and scripts, as well as the four traditional instruments of the “Lhasa ensemble,” *dranyen* (lute), *piwang* (spike-fiddle), *lingbu* (flute), and *yangching* (hammered dulcimer). These instruments are used not in *lhamo*, but in non-monastic song genres, especially *nangma* and *töshay*. Since Sonam Tsering’s death in 2015, several younger teachers have stepped in to fill his role, including current head teacher Tenzin Namgyal, but Sonam Tsering’s vast knowledge is greatly missed by the leaders and students of the troupe. Besides being trained by Sonam Tsering, subsequent generations of Lhamo Tshokpa teachers have all had at least some measure of training at TIPA, and their style, rhetoric, and aesthetic sensibilities are thus concordant with TIPA’s. Since the membership of various Tibetan-speaking Nepalis among their

\(^{41}\) Childs, communication with the author, 14 March, 2018.
students has increased in recent years, they have made efforts to include songs from the Sherpa, Dolpo, and other ethnically Tibetan or related groups, in their repertoire.42

**The History of Lhamo**

The roots of *lhamo* are generally considered to be in the masked spectacles of the Tibetan Empire of the seventh to ninth centuries, but tradition holds that it was founded by the 15th century *mahasiddha* (yogic adept) Thangtong Gyalpo (Snyder 1976; Ahmed 1999; Fitzgerald 2017). According to this founding mythology, Thangthong Gyalpo was moved by compassion to help the people and animals he saw regularly perishing in dangerous river crossings to undertake a project of building iron bridges, 108 of which are attributed to him, and some of which are still in use. Thangtong Gyalpo is said to have adapted the masked dances he used to exorcise troublesome earth-spirits to a form of pedagogical entertainment in order to raise funds for bridge building. A connection of *lhamo* with exorcism and ritual, as well as education and entertainment, continues to this day (Calkowski 1991; Attisani and Ludbrook 1999; Norbu and Dhondrup 2001). *Lhamo* encompasses music, song, dance, costume, masks and props, and is traditionally performed in-the-round with very little in the way of sets. It ranges across genre from comedy to tragedy, from parody to satire, from ritual to recreation, and from morality play to political commentary, often within a single play. Each play is supposed to contain “all the nine expressions of drama such as beauty, ugliness, violence, humour [sic], fierceness, laughter, excitement, compassion, and peacefulness” (Lobsang Dorjee et al 1984: 22).

42 Students from Dolpo are now rare in the Lhamo Tshokpa, but were very common in the 1990s. Since then, they have made much progress in restoring their own performing arts traditions, and have distanced themselves from the exile Tibetans in musical education and transmission (Phurwa Dhondup, conversation with the author, 13 March, 2018).
Each lhamo play has a common introductory section in which there are three types of characters: ngönpa, or “hunters” (rongo pa), gyalu, or “elders,” (rgya lu), and khandroma, or ḍākinī (mkha’ ‘gro ma, or “sky-going goddesses,” also called “lhamo”). The roles played by the performers in the opera are determined by which part they take in the introductory section, with the hunters providing the male roles, the goddesses providing the female roles, and the elders (often only one or two) providing the narration. These are archetypal characters, with the hunters wearing the famous black (or white) flat masks most associated with lhamo, and doing the vigorous par chen spinning dance; the elders wearing the broad yellow headdresses of aristocrats, and delivering namthar (rnam thar, the name of the genre of religious hagiography from which it takes its name) accompanied by authoritative hand-gestures, and the goddesses wearing elegant dharma crowns of the Five Buddha Families (rig nga) and singing namthar while facing the west (Snyder, 1976).

The plays that follow this ritualistic introductory section contain much magic, royal intrigue, supernatural beings, deaths and resurrections, betrayals and redeemptions, and improvised comedy. All generally ends happily, with heroes and heroines married and taking the throne, or convincing their former enemies to follow the dharma. There are nine plays in the traditional repertoire:

**Chungpo Donyö and Dhondrup** (gcung po don yod don grub), in which the two main characters are brothers who are previous incarnations of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama,43 and who are helped by a monk who is an incarnation of Atiśa, an Indian master who revived monastic Buddhism in Tibet in the 11th century;

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43 The Panchen Lama is considered second only to the Dalai Lama in terms of religious authority in the Gelugpa school, and the two lines have traditionally recognized the reincarnations of each other.
Dharma King Norsang (chos rgyal nor bzang), in which a dākinī is kidnapped by a hunter and ends up marrying the king;

The Famous Hagiography of Rechung Dorje (ras chung rdo rje grags pa ’l rnam thar), in which the most famous disciple of the 11th-12th century yogi, Milarepa, is almost seduced by a beautiful woman (this play is said to be lost);

The Chinese Queen and the Nepali Queen (rgya bza’ bal bza’), which recounts the efforts of a minister of king Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po, 7th century) to acquire for him princesses from both China and Nepal;

The Resurrected Nangsa Ö-bum (‘das log snang sa ‘od ‘bum) in which a girl, Nangsa, after being forced to marry an abusive husband, dies of grief, is miraculously resurrected because she is actually an incarnation of a dākinī, and goes on to practice and teach dharma;

Drimay Künden (dri med kun lden), which is taken from a Jataka tale (stories of the Buddha’s previous lives drawn from the sutras) in which a king, after finally being blessed with a son, whose name means “Endowed with all Purity,” later gives up his children and even his own eye out of pure generosity, which are later restored to him because of his faith and merit;

Drowa Sangmo or Kala Wangpo (’gro ba bzang mo; ka la dbang po), in which Drowa Sangmo marries the king and has two children, who are persecuted by his evil first wife, go through many travails, and finally kill her and assume the throne;

Sukyi Nyima (gzugs kyi nyi ma), another story based on a Jataka tale, in which, after a deer is impregnated by contact with a loin-cloth soiled in the wet-dream of a pious hermit, she gives birth to a miraculous baby girl, Sukyi Nyima, who is later forced to
marry the king, but eventually escapes to practice and teach the dharma; and finally, 

**Pema Öbar** (*Padma ‘od ‘bar*), which tells the story of a former life of Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche, the Indian master credited with establishing Buddhism in eighth-century Tibet (Snyder 1976; Ross 1995).

There are also at least two modern plays, **Chaksam (lcag zam)**, adapted from the hagiography of Thangtong Gyalpo by former TIPA director Jamyang Norbu with Norbu Tsering (Norbu and Dhondrup 2001), and another based on the life of Milarepa.

The vocal styles employed range from the tense, glottal, operatic “aria” style of the **namthar** to **kha bshad** (chant-like narrative recitative) to spoken dialogue and monologue. The accompanying music is restricted to **sbub ‘chal** (hemispheric cymbals) and **rnga** (two-headed frame drum) unless other musical instruments appear diagnostically in the action, or are included in intervals of folksong and dance inserted by some troupes (Snyder 1976). Specific drum and cymbal compositions for each major character in each play are instantly recognizable to knowledgeable listeners. The scripts are based on religious hagiographies and **Jataka** tales, and sometimes even supposedly real events. While each troupe has historically written down its own script, these vary a great deal from troupe to troupe, leave plenty of room for improvised topical humor, and remain open to free revision. The scripts contain only text; aria melodies, recitatives, and drum/cymbal compositions are all transmitted orally and performed from memory, amounting to a staggering volume of material over the nine traditional plays in the repertoire, each of which takes at least a full day to perform in full.

**Lhamo** has been called “secular theatre” (Snyder 1976), “secular religiosity” (Attisani and Ludbrook 1999), and “folk opera” (Lobsang Dorjee et al 1984; Ahmed 2006), but its pervasive use of religious subject matter and inherent ritual function make a sacred-secular
divide largely meaningless. Besides religious content, lhamo performances always contain religious rituals, and can have a ritualistic function in themselves, bringing luck and blessings to the community. Weather-controlling rites are often conducted beforehand, and a shrine is set up in the center of every lhamo stage it before each performance with offerings made to Thangtong Gyalpo, who is not only the historic “patron saint” of lhamo, but a meditational deity. That the primary official venues for lhamo in pre-1959 Tibet were Drepung, Sera, and Meru monasteries and Norbulingka palace, coupled with the fact that some of the main lhamo troupes were monastic, also complicates the monastic/non-monastic dichotomy with regard to lhamo. The use of the word “opera,” however, seems apt to describe lhamo due to its use of demanding, stylized singing styles, combination of costume, dance, and spectacle, as well as its sponsorship by elites and embrace by the masses.

By the time of the “Great Fifth” Dalai Lama in the 17th century, lhamo was heavily regulated by the central government, with officially sanctioned troupes required to perform in Lhasa every summer in exchange for tax exemption and payment-in-kind. It is not known how many official troupes existed at that time, but by the 1950s there were four major and six minor professional troops on the books of the central government. The four major troupes were each required to perform a complete opera at the Norbulingka Shotön. These were the Gyalkar Tsepa (rgyal mkhar rtse pa), a monastic troupe from Tsang; the Chung Ripo Chepa (gcung rip o che pa), a troupe of farmers from near Mt. Everest, who for some time were allowed to stop participating in the Shotön due to the great distance they had to travel; the Shang Ripo Chepa (shangs rip o che pa), a troupe of farmers from Shang, also in Tsang, but closer to Lhasa, that replaced the Chung Ripo Chepa (who were then invited back by the 13th Dalai Lama in 1913); and the Kyormolung, which was the largest troupe and consisted of farmers, merchants, and
others from around Lhasa, and also included some women (Snyder 1976: 30-31). It is this last troupe in exile that had the most formative influence on lhamo.

The six lesser troupes did not perform complete operas at Shotön, but instead participated in other rituals of the festival wearing masks designed by the fifth Dalai Lama. These were the Tashi Sholpawa (bkra shis zhol pa ba), a troupe of farmers from Yarlung; the Shedra Nyemopa (bshad sgra rnye mo pa), farmers from Nyeo; the Thonpa Nyemopa (thon pa rnye mo pa), also from Nyeo; the Pun Dun Drok Karpa (spun bdun grog mkhar pa), farmers from Lhoka; and finally the Nang Tsepa (snang rtse pa), and Tsho Mepa (mtshos mad pa), both consisting of farmers from near Lhasa (Snyder 1976: 31-32). All of these troupes were known for their different styles and specializations, from the more staid and conservative performances of monastic troupes like the Gyalkar Tsepa, to the more fast-paced and modern style of the Kyormolung. There were also numerous non-official troupes, with farmers to government officials often putting on impromptu performances without costumes or props, or singing namthar for amusement at parties and picnics, or performing at monasteries during summer encampments. Lhamo was also performed in far-flung Tibetan cultural areas that are now in India, Bhutan, and Nepal. In Nubri, the villagers of Sama stage a lhamo festival every three years, with the next iteration scheduled to take place in October of 2018. On an interesting note, I have long thought of taking members of the Lhamo Tshokpa to see this festival in Sama, but recently the Lhamo Tshokpa informed me that the village headman of Sama contacted them and invited them to this years festival to observe and advise them in improving their performance, as well as to help them with costumes—thus the two groups have already moved to form an alliance without my intervention.

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44 Although Snyder refers to these performers as “farmers,” it may be more accurate to call them “subjects” (mi ser), since they may have been compelled to perform as a tax obligation (see Goldstein et al 2015).
**Lhamo Since 1959**

Tibet was invaded (or “peacefully liberated” according to the PRC) in 1950, but it was not until the Tibetan uprising of 1959 that the Dalai Lama fled to India, followed by tens of thousands of Tibetans, who settled in refugee camps in both India and Nepal. The ensuing creation of a government-in-exile administering a growing diaspora resulted in “two Tibets” (Van Schaik 2011: 238-269), with the PRC installing the Panchen Lama as titular leader in Lhasa, but ruling Tibet directly. Thus since then there have been two political **mandalas** of Tibet articulated, and two accompanying narratives—one from the CTA and one from the PRC. In the wake of 1959, every aspect of traditional cultural practices within Tibet suffered major disruptions—from the “brain drain” effect of so many major lamas and educated aristocrats fleeing to exile, to the ravages of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). For almost two decades, *lhamo* could not be performed in public or was reformed stylistically and substantially to conform to Maoist ideology (Morcom 2004). Since 1978, with the post-Mao reforms of Deng Zhaoping, some of the pre-1959 troupes, such as Kyormolung and Gyalkar Tsepa have been reconstituted (Dikey Drokar 2008; Fitzgerald 2014) and the Shotön festival revived at Norbulingka, albeit with a revisionist agenda aimed at appropriation and Sinicization (Ahmed 2006: 164). There are, however, many amateur companies in Tibet that still perform *lhamo* in a traditional way without much interference from the State (Fitzgerald 2014).

Since the Chinese takeover/liberation of Tibet, both the CTA, in the form of TIPA, and the government of the PRC have used *lhamo* each for their own ideological ends. According to Ahmed,

The Tibetan diaspora has used it in their assertion of “Tibetan identity” and resistance against the Sinicization policy of the PRC in Tibet. The PRC has taken
up the same performance in order to convince the world that it “emancipated” the Tibetans (2004: 149)… [L]hamo is “the semantic space, the field of signs and practices,” in which two formations of political actors, the Tibetan government-in-exile and the PRC, seek to “construct and represent themselves” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 27). The performance is activated as a site of struggle between the diasporic community and the occupiers/liberators by articulation of at least three social fields, namely the diasporic conditioning, “identity,” and “tradition.” It is by this means that power is anchored in the Ihamo and is mobilized for resistance as well as domination (Ahmed 172-173).

Ahmed argues that “the government-in-exile chooses to ‘fix’ Tibetan identity in terms of (neo) orientalist representation of a primordial past, a homogenized Buddhism, and patriarchy” (Ahmed 2006: 163, citing Anand 2000) in order to use Ihamo as a tool of resistance, whereas in pre 1950s Tibet,

Political actors belonging to the same social formation that has mobilized the opera for resistance would have done it for articulating Buddhist ideals that served the dominant classes and their hegemony. Hence what serves as a tool of resistance today may have been one of domination at an earlier point. These shifting positions of Ihamo in the social field foreground the potential of cultural politics as subversive, yet transient, “well-intentioned” strategies are actually camouflaged articulations that conceal hegemonic designs (Ahmed 163).

In deploying such “strategic essentialism,” the CTA has sought to unify exile Tibetans by presenting “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Briggs 1996) of a unified nation, composed of the “three regions” (chol kha gsum) of Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo. While visiting TIPA in 2016, I was shown the costumes of these three regions, prominently displayed in the institute’s museum, and presented as if there were a single “uniform” for people of each of these different vast areas. Later that day, I witnessed a performance of songs from all three regions, performed by TIPA students and artists. Although the corresponding costumes were worn by the performers, little attempt seemed to be made to represent different musical styles—while the costumes may have been different, sonically the performances of Kham and Amdo songs sounded similar to those from Ü-Tsang.
The CTA has long been dominated by “exile Tibetans” (those who left Tibet in 1959 or were born in exile), who are largely from Ü-Tsang, and “new arrivals” (Yeh 2007), who are more often from Eastern areas, have had far less influence. Both groups use the rhetoric of purity, claiming the title of “pure Tibetans” (*bod pa gtsang ma*). The exile Tibetans, many of whom have never seen Tibet, base their claims of authenticity on “temporal” and moral grounds, and are suspicious and dismissive of new arrivals as being too Sinicized (Yeh 2007, Yamamoto 2017). The new arrivals, for their part, claim the embodied habitus of actually growing up in Tibet, and deride the lack of Tibetan language literacy and geographic knowledge among the exiles (Yeh). The new arrivals, however, still have little influence in the CTA or its performing arts arm, TIPA. By appealing to a national imaginary of a pure and unitary pre-1959 Tibet, the exiles have “recentered” the locus of authenticity to Dharamsala (Yeh 2006: 665) TIPA has contributed to this recentering by systematically “performing the nation” (Briggs) in exile by presenting a vision of Tibet as comprising “three regions,” a vision that has long been criticized
as “Lhasa-centric” (Norbu and Dhondrup 2001). This diasporic version of performing arts has now been disseminated around the globe, to Europe, America, and Australia, where large populations of Tibetans are growing (Yeh 2006; Yeh and Lama 2006; Fitzgerald 2017).

**Lhamo in Kathmandu**

The Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association is something of an outpost of TIPA, and its director and teachers have all had some degree of training there. Furthermore, they depend to some extent for funding on CTA-connected charities like the Tibet Fund. While some of the teachers and leaders of the Lhamo Tshokpa were born in Nepal, they are all members of the exile community of Tibetan refugees and have limited rights in the Nation. Their project aligns with TIPA in terms of presenting a unified version of Tibetan performing arts in service of an eventual return to Tibet, although that hope seems to be fading. Originally, the students of the Lhamo Tshokpa were nearly all the children of refugees, but due to demographic changes involving outmigration and urbanization in the last decade or so, they now teach lhamo, as well as so-called classical genres of nangma and töshay to a number of Himalayan Nepali youth from Tibetan-speaking areas like Nubri, Dolpo and Tsum, as well as some Sherpas and Tamangs. These students, while they identify culturally and linguistically to varying degrees with the Tibetan diaspora, are citizens of Nepal, and identify strongly with their own specific regions. This mingling of diasporic and indigenous-Nepali Tibetan identities makes the Lhamo Tshokpa a rich space for the recentering of identities between the Tibetan diaspora and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

A third, trans-Himalayan identity begins to take shape, which places Tibetan music and culture firmly within the incredible ethnic and cultural diversity of Nepal. This happens in
several ways: (1) teachers and leaders of Lhamo Tshokpa constantly expose their Nepali-Himalayan students to the message that they are part of the Tibetan diaspora; (2) the Lhamo Tshokpa makes continuing efforts to include Nepali-Himalayan songs in their repertoire; (3) Lhamo Tshokpa leaders strategize about ways to adapt to long-term existence in Nepal, which is currently experiencing an increase in Chinese influence on policy, betraying an unstated belief that they are never going back to Tibet; and (4) they actively recruit students from non-refugee Tibetan-speaking populations. Before getting to these points, however, I want to discuss the form of their weekly practices and teaching style.

**Saturdays at the Lhamo Tshokpa**

In 2014, Anna Morcom introduced me to the Lhamo Tshokpa, taking me through the narrow paths to the Arab Bank neighborhood, where they then held rehearsals in the ground floor of a Tibetan exile apartment building. There I saw 20-30 students practicing song and dance routines in a dark, basement-like space, where they had to avoid the many structural pillars of the building as they rehearsed slow, twirling steps while singing to the accompaniment of *dranyen*, *piwang*, *yangching*, and *lingbu*. 
Meanwhile, in a small kitchen area, several a ma lags (older ladies) prepared a lunch of dal-bhat (rice and lentils), the Nepali national dish. Outside, groups of younger students were being tutored in songs and dance steps while some boys practiced the vigorous par chen spinning dance, in which they pirouette while leaping in the air, inscribing the circle that defines the lhamo performance space. I attended their rehearsals every Saturday in summer 2014, summer 2015, winter 2015-2016. After I returned to Nepal in spring 2016, I attended as often as I could as I attended a summer session in Nepali language at Rangjung Yeshe Institute. In the spring of
2017, the Lhamo Tshokpa were kicked out of their space in Arab Bank and moved to a larger space in Ramhiti, near Boudha, for which they acquired a long-term lease. This new space is far superior, with more square footage and an open span, free from pillars. It also has an attached office, kitchen, and a room dedicated to storage of costumes and properties, as well as two restrooms. Although a positive improvement in facilities, this new space is also more expensive, putting pressure on the Lhamo Tshokpa’s already strained budget.

Figure 22: Lhamo Tshokpa rehearses ngönpa dance in new space, Ramhiti

The budget has been further strained by the withdrawal of a brief two years of permission from the Nepal government for the exile Tibetans to openly celebrate the Dalai Lama’s birthday in July. This permission has always been tenuous, and was not given at all until the 1990s, but the first time I had occasion to attend the celebrations in 2014, they were allowed to go on all day, albeit with a strong presence of armed police. At that time the Lhamo Tshokpa performed the opening ceremonies of lhamo, followed by a program of nangma and tōshay, then by a
succession of regional dance-song presentations by various associations of different geographical areas in Tibet. One of these involved my own home-stay father, who, even though he was well aware that I was studying music, never told me he was a skilled singer and dancer. Later, when I brought home my first dranyen, he took it and played fluently! The joy of the Tibetans of Kathmandu in being able to fully celebrate His Holiness’ birthday was palpable, and a sense of hope pervaded the scene. After the program ended many people remained to dance gorshay in the middle of the large tent that had sheltered the audience. This joy was short-lived, however, as after the Indian-supported blockade of 2015, Nepali authorities once again tightened control of public gatherings by exile Tibetans, who were not allowed to celebrate in 2016 or 2017. This was a big hit to the fundraising of the Lhamo Tshokpa, which could expect to raise $2,500 dollars from the audiences at these events—their biggest fundraising opportunity of the year—as well as the loss of a major performance venue.

The Lhamo Tshokpa has a board of elders, several of whom are founding members, a director, secretary, head teacher, and other officers. These are all elected to a three-year term by members who have been active for at least five years. They also have a group of senior students who form a semi-professional troupe of “artistes” (without French pronunciation) similar to that of TIPA. These artistes are responsible for the major performances, as well as visiting the schools of the younger students on a weekly basis and teaching them in smaller groups in between the Saturday meetings. At any given time there are upwards of fifty students, including the senior artistes, although attendance on any given Saturday is usually 20-30. Each Saturday students gather from around 10:00 am and begin practicing whatever they are working on. Depending on what that is, they might break into smaller groups or practice en masse. At about 1:00 pm they break for lunch, always a healthy meal cooked by older women volunteers, or by
the senior members. Lunch break is long and leisurely, with a lot of socializing. Often the students play karaoke tracks of popular Tibetan and Nepali pop songs and sing along, or work together on their hip-hop dance moves. From about 2:30 to 5:00 they regroup to continue rehearsal. The afternoon rehearsal often seems more intense, with more yelling out from elders and detailed instruction from the teachers. There are often also speeches consisting of mild scolding, encouragement and moral instruction. They work on an opera for about two months before a major performance, like the Dalai Lama’s birthday or Losar (Tibetan New Year). Every summer they travel to India to perform in the Shotön festival. In the fall they study song, dance, and instruments. They also perform at various festivals and celebrations, as required by the community. These minor performances are often done for free, or to fundraise for other causes.

The teaching at Lhamo Tshokpa is done orally, with support from written texts, often shared electronically or photographed from a white board and read from students’ phones. It is very common to see students singing and dancing with phone in hand, glancing intermittently at the lyrics. All vocal melodies are taught by ear, and also recorded on mobile phones for repeated listening. For lhamo plays, teachers and students use written scripts. All teaching is done in Tibetan, in which all students seem to have at least some fluency, though some struggle more than others with the written language. Namthar arias are written on the white board in dbu med (lower case) script and taught repetitively, line-by-line, after which students practice on their own using the photographs and recordings on their phones. Students without phones copy the lyrics down by hand into notebooks and later work with one another and with the senior artiste teachers in smaller groups to commit them to memory. For non-lhamo instrumental music the process is similar, but musical notation (Chevé system) is also used (Collinge 1996). This notation is the same for all instruments of the “Lhasa ensemble” and is solfege-based. For the
Instruments of drum and cymbal, there is no notation, but each piece is transmitted orally and memorized. Kati Fitzgerald has written about the Lhamo Tshokpa’s didactic practices, particularly noting the importance of peer-to-peer learning and the fluidity of hierarchical relationships:

Starting from the beginning, the [lhamo] scenes are played for the teachers of dance, music and the elders of the group. The scenes are stopped when there is a dropped line, a missed entrance or a muddied dance step. In this way, the teachers and students interact directly in a trial and error schema. Younger members of the NTLA are expected to stand aside and watch, practicing the dance steps and singing the accompanying parts throughout rehearsal. The younger students witness hours and hours of peer performances, which serve as their model for performance. As might be expected, this process takes time and involves many discussions among senior performers, non-performing elders and the group leaders. Good-natured controversies often arise concerning the manner in which certain scenes or dialogues should be performed. Again, seniority is not always the marker of authority in these didactic interactions. Especially athletic and refined dancers are frequently less experienced, younger members of the troupe. Additionally, performance talent is not always equally distributed and the best singers are infrequently the best dancers. This means that authority to teach is not permanently manifest in one performer. Rather, power flows between various members of the troupe as the rehearsal process progresses (Fitzgerald 2017: 160).

Indeed, the democratic nature of the Lhamo Tshokpa’s selection of officers puts the authority for choosing leadership in the hands of all long-term members, but elders and senior teachers are obviously held in high regard and are given a lot of deference. This is especially true for the elders, who seem to be cherished by all and are treated with great respect. They typically sit on the sidelines and watch the rehearsals intently, often shouting out comments or singing along with the arias. When I noticed one elder doing this, I asked him “have you memorized everything?” “Yes, everything!” was his emphatic reply. While most of the surviving founding elders are from Tingri or elsewhere in Tsang, with at least one from Kham, this elder is from near Lhasa, and escaped from Tibet more recently. He described being imprisoned by the Chinese, and spoke of the importance of preserving “pure” Tibetan culture.
I have observed the Lhamo Tshokpa rehearsing and/or performing three operas: Chaksam, Prince Noryang, and The Resurrected Nangsa Ö-bum. I have also been present at many rehearsals of dance songs, and the filming of their most recent DVD, of töshay chamber-songs. The research for and filming of this DVD was funded by a grant from the Tibet Fund, and consisted of songs the Lhamo Tshokpa collected from elders in the refugee camps of Nepal. They do a lot of song collection and documentation, including some in Tibetan-speaking areas of Nepal. To date they have produced at least two DVDs, which they sell as another means of fundraising, most of which they do at their performances. Dikey Drokar has written of the fundraising function of Lhamo, and for the NTLA this holds true, although they are mostly concerned with fundraising for themselves, as their budget is very precarious. While no one receives a salary, the senior teachers and the senior artistes receive a small stipend, and are paid a token amount for appearing in DVDs. Gyalpo, the director of the group, has expressed that he
needs to find more sustainable funding, not only for operating expenses like rent and travel, but also for capital expenses like repairing the floor of the rehearsal space and installing a sound system. He would also like to be able to pay real salaries to the senior teachers and artistes, so that they would be able to commit more fully to the Lhamo Tshokpa, which could then become a truly “professional” troupe. He also wants to give an allowance to students so they could buy sodas or add balance to their phones. The students spend all day Saturday—their one day off in the six-day school week of Nepal—practicing from morning to night, and he worries that many potential students do not come because they are finding ways to make a little income on Saturdays, and he wants to relieve them of that burden.

The Lhamo Tshokpa gives instruction to students for free, as well as providing them with a healthy lunch, and often snacks and drinks. If students are in trouble, they are aware that they can come to the group for help. In this way, the Lhamo Tshokpa has the feeling of a family, and Gyalpo has repeatedly told me his goal is to make the students “better people,” who respect their elders, learn and preserve their culture, and stay away from drugs and alcohol. This aspect of moral education has been used as a selling point by the Lhamo Tshokpa in their grant proposals, and in their fundraising pitches to the community, and indeed, students who spend their one day off per week diligently practicing performing arts have little time for delinquency. The students, for their part, seem to value the social aspect of participation as well as the opportunity to increase their cultural knowledge, since Saturday practices are an opportunity to socialize with friends from different schools. Overall, the atmosphere is light and fun, with a lot of laughter, teasing, and shenanigans punctuating very serious and disciplined practice. Occasionally a student—especially a senior one—will be gently scolded for being too frivolous, which
ironically draws more laughter from the group and the student, attesting to the importance of the “safe space” the Lhamo Tshokpa has cultivated.

While the Lhamo Tshokpa is affiliated with TIPA, it is independent, and has its own agendas related to its location in Nepal and removed from the center of the exile Tibetan mandala in Dharamsala. Without any Nepalese citizens on its board, it is not an officially sanctioned non-profit, and must be careful of attracting too much government attention. Because most of its new students now come from diverse, localized Himalayan identities, and are Nepali citizens, it must also adapt to their needs, and do so without alienating or offending the exile Tibetan establishment and representatives of the CTA in Kathmandu, who can be very inflexible about any perceived dilution of pure Tibetan-ness. Having to negotiate these sometimes conflicting pressures has made the leaders of the Lhamo Tshokpa very careful and canny. Rarely do they tip their full hand in such negotiations. Rather, they attempt to thread the various alliances they depend upon to survive and to continue their mission, albeit while remaining open to the evolution of that mission as political realities change. The Lhamo Tshokpa is therefore a rich ground for observing and thinking about identity discourses, the alliances in which they are implicated, and the cultural models and logics that underlie them.

Cultural Logic and the Lhamo Tshokpa as a Nexus of Identity Discourse and Alliance

Sherry Ortner has written that the Sherpa’s periodic founding of monasteries reveals cultural models that “are both events and symbols” that “can be read expressively as well as instrumentally” (1989: 59, quoted in Fischer 1999: 478). The Lhamo Tshokpa’s performances, as well as their weekly rehearsals, are likewise events that are meant to both communicate and inculcate the cultural model of the contemporary exile Tibetan community, and the idiosyncratic
version of it that is unique to Nepal. This model is centered on the “imagined,” idealized homeland and the collective trauma of its loss. Such models are not static or bounded, but are generated and maintained in the minds of countless individuals and disseminated socially. Thus there is no one true version of a cultural model, but multitudinous models that are so similar as to appear to be collective. Edward Fischer has theorized “cultural logic” as a way to balance the extremes of “constructivist” and “essentialist” approaches to identity that have at times alienated academics from the indigenous groups they study, and “encourage a new type of engagement of anthropologists with ‘the field’ in which we understand ‘ourselves’ to be them as well as us” (1999: 474). In Fischer’s definition, cultural logic is “generative principles expressed through cognitive schemas that promote intersubjective continuity and are conditioned by social, political, and economic contingencies” (473).

The use of the term “cognitive schemas” in 1999 reveals Fischer to be at the forefront of the widespread adoption of concepts from cognitive psychology and neuroscience embraced across the humanities in the last two decades, along with their attendant positivist and materialist assumptions. Fischer finds fault with Ortner for failing to “operationalize the link between idiosyncratic cognition and the dynamics of shared culture,” leaving him “with little sense of the precise mechanics of how individually articulated intentions not only reproduce but change the system itself” (1999: 478). Perhaps this is because such processes are not precisely mechanical, or are mechanical only in a metaphoric or analogous way. In terms of music, Óscar Hernández Salgar deals with this disconnect between individual cognition and shared culture by “formulating a relationship of unnecessary-connection. That is, a contingent relationship, which does not place the weight exclusively on the musical text or on the particularity of each listener, but that is created in the encounter between them” (2016: 17). Thus the interpellation, or placing
of the subject in an identity is able to happen because neither the embodied subject nor culturally ascribed meanings are determined or have necessary “belongingness” (which begins to sound a little like the Buddhist notion of emptiness).

Coming as I do from a background of Buddhist philosophy, in which the mind does not “equal” the brain, but is dependent upon it as its physical faculty (yid kyi dbang po), I am wary of materialism and positivism, which have too often been used to shut down other ontologies. I find the concept of “cultural logic” useful because:

Cultural logic is realized (and thus, for the anthropologist at least, can only be meaningfully analyzed) through practice. And this practice has a marked constructive quality, with new symbolic forms and meanings emerging from the dynamic interaction of individual intention (itself culturally conditioned but not predetermined), cultural norms (variably enforced through reflexive social interaction), and material contingencies (encompassing not only local ecologies but also structural positions in global systems of political economy) (Fischer 1999: 477).

That this logic is generative means that underlying the cultural forms are simple rules that appear to have some kind of boundaries and persist over time. This can account for the seemingly contradictory presence of change and continuity while at the same time highlighting individual agency in constant interaction with received cultural norms.

Like the Maya in Fischer’s study, the shared cultural logic of the exile Tibetans and the Himalayan Nepalis (as well as Tibetans in Tibet) has a “philosophical presupposition of fundamental cosmic connectedness,” balance between the physical and metaphysical, and “ritualized reciprocity” (480). The force of karma propels confused beings into various rebirths over infinite time, resulting in the theoretical truism that every being has been every other being’s mother an untold number of times in a confused cyclic existence that can never be ultimately satisfactory because it is based on fundamental ignorance of the nature of reality. The ultimate nature of that reality is emptiness—the lack of permanent, non-interdependent self-
entity that is nevertheless imbued with luminous awareness. The “Two Truths” doctrine of Buddhism is an important part of that cultural logic. It allows for the instrumental use of essentialism while maintaining a faith in the illusory nature of appearances, within which beings must nevertheless operate, and makes it ultimately non-contradictory. Thus, at the level of relative truth, we exist in a physical realm in which we must refrain from harming “others,” and propitiate non-physical beings that can create obstacles for our mundane and soteriological progress. At the level of ultimate truth, however, we are not different from those, or other beings in various realms, and there is nothing to do since the state of things is perfect as it is.

Such Buddhist worldviews form much of the shared cultural logic of ethnic Tibetans in exile, within the Tibetan plateau, and in Himalayan areas of Nepal and India. There is also a historic presence of center-periphery orientations, and a belief in a “Tibetan race” (the result of intercourse between a monkey and a rock ogress), that was hopelessly backward and barbaric before the arrival of Buddhism. Both the exile Tibetans, and the Chinese have sought to elide the many dialects, sub-ethnicities, and regional differences, and to present two different constructed presentations of Tibetan-ness (Shneiderman 2006). Identity discourse in Nepal has further reinforced the disparate local identities of those in Nepal, who have a long history of being peripheral to both Tibet and Nepal and have never considered themselves as a single ethnicity, (Ramble 2008b).

The shared cultural logics of the exile Tibetans and the Himalayan Nepalis, as well as their long-term proximity in Kathmandu, allows both Tibetan and Himalayan individuals to appropriate and manipulate shared “cultural symbols as well as material objects for situationally contingent ends” (Fischer 1999: 479). An example of this from my experience came in September of 2016, when I presented a talk on the subject of Tibetan music in Nepal at the
Fulbright-Nepal auditorium in Ganeshwor, Kathmandu. In this talk, I played examples of liturgical music in an exile Tibetan monastery in Kathmandu; pop music produced by exile Tibetans in Boudha, and a Nubri song sung by Nepali Himalayan Pema Dhondrup, with exile Tibetan production and accompaniment. During the question and answer period following the talk, a Sherpa college student challenged my unexamined use of the term “Tibetan music,” which was fair enough. Since I was talking about music that was largely created by exile Tibetans or Himalayans working with exile Tibetans, I had not seen a reason to explicate the term. Although exile Tibetans provide religious and cultural education that the Himalayan Nepalis often rely on, they are decidedly uncomfortable with calling their culture Tibetan. Thus, “Himalayan” is often used in discourse by people who are looking for a different term to describe pan-Tibetan culture. I have heard of one instance of monks in a Boudha monastery crossing out the word “Tibetan” and replacing it with “Himalayan.” I have also heard of Tamangs who argue that Tönmi Sambhota, the apocryphal inventor of the Tibetan alphabet, was actually Tamang, and the Tibetans got the script from them.

I acknowledged to the Sherpa student, my mistake in not explaining the problematics of the term “Tibetan,” and my eagerness to learn more, and she invited me to “come to our Sherpa Cultural Centre and see our class in Sherpa songs and Sherpa tungna” (the word among Nepali Himalayans for various forms of lutes similar to the dranyen—possibly a Tamang pronunciation of rdung len, to play and sing). She explained to me that at the Sherpa Cultural Centre, where she was a volunteer, they specifically work to preserve and promote specifically Sherpa culture and teach it to youth. When I arrived at the appointed time, I was warmly welcomed by the director of the Centre, who again expressed his excitement that I was interested in the Sherpa tungna, so when he led me to the classroom, I was surprised to see the exile-Tibetan Lhamo Tshokpa.
teacher, Tenzin Namgyal, teaching six Sherpa students, each of whom was holding a long-necked, six-string, Lhasa-style *dranyen*, rather than the shorter Himalayan *tungna*, which is by no means standard, but is usually quite distinct from the Lhasa instrument. Thus as soon as these six *dranyen*, made by exile Tibetan luthier Buchung, came through the door of the Sherpa Cultural Centre, they became “Sherpa *tungna,*” and the fact that the teacher was not a Sherpa went unmentioned. In this way, the cultural symbol and material object of the lute was reappropriated for the situationally contingent end of defining Sherpa culture as distinct from Tibetan. That this was actively abetted by the Tenzin Namgyal shows the centrality of alliance as Tibetans and Nepali Himalayans work together to produce cultural models in a kind of unspoken discourse in which each side has something to give and something to gain. For the Sherpa organizers and students, the exile Tibetans are a resource for both the physical instruments and the knowledge of how to play and teach them, and for the Tibetans, alliance with the Sherpas provides income while allowing them to retain an implicit authority as teachers or luthiers.

Shared cultural logics behind Buddhist religion, language, customs of dress, and so on, facilitate such alliances and allow both sides to maintain divergent cultural models that are nevertheless seen as non-contradictory and mutually beneficial. Specifically, the cultural logic of center-periphery is reproduced by this alliance.

Center-periphery narratives often involve “civilizing projects,” in which a cultural center brings peripheral areas into the civilizational fold (Shneiderman 2006: 2), and this trope has long been present in Tibetan historiographies and narratives (Childs 2001; Ramble 2008a. 2008b). The ethnic identities of the Himalayan Nepalis have a history of inclusion on the periphery of the Tibetan world, as well as being shaped within the “Nepali national framework of ethnicity,” in which they have long been marginalized in a wholly separate periphery from the Tibetan one.
The exile Tibetans’ collective identity ironically includes being in “the center” of cultural authority as the self-proclaimed authentic heirs to the Central and Western Tibetan “heart” of Tibetan culture, and at the same time having been forced to the deterritorialized peripheral space of diaspora by the loss of their homeland to the Chinese (16-17). In Nepal, the center-periphery locations of both exile Tibetans and Himalayans can shift between these two positionalities, with the Tibetans holding the center in terms of cultural knowledge, while the Himalayans, while still marginalized, have the rights of citizenship and are thus at least theoretically closer to the center of political power and security.

Alliances between the exile Tibetans and the Himalayans often delineate the contours of this cultural logic. After the Dalai Lama’s birthday in 2017, when the Nepal government again forbade the exile Tibetans from celebrating as a group, a leader of the Lhamo Tshokpa expressed to me that, although it has always been under the auspices of the CTA’s representatives in Nepal and the exile community, it might be a good idea to turn over organization and sponsorship of the event to Himalayan groups, who might be somewhat immune from government suppression due to their status as citizens. He also suggested that this was unlikely to happen due to resistance from the refugee establishment and the organizational atomization of the Himalayan groups; nonetheless, this is an example of the Lhamo Tshokpa entertaining creative possibilities of ways to ally with the Himalayans that might counter some of the disadvantages of their subaltern status in the Nepali state.

The cultural authority of the Lhamo Tshokpa vis-à-vis the Himalayans is at the heart of the civilizing project of bringing “pure” Tibetan culture to the center. This authority is expressed through alliance in terms of language/dialect by conducting all teaching in the refugee dialect of Tibetan, which is not the native language of most of the Himalayan students. By performing in
Tibetan, the Himalayan students are allying with the exile Tibetans in a collaboration that acknowledges Himalayan subordinate status in the realm of cultural knowledge. In the wake of the repression of cultural expression that indigenous groups in Nepal experienced, an explosion of identity discourse and organization along ethnic lines, with explicit efforts to “recover” traditions that were lost or impoverished, has fostered a cultural logic that dovetails nicely with that of the exile Tibetans’ authority. It seemed only natural for Himalayan parents to send their children to Tibetan monasteries, boarding schools, and institutions like Lhamo Tshokpa to recover some version of their ethno-cultural practices. This hierarchy of authority can be seen in practices and performances of the Lhamo Tshokpa.

In the months preceding the Dalai Lama’s birthday in 2017, the Lhamo Tshokpa began rehearsing a full production of the opera “The Resurrected Nangsa Woebum.” In this opera, the main character, Nangsa Woebum, is a daughter miraculously born to a barren, but devout couple after supplicating Tara, the Protectress. The daughter, an incarnation of Tara, grows to be the most beautiful and desirable young woman in the area, and is soon noticed by the prince who falls in love with her and uses his authority to force her into marriage. The prince’s aunt, an evil nun, resents Nangsa immediately and plots to abuse and destroy her. In a crucial scene, the nun beats Nangsa for generously giving grain to mendicant yogis and pulls out some of her hair. The nun then goes to the king and prince, hair in hand, and claims it was Nangsa who pulled out her hair. She thus turns the prince against his wife, and he also beats her until she dies “of grief.” Nangsa is then miraculously resurrected after meeting the lord of death, who realizes she is a ḍākinī, and goes back to the royal household to the contrition of the king, prince, and nun, whom she inspires to practice the dharma.
The Lhamo Tshokpa chose a fifteen year old Sherpa girl to play the lead role in this production—an instantiation of alliance in which the Himalayans would be given pride of place in a very important performance, symbolically aligning them with the exile community. During rehearsals, a senior student, who is an exile Tibetan, played the role of the evil nun, and was required to dramatically beat Nangsa with a riding crop made from a dowel with a short piece of rope attached. At one point the older girl got a little too vigorous with the beating, and the younger girl was hurt, and broke out in tears. After a brief interruption in which everyone comforted her and the director of the company, a Tibetan medicine specialist, massaged her “bruised nerve,” the rehearsal resumed with no further problems.

Figure 24: Rehearsing the beating scene in Nangsa

A couple of months later, when it was time for the performance at the Dalai Lama’s birthday celebration, the company was devastated—though not particularly surprised—that the festivities would not be allowed, and that their months of practice would not be rewarded. They
continued to rehearse, however, and on Losar (Tibetan New Year) of 2018 they were able to stage the opera at Songsten School in Boudha. For the first half of the play, the young Sherpa girl appeared as Nangsa, but when it came to the beating scene in the afternoon, she was replaced by an older, more experienced exile Tibetan girl. I do not know if she had simply been scared by the intensity of practicing this scene, and begged to be released from it, or if the director and teachers decided it would be safer to use a more seasoned performer for this difficult part, but wanted to maintain the Sherpa girl in the leading role, but as far as I could ascertain, the change of personnel mid-performance went without comment to the audience.

As an outside observer, it was not lost on me during the rehearsal that an older, larger, exile Tibetan girl was simulating the domination of a younger, smaller Himalayan girl, but perhaps that is reading too much into the situation. I do believe that it is significant, however, that the Sherpa girl was retained in the leading role for everything but the beating scene and the
subsequent conclusion. Unlike the Dalai Lama’s birthday celebration, Losar events like the one at Songsten School are organized by the Himalayans and not just the refugee community, and since they do not focus on the Dalai Lama, they are allowed to go on. The Lhamo Tshokpa also did not display a large portrait of His Holiness at this event, as is their usual practice. Thus in this context, their alliance with the Himalayan groups is highlighted, and having a Himalayan girl in the lead role—and one who is also a student at Songsten School—emphasizes this alliance.

**Conclusion**

The Lhamo Tshokpa is a potent scene of identity discourse among the exile Tibetans of Nepal and the indigenous, ethnically Tibetan Himalayan Nepali communities, that plays out multiple, mutually beneficial alliances. The exile Tibetans use these alliances to strengthen their cultural authority and the unity of Tibetan and Himalayan peoples, as evidenced by shared religion, language and cultural practices. The Himalayans benefit by drawing on the cultural resources of the exiles in their own project of reclaiming and reconstructing their localized identities, and exercise their own authority through their superior standing as citizens of Nepal. By putting Himalayans in prominent roles; researching the songs of Himalayan groups and attempting to incorporate them into their repertoire; and also by downplaying the rhetoric of Tibetan-ness in favor of Himalayan-ness when performing for predominantly Himalayan and Nepali audiences, the Lhamo Tshokpa attenuates the Tibetan nationalist agenda of their founding and puts forward a presentation that begins to recenter their world not in the idealized homeland of Tibet, or the exile capitol of Dharamsala, but in the Himalayas of Nepal. While the elders of the group still hold to the dream of return to and freedom within Tibet, the younger leaders, who were mostly born in Nepal, may be adjusting to the possibility that they are in Nepal for good, and finding
ways to adapt by allying with related groups. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the demographic reality faced by exile Tibetan institutions like the Lhamo Tshokpa, as well as monasteries and schools, is that without the Himalayans, they would not have enough enrollment to survive (Childs 2004; Childs et al 2014). The shared cultural logics of these groups, based on Buddhist philosophy and center-periphery origin stories, allow for collaboratively created cultural models from which each group, and individuals within them, can draw to appropriate common symbols for situationally instrumental purposes.
CHAPTER FIVE: IDENTITY, ALLIANCE, AND RECENTERING IN THE YOUTUBE VIDEOS OF PEMA DHONDRUP

Beverly Diamond points out that technological mediations are often implicated in processes of genre making, as they involve labeling and categorization, and are by nature collaborative (2006: 171). Modern musical production of indigenous music can exoticize “distinctive” sounds or pull those sounds toward the “mainstream” by combining them with electronic effects and modern instrumentation. Indigenous musicians, by forging alliances with producers, arrangers, or recording companies, can craft their presentations and performances of identity for audiences both within and outside their communities and make implicit or explicit statements about their relationships with other groups and their place in networks of connectedness. In the case of music videos made for YouTube, other online video sharing sites, or DVDs, the potential for building alliance through technological mediation is increased not only by the musical production, but by the visual semiotics of imagery, as well as the inherent hermeneutical function of viewer comment sections.

Studies of music and YouTube are increasing (e.g., Cayari 2011; Vernallis 2013) due to its growth as a platform for music sharing and its hermeneutical richness. Miguel Mera and Anna Morcom have discussed the move toward including music videos in studies of “screened music” (Mera and Morcom 2009). In terms of Tibetan music, Morcom has called attention to the importance of visual imagery in music videos (2015b) and their importance to the economy of Tibetan music (2004, 2008, 2015a); and Anna Stirr has analyzed visual images present in two different versions of the song Blue Lake (Stirr 2008). Holly Gayley has written about how Tibetan monastery-produced VCDs from within in the PRC have employed “rites out of place,” a term coined by Ronald Grimes to refer to rituals decontextualized by filming and “recast
within…new frame[s],” which Gayley argues allows Tibetans to “tacitly perform allegiance to Tibetan modes of authority” through Buddhist devotional frames (2016: 45, emphasis mine). This is essentially alliance-building through the technological medium of music video. Similarly, Cameron David Warner has written about how Tibetan YouTube videos made in the PRC can use coded language in combination with images to deliver “connoted messages” in a “hidden synergy between lyrical and visual signs” (2013: 549, 452), that communicate tacit alliance with Tibetans outside of Tibet. By utilizing the hermeneutic and semiotic platform of YouTube, these artists can “mediate poetics and publics of communitarian sentiment” and subversively resist the “civil religion” of the PRC (2013: 551, 545). In the same way, Himalayan Nepalis ally with exile Tibetans and Nepalese of other castes to produce music videos, which they then share on Facebook and YouTube, that articulate their localized identities, while at the same time revealing much about their positionalities in relation to exile Tibetans, greater Nepal, and the global community. In this chapter, I will discuss five such videos by Nubri singer Pema Dhondrup, based on songs from his CD, Nubri Toshe Tashi Drayang. I will analyze transcriptions of the melodies in the same way as done for the field recordings discussed in Chapter 3; talk about the meaning and significance of the texts; and look at how information about identity, alliance, and the recentering effects of mandalization might further be encoded in the visual imagery of the videos themselves. I will also briefly consider the alliances depicted in a “cover song” video directed by Pema Dhondrup.

This CD contains twelve “Nubri songs,” most of which are traditional (meaning they are orally transmitted and of anonymous authorship), but some of which have known contemporary composers, including Pema Dhondrup himself. The album was produced in Kathmandu in collaboration with Pema Tenzin, an exile Tibetan music teacher, from whom I have also taken
dranyen lessons. The instrumentation consists completely of the Lhasa ensemble instruments, with occasional bells and drums, accompanying Pema Dhondrup’s singing. Pema Tenzin plays all the instruments, with the exception of piwang, which is played by the late Sonam Tsering, the former master teacher of the Lhamo Tshokpa. Pema Tenzin also arranged all the songs. Aside from the layers of meaning conveyed by the visual images of the music videos, the sonic attributes of the audio on the CD, which is used for the videos, expresses alliance building through technological mediation. In the process of adapting Pema Dhondrup’s songs to instrumental accompaniment, Pema Tenzin “cleaned up” any discrepancies, such as odd numbers of beats, or pitches that might have fallen outside the seven-note scale, couching the melodies in the sonic context of the Lhasa ensemble and the TIPA style of folkloric song.

Pema Tenzin was trained at TIPA, and is an expert in instruments, singing, dance, and lhamo. He currently lives in Swayambu and makes his living teaching music at Tibetan schools in the area. Pema Dhondrup lives in Nubri, but his family also has a home in Swayambu, and he splits his time between the two. Pema Dhondrup is Pema Tenzin’s student, particularly on dranyen, and defers to him on questions of musical style and propriety. Their collaboration thus embodies the alliance between exile Tibetans and Himalayan Nepalis by on the one hand, implying the cultural authority of the exile while presenting the localized authenticity of the Himalayan valley as a unique aspect embedded within greater Tibetan culture. This sonic alliance pervades all the songs on the CD, and undergirds the visual messaging of the videos, which are set in Nubri and Kathmandu. Pema Dhondrup has produced videos for at least seven of the songs on his CD, but I have used only the five for which he has provided subtitles in Tibetan, allowing me to arrive at an accurate text. Pema produced these videos with the help of Nepali friends Saroj Khadka and Chandra Gurung.
“Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang (Auspicious Melody Nubri Praise Song)”

This töshay (bstod gzhas), or “praise song,” which is also a changshay (a changshay of praise), has Nubri-specific lyrics written by contemporary lama Tulku Karma Rinpoche, who was born in Bhutan, which implies yet another axis of alliance-building between Nubri and the Himalayan kingdom, which has historical precedence that may date to the late 17th century (Childs 2001: 18). This genre is considered to be semi-classical—akin to “chamber-music,” and is historically associated with the kha che, or Muslim community of Lhasa, who were often hereditary musicians there in the 19th and 20th centuries (Samuel, 1976). This serves to mark the song as Tibetan even as it proclaims itself a Nubri song. The contemporary text includes Kuthang within Nubri—but does not mention Kuthang—by delineating the upper limit of the valley as Pungyen (spungs rgyan, Mt. Manaslu), literally “Heap of Ornaments,” which lies above Sama and Samdo villages, with Larkye Pass on its shoulder; and the lower limit as Sertrang (gses sbrang, Serang Himal), literally “Golden-Bee Mountain,” which towers above Prok and Bi villages in Kuthang. The song calls Pungyen “the palace of the Lords of the Three Families” (bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Manjusri, and Vajrapani). In Buddhism, the meaning of teachings and practices is often said to have three levels—outer, inner, and secret. Pungyen, on the outer level, is a snow mountain; on the inner level, it is either the palace of the Lords of the Three Families or of Cakrasamvara, depending on the pure perception of individual lamas (what it is on the secret level is, apparently, a secret). Pungyen can also refer to the worldly protector deity of the

45 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRAmiBv5g5Q>
46 As in many cultures, musicians of low caste (often Muslims) provided musical entertainment for the Lhasa aristocracy. Over the course of the 20th century these musical practices spread to the middle and upper classes.
47 As mentioned above, this can also be spelled gser thang, or “golden plain.”
mountain.\textsuperscript{48} “Sertrang, or “Golden-Bee Mountain,” is cited as the “practice place of Orgyen Pema,” or Padmasambhava (founder of Tibetan Buddhism).

Additionally, the song defines Nubri as consisting of four villages, Rō (Sama), and Lō, in upper Nubri; and Bi and Trok (Prok), in lower Nubri. The villages are compared to the four harmonious siblings, characters from a Jataka tale in which an elephant, a monkey, a hare, and a crow mutually agree on their respective ages and live amicably together.\textsuperscript{49} This cheery language reads somewhat like a tourism add (which impression is strengthened by the last verse calling visitors from around the world “siblings of previous lives” who will be welcomed “with gladness, faith, and joy”) and belies real tensions that have existed between upper and lower Nubri. However, it can also be seen as a call for alliance by Tulku Karma Rinpoche and Pema Dhondrup—alliance among the people of the two ends of the Nubri valley as well as between them and outsiders who might be able to help them in their relative poverty and putative isolation. Indeed, the rest of the text highlights the strong Buddhist faith of all the people of Nubri and the importance of their Milarepa and Guru Rinpoche pilgrimage sites, which they universally value highly, and which many Western dharma-seekers also have an interest in. Accordingly, this song is at the same time a traditional Nubri song, and intended for a contemporary and cosmopolitan audience.

In terms of mandalization, this song places Nubri in the center. Unlike “Kathmandu Pilgrimage Praise Song,” which situates Nubri as a borderland “between India and Tibet,” here, Tulku Karma Rinpoche employs the common Tibetan trope of the “roof of the world” to place Nubri, and its primary sacred mountain, Pungyen, in the highest position, with Sertrang peak defining the lower boundary of the \textit{mandala}, and Lake Kel in the middle. Once this environment

\textsuperscript{48} Khenpo Gyaltsen, personal communication with the author, 9 September, 2017.
\textsuperscript{49} Jataka tales are stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, drawn from the \textit{sutras}. 
is delineated, it is populated with deities (the Lords of the Three Buddha Families), lamas (Guru Rinpoche, Milarepa, and “the rest”), and villages (Rö, Lo, Bi, and Trok). Finally, it invites foreigners to enter this mandalic framework. In this song’s mandalization, Nubri is complete in itself, without reference to other places, which thus recenters it as a geographic cosmology of its own.

“Auspicious Melody Nubri Praise Song”

At the top of the world
There is a happy country
The pleasant land of Nubri
The homeland of us youth

Above is Pungyen Snow Peak
The palace of the Lords of the Three Families
Below is Sertrang Snow Peak
The practice place of Orgyen Pema

In the middle is blue Lake Kel
Our spirit-lake surrounded by local deities
Mountains, lakes, and forests are assembled
Like the jewelry of the world

When The Lords of the three Buddha Families
Padmasambhava, Mila, and the rest,
Came to this place
They blessed the very land

Above are both Rö and Lö
Below are both Bi and Trok
These four beautiful districts
Are like the Four Harmonious Siblings

The Three Jewels are the protectors
Of the lineage of our ancestors
who know the workings of karma, and what to adopt or abandon
These are the distinguishing features of our land
Visitors from around the world
Are our siblings of previous lives
We will welcome them
With gladness, faith, and Joy

Figure 26: “Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang”

The melody of *Nubi Töshay* is a traditional one from Tibet that is known to Tenzin Namgyal of the Lhamo Tshokpa. Like many *töshay*, it is hexatonic minor (missing the sixth scale degree). This could be confused with Dorian mode, but this song’s tonic is *la*, or the sixth degree of a fixed-*do* system, making it Aeolian (melodic minor scale) from a Western point of view. Like much Tibetan song verse, it has six syllables per line. Rhythmically, eight of these lines are arranged in the following form: AABA’A’. Each A and A’ have 10 beats and B has 14, resulting in an overall length of 54 beats. A and A’ both have cadences, or “resting tones,” in Collinge’s terminology, on the song tonic, while B has a half cadence, or a *ma dra* on *sol*, at the end of the middle phrase, giving the whole melody a jagged arch-shaped contour that perfectly evokes the Snow-peaked horizon of Nubri.
“Sacha Gangtö Yar la Shuk Khen (Those Who Live Up in Places So High)”

This video opens with aerial shots of Nubri looking northwest with Manaslu in the distance, interspersed with Pema Dhondrup walking among prayer flags. As the aerial shot moves up the valley, Pema begins to sing, first seated on a high rocky outcropping, then cutting to him on the shore of Birendra lake above Sama village, with Manaslu peak in the background. Pema is dressed in a hooded jacket and traditional Tibetan shirt (stod thung) and wears, or alternately, twirls his sunglasses in his hand. He is wearing headphones in the footage around the lake, and all-black trekking gear over a Tibetan shirt in the prayer-flag and rocky outcrop shots, where he wears his sunglasses and twirls a sprig of juniper. In both outfits he has the appearance of a hip, urban youth. As the song begins, with the words “Those who live up in places so high,” he gestures sweepingly toward the landscape of Nubri in the background, indicating specifically which high place the song is referring to.

As the second line of the song is sung, “My root lama dwells there,” a series of split-screen images appear, with Pema accompanying a procession of lamas and monks on a trail, and shots of important lamas, such as Lama Tashi Dorje (the grandfather of Mingyur Rinpoche and Tsoknyi Rinpoche) as well as Tulku Karma Rinpoche, who was born in Bhutan. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, the half-brother of Tsoknyi and Mingyur Rinpoches, also appears briefly, riding a horse. Showing these lamas as visual representations of the root lama in the song is significant, since their lineage and ancestry embody the historical alliance between Nubri and ancient Tibet, and since Lama Tashi Dorje is believed to be a descendant of King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde rtsen, ca. 8th c.) (Childs 2001). It also shows the modern alliance between Nubri and exile Tibetans, since Lama Tashi Dorje’s grandsons are the offspring of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, a refugee from Kham.

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50 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1EKCOvCH4o
In the next verse shots of Pema singing in Nubri alternate with shots of him singing in a Kathmandu recording studio. Here he is wearing a white Tibetan shirt and wearing headphones before a large-diaphragm microphone. Pema’s dress in the two different settings creates a subtle juxtaposition—in the wild, remote, and timeless landscape of Nubri he is dressed as an urban youth, while in the modern, urban recording studio he appears to be dressed more traditionally. His white shirt and long black hair are reminiscent of Milarepa, especially as he holds his left hand up to his ear, echoing the iconic pose of the great yogi who is supposed to have visited Nubri in the 11th century. Thus far the imagery presents Nubri as both timeless and modern, and entangled with webs of alliance that span Tibet, Nepal, and the contemporary diaspora, while foregrounding the importance of Buddhism in Nubri.

These images of Pema Dhondrup singing continue through the verses that refer to the chiefs and leaders, and their subjects, but in the final set of verses, more images of people in Nubri appear. During the words “My own kind parents dwell there,” footage of Nubri elders spinning prayer wheels are shown. In the consequent, and final verse, “That their sons are
assembled there makes me happy,’” Pema is shown greeting a line of young students holding offering scarves (khā btags). The video ends back in the recording studio, with Pema giving a final “thumbs up” to the recording engineer.

The song is a traditional, and purportedly old, tōshay/changshay, with a formulaic structure in which we are enjoined to respect those who live in high places—both literally and figuratively—lamas, chieftains, and parents, and not to create obstacles for them because the monks and nuns, subjects, and parents who depend on them are a universal good. While the song never mentions Nubri, the video makes clear that this is the subject of the song, and that Nubri is positioned not in an imaginary past, but in the modern world where connections with old Tibet and contemporary global but Nepal-based exile and Nubri native lamas abound in a vital web of alliance that shapes the identity of “Nubri singer” Pema Dhondrup. The headphones he wears throughout the video (which have a diachronic function in the studio scenes, but are a little incongruous in the Nubri settings), are a thread that runs through the video, never letting us forget the centrality of technological mediation and the fact that, although the song is considered to be old, it is being performed in the present moment, with all its implications of global modernity.

Spatialized language throughout this song valorizes the highlands as sacred space. Those to be honored (lamas, chiefs and leaders, and parents) are connected with those who honor and depend on them (monks and nuns, subjects, and sons) and all are placed in an elevated position in order of their importance. This reverses the dominant narrative of Nepali society, in which mountain-dwelling ethnic groups are considered low-caste due to diet, religious practices, and so forth, and asserts that they are actually spiritually superior due in part to their positionality as highlanders.
“Those Who Live Up in Places So High”

Those who live up in places so high
My root lama dwells there

Do not hinder the lama’s person
That monks and nuns are gathered there makes me happy

Those who live up in places so high
My chiefs and leaders dwell there

Do not hinder the person of the leader
That his subjects are assembled there makes me happy

Those who live up in places so high
My own kind parents dwell there

Do not hinder the person of my parents
That their sons are assembled there makes me happy
The melody consists of two phrases, the first of which repeats (mm. 1-10 and 13-22), and the second of which wraps back into itself through cadential elision (mm. 36) and repeats without pause before eliding into a cadential form of the final eight beats of the phrase (mm. 49-52). The form is therefore AABB’. The scale is hexatonic, and shifts between apparent ma dra mother tones of d’ and c’, and a recurrent resting tone on two octaves of g. The antecedent motive (mm. 1-4) of the first phrase would seem to be second-mode minor if it were unaccompanied, but the shift up to d’ from the instrumental drone on C provides a distinct sense of going “away” in terms of tonality, as do the leap from e’ to g’, and descent to a’, before a satisfying return to c’ in the consequent motive (mm 5-10). After a four-beat rest, this phrase is repeated. The second phrase at first seems to go “away” to d’, but quickly returns to c’, from which it descends to rest on the lower octave of g (c’ in mm. 27-28; g in mm. 29-32), which sounds much more major and stable in the context of C than it does in the opening measures, where it is prepared by d’. At the end of the phrase, the tune climbs back up to a c’ that at first sounds cadential, but is immediately elided by a return to d’ and the beginning of a repeat of the phrase. This cadential elision at the end of the second iteration of the phrase (mm. 47-48) leads to a cadential statement of the final motive (mm. 49-52).
While the opening motive suggests a tonality of D, the obvious cadences on a C mother tone make this melody hexatonic major, which is reinforced by the constant return to a C drone in the instruments. I wonder what the effect would be without the tonal cue of the instruments, which reflect Pema Tenzin’s influence. The verse also has an even number of 54 beats, which could be the result of Pema Tenzin “straightening up” odd-numbered rests, which he told me he sometimes does when arranging Nubri songs for instruments.

“Menchung Nubri Kyipa’i Phayul (Young Maiden [Happy Homeland of Nubri])”
This song is a flirtatious call and response (*gab tshig*) between a boy and a girl, with lyrics written by Pema’s older brother, Khenpo Tsündrü Tarchen, and a melody by Pema Dhondrup. Pasang Dolma, a Nubri woman, sings the female verses. The video is replete with scenes of villages and landscapes of Nubri with boys and girls appearing in the frame in alternation along with the lyrics. Much of the footage is from around Prok (*krok*) village, where Pasang Dolma is from, and other youth from Prok appear as dancers, or in the case of two boys, sometimes lip-syncing Pema’s vocals.

![Figure 29: Pema Dhundrup dancing with village girls. “Menchung Nubri Kyipa’i Phayul”](image)

The scenes are cut rapidly and alternate between idyllic landscapes of Nubri’s mountains and waterfalls and shots of young men and women dancing in rows (reflecting the institutional influence of viewing dances like this as folkloric stage performances), often behind either Pema Dhondrup or Pasang Dolma. Four girls and two boys are featured prominently, and there are also close-up shots of other villagers, including two elder women. By including members of the community in his video shoot, Pema Dhondrup reinforces alliances within the valley, allowing them to collaborate with him in presenting a picture of Nubri as a beautiful and harmonious place.

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51 Two of Pema’s older brothers are Khenpo, a monastic philosophical degree similar to a Ph.D. Khenpo Tsültrim Tendar lives in south India, and advised me in Nubri. Khenpo Tsündrü Tarchen, whom I have not met, resides in Germany.

52 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVYhwi0uWuY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVYhwi0uWuY)
of gorgeous landscapes and quaint villages. Being able to appear in a music video is no doubt fun and exciting for these youth, who are either among the small minority of people in their age group who remain in Nubri or are those who return for short-term visits.

Many of the scene cuts are timed with the music, so that a particular shot lasts for two beats. This makes the video flow with the up-tempo rhythm of the song, matching its bright, bouncy mood. Images of the economic activities of Nubri are also inserted here and there, such as yaks hauling lumber, scenes of a mule train, and singers and dancers in agricultural fields. At the end of the video, there are images of Western trekkers, an important source of income for Nubri, and one that Pema Dhondrup, as a licensed trekking guide and community leader, promotes in several of his videos. By placing these foreigners in his video, Pema sends the message that they are welcome, and that he is ready to ally with them both to bring income and to spread awareness of Nubri globally.

The text of the song is modern not only in actuality, but also in content because it calls for youth to return “after studying in another’s country,” a reference to the contemporary phenomenon of youth outmigration, which is a major concern of Pema Dhondrup and his brothers. The spatilaized language of the “four lands” mentioned in the first verse refers to the four main villages of Nubri, which reinforces the idea of Nubri as unified and harmonious, but also as bounded. The exhortation to return to one’s homeland “as if it were Örgyen Pema’s hidden treasure” underscores the importance of Guru Rinpoche pilgrimage sites in Nubri, and is followed by shots of Serang Gompa, built near one such site. Fertile fields and pure water, friendliness, and the customs of one’s parents are invoked as tropes that appear again and again in Nubri songs, and are aimed at an audience of Nubri youth living in Kathmandu, India, or elsewhere who are encouraged to return to an idealized homeland. By spotlighting young,
attractive boys and girls in the video in the context of a flirtatious antiphonal song, Pema delivers a subtle message to youth in the city that they might be able to find a culturally appropriate marriage partner by returning home. Throughout Nubri is treated almost as a separate country (*mi yul*, or “another’s land,” contrasted with *rang yul*, or “one’s own land), and an environmental consciousness is hinted at in enjoining the young maiden to return as if Nubri were “fertile fields of pure water and earth.” This song is a good example of strategic essentialism, because it uses “positivist essentialism” (Nubri youth are depicted as universally happy and friendly, wearing Tibetan dress, and inextricably linked to the landscape) in a “scrupulously visible political interest” (persuading Nubri youth to return home at a time when large numbers of them are studying in Kathmandu). Thus this song, composed by Pema Dhondrup and Khenpo Tsündrü, directly addresses and seeks to remedy the problem of outmigration, which is a major concern for them because they perceive Nubri’s cultural survival as depending on its reversal.

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|དམན་&ང་(བ་རི་,ིད་པའི་ཕ་0ལ།།|
|“Young maiden (Happy Homeland of Nubri)”|

|དམན་%ང་'ིང་བཞི་བ+ོར་ནས་ཡོང་ཡོད།|
|རང་$ལ་&ག་པ་མི་འ,ག|
|!བ་རི་ཕོ་གཞོན་མོ་གཞོན།|
|!བ་རི་ཕོ་གཞོན་མོ་གཞོན།|
|ལོག་ཤོག|
|ལོག་ཤོག|

Young maiden! We come from around the Four Lands
There is nothing better than one’s own country
Young men and women from Nubri
Remember your homeland and return!
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Young man! Come back with good news
Of the descendants of our excellent parents
Return to your homeland as if
It were Örgyen Pema’s hidden treasure!

ངབ་ཐེབས་ཐེ་ཐེ་དབང་པོ་ཕྱིན་པོ་དཔོན་བཤད་སུངས་པར་བདག་བུ།
དེ་རེ་མི་སེང་གི་བོད་དག་ན།
བོད་དག་སེམས་དཔའ་བོད་དག་ན།
དབང་པོ་གཅིག་ལྷ་བོ་ནས་།

Young maiden! Come back to your homeland as if
It were fertile fields of pure water and earth
After studying in another’s land
Return to your homeland!

དམན་ངོ་རང་དབང་རང་འདོད་སུངས་པར་བདག་བུ།
དབང་པོ་གཅིག་ལྷ་བོ་ནས་།

Young maiden! Return to your homeland
United in friendliness
After studying in another’s land
Return to your homeland!

དམན་ངོ་དཔོན་དབང་པོ་དཔོན་བཤད་སུངས་པར་བདག་བུ།
དབང་པོ་གཅིག་ལྷ་བོ་ནས་།

Young maiden! Return to your homeland
In freedom and aspiration
Remembering Nubri again and again
Return to the homeland of your birth!

དམན་ངོ་དཔོན་དབང་པོ་དཔོན་བཤད་སུངས་པར་བདག་བུ།
དབང་པོ་གཅིག་ལྷ་བོ་ནས་།
Young maiden! Return having placed
The excellent customs of your parents in your heart
Remembering your happy homeland again and again
Return to your own country!

The melody of this song is very bright and happy (though it is uncertain whether it is perceived as such by Tibetans), and is in pentatonic major, based on the first scale degree. In Collinge’s scheme, its interval pattern and tonic indicate it is drug skyes, or mode one. Pema Tenzin’s accompaniment reflects this, with the song beginning on so and ending on do, creating dominant-to-tonic tonal movement. Structurally, the verse consists of an antecedent phrase of twelve beats (mm. 1-6), which starts on scale degree five (g”) and proceeds through a double-arched contour down a full octave to a resting tone of g’. The consequent phrase is a permutation of the final eight beats of phrase 1, which resolves on the song tonic of c’, creating a satisfying resolution. This phrase is repeated, creating an ABB form.
Each verse of this strophic song is 32 beats long, and while the phrases are not symmetrical, with A encompassing six bars and BB eight, the overall effect is concise and balanced. The instrumentation of the Lhasa ensemble (minus the piwang) and the lack of Nubri dialect marks this song sonically as generally Tibetan, aligning Nubri with the diaspora and signaling the alliance between Pema Dhondrup and Pema Tenzin to present one as an aspect of the other. For an exile Tibetan hearing this song, or watching the video, only the images and references to place would signal that it is specifically from Nubri. Sonically, with its standard instrumentation and pentatonic melody, it is generically Tibetan. Instrumental breaks are used sparingly, with phrase B appearing as an intro and occasionally as a short break between verses. This, combined with a fast tempo, results in a short run-time of just over two minutes, the shortest of any song on Pema’s CD.

“Ama Drenpa’i Kyolu (Sad Song of Missing Mother)”

Pema Dhondrup composed this song, which is both a skyo glu (song of sadness) and a dran glu (song of remembrance), genres that are very common in Tibetan folk and pop music. The video begins with Pema on the steps of a temple in Kathmandu Durbar Square (Basantapur), one of the three historic Royal Palace squares in the valley. As Pema paces around the temple dressed in Western street clothes, the song begins with a spoken word voiceover in which he mentions the importance of circumambulation, laments being separated from his mother, and offers an aspiration prayer for her long life. When the words “I shed the tears of suffering” are spoken there is a close-up of Pema wiping tears from his eyes. In this spoken introduction Pema talks of meeting his mother in a dream, and by the end of the section, he has been transported, dreamlike, from the center of Kathmandu to the roof of a monastery somewhere in Nubri (according to

53 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-BH2n5X1jk
Geoff Childs, this might be Namlha, above Namdru), where he begins to sing, dressed in formal Tibetan clothes.

In the first verse, as Pema sings from the roof of the monastery, about missing his mother with every hill he crossed, an image of women dancing in his home village of Tsak appears, followed by a close-up of his mother. Pema wipes tears from his eyes, after which we see his mother and her sister encouraging him to drink *arak* (distilled spirits), which Pema as a rule never drinks, and they laugh when he has a gag reflex. In the next verse, which speaks cryptically about being greeted on a horse with ornamental tack and saddle, Pema is shown racing a horse around a large *mani* wall (a wall of stacked stones carved with mantras and deities) in Nubri. Horse racing is very popular these days among Nubri youth. Although historically it may have been reserved for the Nubri elite, it is important to a contemporary cowboy-hat-wearing performance of identity, is associated with wealth, and may also index Tibet, where equestrian play is thought to be an archetypical activity.

![Figure 31: Pema Dhondrup drinking with his mother and aunt, “Ama Drenpa'i Kyolu”](image)

In the third verse, we see Pema, still in the fancy attire of the dream, walking along the porch of his family’s guest house in Nubri while the lyrics mourn, “then like the frog, having no wings I
was left behind.” The lines about the birds changing their songs refers to the fact that one can tell when birds are going to migrate when they start singing different songs. Frogs and birds also have connotations of spatialized hierarchy, with birds inhabiting the sky and frogs the water, implying that those who stay in lower places (i.e., Kathmandu) will be left behind, while if they emulate birds (by “changing their songs) they can return to heights and be reunited with family.

This is followed by footage of men dancing in Tsak, and Pema playing a dranyen and showing it to a child. The dranyen appears several times in this video, and when he shows it to the child, suggests a metaphor for passing on culture to the next generation. The instrument also appears in the drinking scene with his mother, leaning against the wall behind his aunt, suggesting that the culture and language are safe within the home when maternal elders are present. Thus in Nubri, as in many indigenous cultures (e.g., the Navajos of the American Southwest), female elders may be seen as custodians of culture. In the next verse, which exhorts the listener not to “stay on this barren mountain” because “it is the land of another,” it is clear that what is meant is Kathmandu—a foreign land to people from Nubri. The foreignness of Kathmandu is emphasized when, during the words “it is another’s land” (mi yul has the connotation of being someone else’s place) Pema becomes almost obscured behind statues of Hindu gods. At the end of this verse, when the words say “let us return,” the scene shifts back to horse races in Nubri. In the final verse, as Pema holds the dranyen he sings “if you have abandoned your fatherland, return without abandoning your mother tongue!” Again the dranyen is significant. As a cultural symbol and system of meaning, it represents the mother-tongue he is carefully cradling in his arms. A brief shot of Pema wearily scrambling up a rocky riverbed, wearing headphones, and lying down from exhaustion represents the arduous journey home, in which he is nevertheless changed, wearing Western clothes and bearing technology. After this, he is shown, once again in Tibetan
clothes, climbing the stairs to his home in Tsak, at the top of which waits an elder woman.

Finally, women and men are shown dancing together, suggesting a reunion of mothers and sons, before we briefly see Pema and his mother from behind, walking out of a door into bright sunlight.

\[ ས་མ་བོད་པའི་ཚུལ་ནུ་\]

“Sad Song of Missing Mother”

(spoken)

It is important for those with faith
To circumambulate the Stupa
Remembering my kind mother
I shed the tears of suffering
Not only remembering my mother
Did tears come to my eyes
But through my deluded mind
I met her in a dream
Mother who is not with me
Wherever you are
May joy arise in your body
Through the condition of obstacles not arising
Kind mother, living in a faraway land
I pray for your long life

(sung)
ལ་མོ་རེ་རེ་'བ་)ས།
ཨ་མ་རེ་རེ་&ན་སོང་།
རི་$བ་ལ་'ེབ་)ས།
མིག་ལ་འཆི་མ་ཤོར་+ང་།
With every hill I crossed
I remembered my mother
When I arrived at the back of the mountain
Tears came to my eyes

བོད་ཆེན་)་ཕོ་བ,་ཡི།
བ$ས་མ་རེ་(ེབ།
ཟི་ལིང་དང་
འ$ོ་མ།
As the swallow and the blackbird change their songs
Let us return!

For a hundred stallion-strides
Each greeter came
Fixing the ornamental tack
And saddles they returned

Then like the frog
Having no wings I was left behind
As the swallow and the blackbird change their songs
Let us return!
Do not stay on this barren mountain
It is the land of another
After living in another’s land
Let us return to the fatherland of our birth

You who live like this in another’s land
Turn and go back!
If you have abandoned your fatherland
Return without abandoning your mother tongue!

The text of this song, while penned by Pema Dhondrup, contains many traditional tropes common to songs of remembrance (dran glu)—the loving mother; tears coming to the eyes, crossing many hills; and abandonment of homeland and mother-tongue. The two most cryptic verses, that mention saddlery, a frog, and birds, probably reference traditional proverbs, and might even be drawn from traditional songs. While this song does not explicitly reveal alliance-building with other groups in the text, it does point to alliance with the land (said to be typical of indigenous cosmologies), and between elders who remain at home and youth who have migrated to Kathmandu, urging the youth to hold on to their identity, as signified by language and the trappings of traditional culture and embodied in their elders. It is also a product of alliances with other Nepalis—Chandra Gurung (see below) filmed and directed the video—as well as exile Tibetans, as Pema Tenzin shaped its sonorities.

The melody is pentatonic minor (all skyo glu, or “sad songs” I have heard are in minor
modes, suggesting that the minor sound may indeed have sad connotations for Tibetans), and its traditional sound demonstrates Pema Dhondrup’s stylistic mastery as a composer. Based on the sixth scale degree, the interval pattern conforms to Collinge’s fifth mode (blo gsal). Beginning and ending on a’, the structure consists of two periods. The first, with three eight-beat phrases (mm. 1-4, 5-8, and 11-14) with triadic resting tones of a’, e’, and c’, and the second period with an altered version of phrase 1 (mm. 17-22) with a resting tone of a’, followed by a cadential version of the third phrase, coming to rest on the tonic (mm. 23-27). This second period is then repeated, giving the whole verse a phrase structure of ABCA’C’A’C’.

Figure 32: “Ama Drenpa’i Kyolu”

Pema Tenzin has inserted four beats of instrumental rest between B and C, (mm. 9-10), and C and A’ (mm. 15-16). Since the second period (mm. 17-28 and 31-41) is eleven measures long, he follows it both times with three measures of rest to bring the total length of the phrase to an even 14 measures, resulting in a total length of 44 measures, or 88 beats. The instrumentation is
restricted to dranyen and hammered dulcimer (ya’ng cing), with the two-headed frame drum (rnga) struck on every third of four beats. The drum is a marker of Buddhist ritual music not usually used in songs of this kind, and it serves to evoke religion as the basis of the culture in which the longed-for mother and homeland are embedded.

“Dzema Kusuk Dem Dem (Supple-bodied Beauty)”

In a love song (dga’o gzhas) with lyrics written by “Kewa,” who is actually Pema’s brother Khenpo Tsündrü Tarchen, and a melody by Pema Dhondrup, a close-up of a beautiful girl first fills the screen (the “model” is identified as Dolma in a caption). Pema Dhondrup then appears, standing below large prayer flags on a mountainside near his home village and singing verses of love over the sparse accompaniment of dranyen and ya’ng cing (hammered dulcimer). In the second verse, at the word “beauty” (mdzes ma) the girl reappears as her face is likened to the full moon. Then, alternately standing on a boulder and sitting beside a mani wall, Pema begins to rap. Wearing the backwards baseball cap and low-slung pants of global hip-hop culture, the verses he raps are very traditional—tropes of flirtation that appear in many songs. “Your body is like grass bamboo,” “your face is like the clear, full moon,” and “your hair is straight and smooth,” are well-worn sayings that are similar to the English cliché “your eyes are like limpid pools.” The phrase “your eyes are like the meeting of two golden fish” refers to one of the eight auspicious symbols, in which two fish are depicted coming face-to-face. The implication is that the girl’s eyes are fish-shaped and slant slightly upward. In the next verse, he sings that [the preceeding words] “appear on top of the hearts of all who are lustful” (chags ldan).

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After this verse, Pema is shown sitting in a line of women and leaning forward to gaze at the girl, seated at the other end of the line. As he does this, a young Western man leans forward from in between, looking back at him and blocking his view of the girl. He then turns to look at the girl before looking directly at the camera with a comic shrug. Female beauty is a common motif in discourses of cultural nationalism, and seen in this light, the fact that a foreigner is blocking Pema’s view of the girl might be seen as a depiction of foreign cultural intrusion and disruption of tradition. The Western boy is wearing Tibetan dress and is identified as Scot in a caption. Scot also appears in the Footstool Project video (see Chapter 1) where he is identified as a missionary. Pema’s inclusion of a foreigner in Tibetan dress in his video might also signal alliance-building with the outside world, and a welcoming of foreigners to the very center of his culture, suggesting that if they dress the part—i.e., adopt appropriate cultural practices—they have a chance to become insiders in an exotic, remote culture. Scot is indeed a Footstool Project missionary, on the staff of MountainChild, as is the director of the video, Chandra Gurung, who also filmed “Ama Drenpa’i Kyolu.” This signals Pema’s readiness to ally with the missionaries in Nubri, who he has told me are his friends (rogs pa), “even though they are Christians.”

Figure 33: Pema Dhondrup and Scot rap to a girl, “Dzema Kusuk Dem Dem”
Pema Dhondrup is a devout Buddhist and he has expressed to me that he is saddened by the success of Christian missionaries in the Gurung villages just below Nubri, and somewhat troubled by their intense efforts within Nubri itself. At the same time, his confidence in the strength of Nubri’s Buddhist faith leads him to believe that the missionaries do not stand a chance in converting the majority of people there. Pema is also a politician who has recently won election to head his newly-formed rural municipality. He is a natural in this role because he is so affable and appears to be universally liked. It seemed to me, while traveling through the valley and adjacent villages with him, that he has no enemies. He thus maintains friendly relationships with the missionaries and converts, and in spite of his reservations, does not want to jeopardize the real benefits that the missionaries bring to his community. By including a missionary in his video, he signals his readiness to ally even with them, as his “siblings from previous lives” (see “Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang”), and to give them a place in the future of Nubri.

Figure 34: Scot appears in the Footstool Project video

After a shot of Pema rapping to the girl on top of the boulder, dressed in urban street clothes, Pema appears alone, singing “before the age of fifteen I fell in love with you” from the top of the boulder. Scot then appears again, and he and Pema rap to the girl in a field, wearing
Tibetan dress and using hip-hop style hand gestures. During this sequence, Pema’s rap compares the girl to a series of goddesses. Sarasvatī (dbyangs can lha mo) is the Hindu goddess of music and learning, and is also revered in Tibetan Buddhism as the goddess of music and a form of Tara, the protectress. The Hindu/Buddhist goddess Hāritī (yid 'phrok lha mo) is a protector of children. Called Ajima by Newari Buddhists, she is enshrined in both Boudha and Swayambu in Kathmandu. I have not yet been able to determine the identity of the third goddess, “Ri dza a run,” but judging by the context she must be connected with dance, as Sarasvatī is with speech (knowledge and learning) and Hāritī is with love (care of children) in the text.

In the next verse, Pema is shown glancing at the girl from across a crowd, then standing in front of the stone wall of a house, singing “though I’ve reached the age of twenty whole years I am still waiting for you,” and “I’ve lost my heart to you in love.” After this he meets the girl in a field and hands her a flower. At this point, the song breaks into spoken word, with “hey girl, what am I saying? Look at me just once.” With that, Pema is once again in from of a mani wall, rapping lines about missing the girl when he is eating, drinking, coming, going, sleeping, and rising. Then, alone on a brushy slope, Pema sings a verse that says “my heart has died from loving you” as he gestures to the river below and the mountain above in apparent agony, and sings “please tell me what is in your heart.” Finally, he is pictured with the girl atop the boulder, where he promises her in rapid-fire rap that they will be together like the sun and moon in the sky, the fish and water, and the snow-lion and the snow.
Beauty! Supple-bodied beauty You have stolen my heart Miss beautiful!

Sweetheart! Sweetheart your smile Is like the full moon Miss beautiful!

(rapping)

Beauty, your body is like long grass bamboo
Beauty, your hair is straight and smooth
Beauty, your face is like the clear full moon
Beauty, your nose is like a lotus stupa
Beauty, your eyes are like the meeting of two golden fish

(singing)

The lustful!
(these words) have appeared on the top of the hearts
Of all who are lustful
Miss beauty!

The age!
Before the age of fifteen
I fell in love with you
Miss Beauty!

(rapping)
Beaut y, when you spoke I thought you were Sarasvatī
Beauty, when you gave your love I thought you were the goddess Hāritī
Beauty, when you called me I thought you were the highest mountain top
Beauty, when you danced I thought you were Ri dza a run
Beauty, as for your breasts, I thought they were made of butter

(singing)
Whole years
Though I’ve reached the age of twenty whole years
I am still waiting for you
Miss Beauty!
A young man
I’ve lost my heart
To you in love
Miss Beauty!

(speaking)
Hey girl,
What am I saying?
Look at me just once!

(rapping)
Girl!
When eating I miss you
When drinking I miss you
When staying I miss you
When going I miss you
When sleeping I miss you
When rising I miss you
(singing)

A young man
My mind has died
From loving you
Miss beauty!

(speaking)

Hey girl,
Girl, look at me once

(rapping)

Like the sun and moon are together with the sky
Like the fish and water are together
Like the snow and the lion are together
I promise that you and I will be together
The word “dem dem” (ldam ldam) from the title and first verse means “supple” or “flexible,” but applied to a girl it can also imply curvaciousness. The word “dzema,” used throughout the song as a form of address means “a beautiful girl,” or simply, “beauty.” When followed by the honorific “la” (lags), I have translated it as “Miss Beauty.” The spoken sections beginning with “waey bumo” (waii bumo), literally “hey girl,” remind me of similar spoken sections in American R&B recordings of the 1970s, tropes that have been carried through in hip-hop to the present day. The lyrics are very simple, efficient, and effective in depicting a youth in love. They draw heavily on common romantic tropes that appear in almost the same form in Tibetan pop songs, and that probably have deeper literary roots. In this video, Pema Dhondrup and Khenpo Tsündrü have created a song that will appeal to Nubri and other Himalayan and Tibetan youth, while signaling alliances with Westerners—even specifically Christian Westerners—and with global youth culture. At the same time Pema is invoking hip-hop by rapping, however, sonically the track couldn’t be farther from hip-hop. The accompaniment of dranyen and hammered dulcimer created by Pema Tenzin says “Tibet” in no uncertain terms. The juxtaposition is novel, and instructive that Pema is presenting multiple positionalities at once. On the one hand, he is aware of, and indeed part of, global youth culture, and on the other, he is not about to abandon his “traditional culture,” represented by the instrumentation and traditional textual tropes. As with all the songs in this chapter, produced in collaboration with Pema Tenzin, this video is an artifact of an alliance between Nepali Himalayans and exile Tibetans. Meanwhile, the images in the video firmly emplace it in Nubri’s landscape.
The song is in hexatonic minor, based on scale degree 2, akin to Dorian mode.

Rhythmically, it differs from the other songs in this chapter, and indeed in Chapter 3, in that it lacks the strong dotted feel that is typical of most of the songs I have discussed. Therefore I have notated it in 2|4 time rather than compound meter to reflect the duple micropulse I hear in the voice and instruments. The form has three phrases. The first (mm. 1-6) starts on a’ and ascends to a resting tone on the song tonic of d’. The second phrase (mm. 7-14) starts on d’ and descends through a falling contour to a ma dra of g’, which elides into the third phrase (mm.15-22). This phrase starts on what could be considered a temporary resting tone of f’ (mm. 15-17) before resolving to the tonic of d. The number of beats is even, and Pema Tenzin preserves this evenness by adding four beats of instrumental break after each verse.
“Khani Ho Yhamu [Sherpa Dress]”: A Nepali Song set in Nubri

A final video by Pema Dhondrup that is neither a Nubri song nor one that he is singing is nevertheless worth considering. “Khani Ho Yhamu” is a contemporary song by pop singer Trishna Gurung with lyrics (mostly) in Nepali that reference the contemporary phenomenon of migrant labor which is impacting large numbers of Nepali families as working-age men go to the Persian Gulf and other overseas locations for work. The text of the song, and Gurung’s original video55 portray the sadness of parting as a girl is left behind by her husband or boyfriend. The title phrase is in the Gurung language, and I have been told its meaning is “where are you going?”—which is antecedent to the next line in Nepali, “ma pani janchu” (“I’m going too”). The song, a recent pop hit in Nepal (2010s), can be notated in 7/8 meter, with beats divided 123, 12, 12. This rhythmic pattern is called rupak tāl in Indian classical music and is common in the Nepali pop genre called adhunik git. By invoking this genre, associated in the popular mind with Nepaliness (Henderson 2002), and placing it in Nubri, the video declares alliance between Nubri and Nepali society in general.

Pema switches roles in this video as he turns the camera on his usual video director/producer, Saroj Khadka, who acts out romantic scenes with Kamala Bhujel, formerly a nurse at a clinic in Prok, around the shores of lake Kel. Thus far, Pema has only posted this video on Facebook.56

55 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQW6iPOTwAY
56 <https://www.facebook.com/nubrigotsaktsak/videos/357908861248754/>
The soundtrack of the video is simply Trishna Gurung’s recording, so I will not comment on it musically, but what is interesting about the video is that Pema has placed two Nepalis, over the background of a Nepali song, in an iconic location in Nubri, and put them in Tibetan dress. This uplifts the Nepalis to the highlands, which are depicted as clean, pure, and a site of romantic freedom. Notably, the title of the video says “Sherpa dress.” Since Nubriwas and Sherpas are definitely separate groups, and ordinarily balk at any conflation between them, I can think of no other reason Pema would title the video such other than that the brightly colored pang gdan (aprons) that Kamala Bhujel is wearing are more like those worn by Sherpa women, rather than the stereotypical Nubri version, which have more muted colors and prominent embroidery. Saroj Khadka wears the Tibetan brocade vest and shirt often worn by modern young men from Nubri, as well as by Tibetans and Sherpas, but also carries a khukuri, the curved knife that is a symbol of the Nepali army and is traditionally carried and used by Nepali village men.
Pema’s use of a popular song in Nepali that is also by a Gurung artist and contains some Gurung language signals multiple layers of alliance. By placing Nepali actors in Nubri, in Tibetan dress, Pema is simultaneously suggesting the Nepaliness of Nubri and that Tibetan-ness is a part of Nepal. By depicting high-caste (Khadka is Chhetri) and lower-caste (Bhujel is a Tibeto-Burman speaking janajati caste) youth in a romantic relationship, Pema subtly transgresses social norms of caste separation and hints that Nepali youth should be free to marry whom they want. The use of a Nepali/Gurung song builds alliances both with greater Nepal and specifically with the Gurung ethnicity, which is the predominant group in Northern Gorkha just outside of Nubri. Pema has also performed this song with my accompaniment at a Kathmandu wedding (see Chapter 2: 44), to the delight of the many in attendance: Gurungs, Tsumbas, Nubriwas, exile Tibetans, and Nepalis, in attendance. This video, which has to date received 4.7 thousand views, represents Nubri as the backdrop for the performance of a modern Nepali youth identity that brings together different strains of contemporary and historic symbolism to suggest an array of unifying alliances through collaboration, technological mediation, dialect choice, and genre formation.

Conclusion

The music videos discussed in this chapter contain examples of alliance in the categories of technological mediation and collaboration, as well as to a lesser extent, language use and genre formation, mentioned by Beverly Diamond. In allying with exile Tibetans, Nepalis, foreigners, and calling for alliance among different villages, age groups, and places of residence, Pema Dhondrup says something about his own ideas of identity. He and his community of Nubri comprise a unique ethnic group, but one that is closely related to and dependant upon both Tibet
and Nepal. It is also one that is not stuck in time in an imagined past, but which is fully connected to global culture, and is poised to participate more fully in its transnational flows.

The fact that Pema Dhondrup has deferred to Pema Tenzin in terms of arrangement and production shows that he respects the cultural authority of the exile Tibetans, and is eager to receive their cultural knowledge. For his part, Pema Tenzin has buttressed this perception of the relationship by taking on himself to “clean up” and professionalize Pema Dhondrup’s Nubri songs and by treating them as yet another variety of “Tibetan songs.” The fact that Pema Dhondrup has actively sought to include foreigners in his videos shows that he is willing to ally with foreigners and others who might be helpful in preserving his culture through changing times, and transmitting it to future generations in a form that while adapting to new conditions, will retain a kernel, or “essence” that is specific to Nubri. Pema Dhondrup and Pema Tenzin have done their small part to recenter the mandala of Tibetan music to include as tutelary deities the Himalayan valleys of Nepal, with the focal point of Kathmandu, with its pilgrimage sites where Himalayans and Tibetans freely mingle, as the pivotal image. Moreover, especially through the song “Nubri Töshay Tashi Drayang,” they have moved to recenter Nubri as its own self-contained mandala, complete in and of itself. This serves to recenter highland Nubri, moving it away from the peripheries of Nepal and Tibet, and valorizing it as a center of its own.
In writing this dissertation I set out to understand how songs and music reflect how indigenous Tibetan-speaking Nepalis from Nubri and exile Tibetans in Kathmandu understand and articulate their visions of identity both among themselves and in relation to one another. In the process I found myself interrogating my own identity—who was I, and how did unexamined aspects of my worldview and self-image affect my interactions with my collaborators and with others I met in the field? As a Buddhist, I felt I had an advantage in establishing relationships with my Buddhist interlocutors that non-Buddhist outsiders might lack. Often, when people would see the mala (prayer beads) wrapped around my wrist, they would ask “nang pa yin pas” (are you a Buddhist? [literally “insider”]). When I answered in the affirmative, I would frequently sense an opening from the other person—an increase in comfort as they proceeded to ask me who was my lama, how long I had been Buddhist, and so forth. As I sat with lamas and khenpos, asking them questions about song texts, history, and customs, they would freely diverge into Buddhist topics, knowing that I was just as interested in their dharma teachings as in their “secular” cultural knowledge. In some small but significant sense, being a Buddhist gave me partial “insider” status.

Bi-musicality, or the ability to play and sing songs of the people with whom I was working was also a powerful means of entreé and connection. When I played and sang for villagers in Nubri, or exile Tibetans in Boudha, their faces would instantly light up at the sight of a foreigner playing a dranyen and singing in their language. After introducing myself through music, I have found that people are more often eager to engage with me and ask me questions about myself or volunteer information about other musicians or songs. This ability also has also given me a privileged vantage point as I tried to understand how Tibetan and Nepali musics
work from the inside out. Through studying instruments with local teachers, I gained access to their understandings, thought processes, and pedagogies on a practical level, through which I learned details about their worldviews that would have remained hidden to a non-musician. It has also allowed me to enter into dynamic musical collaborations through which I continue to learn and deepen my understanding and relationships in alliances that express and delineate the changing and positional identities of all involved.

At the same time, I have come into contact with Christian missionaries, both in my field sites and in the ethnomusicological literature, in ways that have revealed to me some of my deepest unexamined biases, and spurred me to come to terms with them. Before I came to higher education, I spent many years as a musician, songwriter, and recording artist. In the role of a creative artist, one has to make many judgements about good and bad in art—what is valuable, worthy, and sublime, and what is shallow, disingenuous, or simply “schlock” (a Yiddish term for mediocre). As a creative musician, it was easy for me to take a certain perverse pleasure in not liking certain music, genres, or artists—it could result in a feeling of superiority. Becoming an ethnomusicologist ruined that for me. I found I was no longer interested in discriminating between “good” and “bad” music, but in understanding how different musics worked, why people liked them, and how they functioned for the people who used them. I even found myself questioning the very concept of “music,” which I learned is by no means a cultural universal. In the same way, as I have studied different cultures through the discipline of ethnomusicology, I have become more sensitive to the ways I have habitually Othered cultures different from my own—most notably evangelical Christians. This project has opened up Christian ethnomusicology as a new topic of inquiry for me. While this does not preclude me from opposing Christian missionaries in my field sites in transparent, ethical, and respectful ways, it
does require me to make efforts to understand them on their own terms just as I would any other culture, and to put aside my own prejudices while seeking dialogue and common ground. I am now looking forward to delving into this topic more deeply in the future, which for me is one of the most exciting developments to have come out of my dissertation research, and one I never would have expected.

In this dissertation I have explored the literature on identity, both in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in ethnomusicology, and concluded that alliance studies is a fruitful framework for thinking about it, especially when one is dealing with multiple, related, and interacting groups who are engaged in explicit identity preservation, construction, and maintenance. In so doing, I have also explicitly connected alliance studies to applied ethnomusicology. I have made the first-ever collection of songs from Nubri by an outside ethnomusicologist, providing musical and textual transcriptions and translations, and attempting musicological analysis grounded in Collinge’s “new lexicon” of music theory, derived from native Tibetan scholars. I have done extensive ethnographic fieldwork with the Lhamo Tshokpa of Boudha, revealing insights into one specific locality of the Tibetan diaspora, not in isolation, but in regard to their relationships and alliances with contiguous groups with whom they are inescapably entwined. I have made an in-depth study of the majority of the music videos produced by one Nubri artist, Pema Dhondup, and interrogated not only their music and texts, but the rich visual information they contain that can reveal further levels of meaning, contributing to a growing field of YouTube studies. Using alliance studies as an overarching framework, and mandala theory as a lens through which to look at song texts. I have attempted to tie these threads together to form what I believe is a unique contribution to ethnomusicology in terms of theory, and to general understanding of Tibetan and Himalayan cultures. In a process
typical of academic study, I have also formed alliances with a number of scholars in particular ways, and this dissertation could not have been completed without those alliances. Brenda M. Romero taught me her theory of infinite variation, which holds that “maintenance and renewal are achieved through rituals of interrelationship and interdependence” (2015). This got me started thinking about interdependence and maintenance as processes, which dovetails nicely with Diamond’s model. I feel that my use of alliance studies has buttressed Romero’s theory in ways I hope to explore further in future research.

**Contributions to Ethnomusicological Theory: Alliance Studies as a Framework for Identity**

The paradigm of alliance studies has proven to be a productive scheme for making sense of how exile Tibetans and indigenous Tibetan-speaking Nepalis from Nubri, as well as from other locales, co-create their identities in relation to one another. It has allowed me, in this dissertation, to talk about the intersecting and overlapping nature of the identities of these groups not as fixed, discrete, and solid, but as continuously formed and adapted through alliances that allow each group, and each individual within them to conceive of their identities separately, yet at the same time. Somewhat in the manner of the multiple blind men who grasped different parts of the elephant, these disparate but interrelated groups can draw on shared cultural logics to arrive at versions of identity best suited to the needs of each, while maintaining their individuality in the midst of mutually beneficial collaboration. The conditions of globalizing modernity, technological interconnection, neoliberal economic regimes, transnational flows, and global discourses of nationalism, indigeneity, diaspora, and human rights guarantee that such groups can never really be unconnected, and are implicated in webs of interdependent arising.
Alliance studies promises a way forward in studying music and identity in ethnomusicology, as well as other disciplines, that can free the scholar from the problems of reification that have plagued identity studies in the past, and revitalize identity as a category of inquiry. It has the potential to reduce the disconnect between researcher and research population by revealing that relationship as an alliance as well, and examining it accordingly, which has implications for applied ethnomusicology and suggests a natural progression towards a truly collaborative ethnomusicology. In this dissertation I have sought to use Diamond’s model thoroughly, considering identity and alliance through all five of her suggested foci: genre formations, language and dialect choice, technological mediations, collaboration and citation, and issues of access and ownership. I have placed this inquiry in the context of my own worldview of Buddhist ontology and indicated how musical communities can be seen metaphorically as overlapping mandalas, an idea I hope to develop further in the future. I have thus provided an example of how alliance studies can be applied to an ethnomusicological study, and contributed to the further use and theorization of alliance studies in ethnomusicology.

Contributions to Our Understanding of Tibetan and Himalayan Cultures

This dissertation also contributes to general understanding of Tibetan and Himalayan culture as a complex of subcultures. By examining the overlapping identity discourses of exile Tibetans and ethnically Tibetan Himalayan Nepalis through the lens of alliance studies, using music as a nexus of identity performance and articulation (both in the ordinary sense of expressing something, and in Hall’s Marxian sense of making connections), I have sought to represent the state of contemporary relationships between the two groups in Nepal. In documenting a small part of the folksong repertory of Nubri, I have provided never-before published oral texts that
will be of interest to Tibetan scholars generally and will contribute to our knowledge of the Tibetan language oral literature of Nepal. By looking at the YouTube videos of Pema Dhondrup, I have aimed to not only foreground this important, but little-known, artist, but to contribute to a growing body of YouTube studies by scholars in ethnomusicology and the broader humanities. The literature on exile Tibetans and Tibetan-speaking Himalayans in Nepal does not contain much work that dwells on the connections, relationships, and alliances among them, but usually treats them separately while going into detail about a given group. I hope that this dissertation will contribute to a move toward viewing these groups in tandem, to reflect their deep entanglement and mutual dependence.

The Revitalization of Music and Identity

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the growing renewal of identity studies in music (see Hargreaves and MacDonald 2017). While identity has often been problematized and even derided as an analytical term, identities are unquestionably important for many different peoples around the world, and music is a central mode through which people learn, recognize, display, construct, maintain, and articulate who they are in the world. By enabling groups of people to form and reinforce bonds of community focused on identity, music as performed an essential adaptive function for the survival of human beings as groups through interdependence often expressed musically (Romero 2015). Music has the ability to simultaneously carry meanings imparted culturally by collectives, and also cognitively by individuals, and since music carries no intrinsic meaning of its own, it is extremely open and flexible in terms of potential vectors of significance. This is alluded to in Brenda M. Romero’s theory of infinite variation—“The nature of music, as of humanity, is to endlessly maintain and renew itself” (2015: 140). What is needed
in the study of music and identity is more nuance regarding the ontology of identity, and alliance studies and Buddhist philosophy are both promising frameworks for furnishing such nuance. This study has addressed some of the nuance of how alliances shape identities via musical flows aligned to the peaceful tenets of Buddhism. As music will no doubt continue to be employed by people everywhere in expressing their identities, and will consequently continue to tell us something about those processes, the possibilities for the study of music and identity have by no means been exhausted.
EPILOGUE

Since beginning this project I have found myself implicated in a range of alliances with the people with whom I have been working. I have been requested to help with grant proposals for the Lhamo Tshokpa and for a new monastery project in Nubri; I have engaged in multiple musical collaborations with Pema Dhondrup, exile Tibetans in Boudha, and Nepali students and teachers at Kathmandu University; I have also given guitar lessons to Pema Dhondrup’s son, and at Pema’s request, introduced his son to the Lhamo Tshokpa, where he is now a student. I raised funds to purchase six *dranyen* which are now in the hands of schools and individuals in Nubri, including Pema Dhondrup and Dawa Dhondrup.

![Figure 37: Dranyens for Nubri](image)

I am not separate from the people I have forged alliances with—we are now entangled in relationships that define our identities. From someone who knew nothing about Nepal four years ago, I am now an ethnomusicologist of Nubri and the Tibetan diaspora in Nepal. There are people in Nubri and in the Lhamo Tshokpa that consider me family, and I them. This dissertation is but a beginning, and doing the research for it allowed me to make these connections. Writing it
has given me the chance to put my initial findings, impressions and ideas on the page. Most of all, it has inspired me to continue this work, and I am anxious to begin the next phase.

In this dissertation I have struggled to think about identity in a way that would be more palatable to me, and to others in my field using the framework of alliance proposed by Beverly Diamond. I have rehashed much that I have studied in the past few years and attempted to uncover new sources that would be relevant to my project. I have tried to learn to play and sing the music I have been studying, and to accurately present the songs and texts that I recorded, while doing my best to interrogate and analyze the words and melodies to say something useful to other scholars. One of my first writing teachers told me that writing a research paper simply means becoming an expert in something and telling people about it, and I feel I have done that to at least an extent. In writing this dissertation I consolidated the various strands of knowledge I have been thinking about over the past two years, and I now feel confident to discuss this material freely—some of my friends might say too freely! However, I know there are many faults, and I once again beg the forgiveness of the knowledgeable for any mistakes I have made in this text and for any shortcomings it may have.

In the aftermath of my major fieldwork I have continued to research Tibetan, Himalayan, and Nepali music, and I have begun to teach Western and World music to undergraduate students at Kathmandu University. I have already learned much from these students and I look forward to strengthening our mutually educational alliance. I have also continued to raise funds for instruments for Nubri, and I have discussed with Pema Tenzin the possibility of creating an instructional manual to distribute to those who hold those instruments. Pema Tenzin is an experienced educator and when I told him I wanted to produce such printed materials he immediately gave me handwritten transcriptions of all the songs he recorded with Pema
Dhondrup as well as other matter, including a particularly beautiful hand-drawn diagram of the nomenclature of the *dranyen* and the notes of the fingerboard.

![Diagram of the nomenclature of the *dranyen* and the notes of the fingerboard.](image)

Figure 38: Pema Tenzin's *dranyen* diagram

One thing I learned from this diagram is that Pema Tenzin pronounces the solfege syllable for the two possible positions of the first scale degree, the only note that can be fingered in two different places, differently. For the third note on the third course, it is *do*, but for the second note on the first course, it is *tö* (“toe” in Pema’s vernacular Romanization style). Pema wants me to digitize these materials and use them to create a booklet that will help students in Nubri learn the *dranyen* using Nubri songs. Since many of them are already familiar with the songs on Pema Dhondrup’s CD and videos, this promises to be effective, because it is much easier to learn a song one already knows.
The challenge now is to find a way to reproduce this notation typographically in Microsoft Word. The Chêve system as adapted by Tibetans is very efficient and easy to understand. Many students can learn to sight-read it in a matter of days or weeks because, with the exception of do, there is only one place to play any given note on the instrument, and there are only seven notes. The rhythm is indicated by dashes below numbers that represent scale degrees, and they function in exactly the same way as the beams of eighth- and sixteenth-notes. Vertical slashes every two beats are essentially bar lines.

My first project after this dissertation will be to figure out how to best render this notation as a Word file. Once I can do that, I will work with Pema on developing a text that will explain the technique in prose, as well as giving some background on each song. Ideally, this text will appear alongside the transcriptions and diagrams in Tibetan, Nepali, and English. Producing this manual specifically tailored to music students in Nubri will be a small but significant way to...
“give back” to the Nubri community as an applied ethnomusicologist, and it will also be of interest to the exile Tibetan musicians of Kathmandu who might wish to add Nubri songs to their repertoires.

Finally, I intend to return to Nubri in the near future and continue to record folk songs, and in the process I am thinking of ways to make this work more truly collaborative and contribute to the project of the decolonization of ethnomusicology by placing more control of every aspect of musical ethnography into the hands of my collaborators. This is no easy task, and I am just beginning to think about it. One thing I will certainly do is, upon leaving Nubri on my next trip, leave my recording device (a Zoom H4 digital audio recorder) with Pema Dhondrup so he can continue to document songs and other oral literature on his own. Thus Pema will be able to decide, without my presence or direct influence, what and whom to record, and what questions to ask of his informants. I hope this will lead to us cataloguing, archiving, distributing, and theorizing this material collaboratively, and ultimately writing the resulting ethnography together.
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