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The Human Dimensions of Land-Use and Land-Cover Change in Lamjung, Nepal

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pre-unified Nepal and later in the unified kingdom), social issues (e.g., social conditions of women, castes, etc.), and religious influences (e.g., the presence and degree of influence of Vaishnavite, Shaivite, Tantric, and Buddhist traditions). This aspect of my study draws largely on historical accounts of Nepal, gathered in both archival research and secondary reading of Nepal's history.

The second component of my project moves from a text-archival focus to a contemporary ethnographic account of Nepalis' understanding and celebration of the Svasthani. In Magh (January-February) 2005 and 2006, I lived in the village of Sankhu, which hosts the annual month-long Svasthani mela. In addition to witnessing the colorful Svasthani barta (ritual fast), I interviewed numerous barta participants, pilgrims, and village elders to better understand Nepalis' lived experiences and celebration of the Svasthani tradition. These individuals offered keen insights on the unparalleled popularity and presence of the Svasthani textual tradition throughout its history and in today's society. For, according to many, the Svasthani is 'Nepal's most important living tradition'. I supplemented these interviews with extensive conversations with authors of recent Svasthani publications. Their insights in particular illuminated recent trends and hint of the future trajectory of this key tradition. I also digitally photographed

nearly twenty private copies of handwritten Svasthani texts owned by local (primarily Sankhu) families, including a text dating to 1674 CE that was haphazardly stored under a bed.

In my dissertation I argue that Hindu communities in Nepal translated the SVK tradition among and between themselves in an effort to conceptualize and create their own *Nepali* Hindu cultural identity and tradition. The Svasthani presents a unique viewfinder through which I reexamine Nepal's sociocultural history in an effort to understand how that history (re)produced this key textual tradition and, moreover, how this textual tradition can illuminate critical points of transition and development in that history. The importance of understanding this identity, the popular tradition that fostered it, and the implications of both for the future of what was until recently the world's 'only Hindu kingdom' is crucial as Nepal negotiates its precarious state of political transition and probable secularization.

Preliminary remarks on my research of the Svasthani's earliest textual incarnations will be published in the forthcoming volume of the *Journal of the Nepal Research Center*.

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THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF LAND-USE AND LAND-COVER CHANGE IN LAMJUNG, NEPAL

Among land change scientists, there is growing recognition of the need for an integrative, multilevel approach to study the relationships of agricultural "modification activities" and global land-use and land-cover change (LULCC). This comes as a crucial step to move beyond the primary area of change (i.e., conversion of forests to other land-use categories) to study the changes in agricultural areas, mainly the land-use strategies resulting in different agricultural intensification levels. While these modification activities have significant impact on LULCC, these are also subtle and dynamic to be detected with remote sensing and ecological models alone. In other words, we lack sufficient knowledge on the extent to which agricultural land-use strategies contribute to LULCC and *vice versa*. The need for such knowledge is even greater for the mountain areas, one of the most understudied fragile ecosystems, where agricultural practices heavily rely on forests, livestock, pastures and cultural-ecological

adaptations.

In 2004-05, I conducted my dissertation research in Lamjung District, Nepal. This research proposes a cross-disciplinary, multi-scalar approach that integrates household and community data with remote sensing and GIS applications to investigate the relationships between the finer scale agricultural land-use strategies and the broader scale land-cover change trajectories for the period between 1984 through 2004. Main research questions were: Under what household and community contexts do mountain smallholders change their agricultural land-use strategies? How and to what degree are land-use strategies associated with the broader patterns of land-cover? After participant observations, a household survey of 66 households in two villages were followed by in-depth interviews of key respondents, elicitation of local land-use history, collection of "training samples," and remote sensing analysis to study the LULCC trajectories. Final data

analysis is now underway and the dissertation will be completed by April of 2007.

By analyzing the changing dynamics of household conditions and community contexts (i.e., socio-cultural, demographic and economic), this research establishes general relationships underlying subsistence behavior of mountain smallholders, their dependence on agricultural and forest resources, and the extent to which their behaviors are historically and spatially influenced by changing local demography, expanding market economy, shared cultural knowledge and institutional arrangements in use. It also detects the changes in land-cover patterns by analyzing set of multi-temporal Landsat data of 1984, 1994, and 2003 and their classification and thematic accuracy. In doing so, it identifies the proximate causes and the driving forces of LULCC

and places them within the context of longer histories of the coupled human-ecological system of the area. Finally, it also captures how an important cross-section of actors perceive, manage, and change agriculture and forest resources in the Nepal Himalaya—one of the environmentally critical regions of the world.

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MIGRATION, GENDER AND NATION IN NEPALI DOHORI PERFORMANCE

My current research examines Nepali migrants' construction of gendered national identity through language and music. Specifically, it concentrates on the emerging commercial musical genre of improvised male-female duets known as dohori, in which romantic love, migration, and social issues are addressed through humorous lyrical play. Dohori has become widely popular over the past two decades, peaking in popularity during the past three years with the influx of migration from hill villages to Kathmandu. Previously rejected by Radio Nepal as unworthy of radio broadcast, dohori was embraced by the newly formed private music companies and FM radio stations in the 1990s. Dohori cassettes now provide the sales base of Nepal's major private music companies. Since the first dohori club opened in Kathmandu in 1996, the number of restaurants where dohori is performed has increased into the hundreds. Some view the rise of commercial dohori as a revival of a dying folk tradition, and it is increasingly presented in terms of national cultural heritage. This linkage of dohori with national heritage legitimizes it as a musical genre and as a profession for both men and women—moving to Kathmandu and finding a job as a performer in a dohori restaurant provides not only a source of cash income but also an opportunity to rise in social status within the profession through talent and skill. Yet, this valorization has both encouraged efforts to “clean up” dohori's trademark sexual innuendo, especially

on nationally circulating recordings, and led others to claim that the public, improvised matches of wits between men and women are indicative of rural hill women's relative freedom of sexual and intellectual expression (Dixit 2002). Urban middle-class sensibilities of suitable Nepali gender roles (Liechty 2003; Liechty 2005) and nationalist idealization of “free” rural life (Pigg 1992) thus come into conflict around gender and sexuality in musical performance, and in the lives that performers actually lead. With this in mind, I ask, how do migrant dohori performers address this tension, along with their own desires for belonging, social status, economic success, and changing forms of romantic relationships, in their music and in their lives?

I approach dohori's changing styles and status not as a revival but as a recontextualization (Bauman 1990; Bauman 1992), concomitant with the changes brought by political upheaval, increases in rural-urban and international migration, and the circulation of mass media. My research is based in the dohori restaurants of Kathmandu, a “midpoint” between the dohori improvised in village songfests and the composed songs recorded on cassettes. I accompany restaurant performers to recording sessions, on return trips to their villages, and on tour around Nepal, paying attention to gender dynamics displayed in performances in different settings, and to discussions about suitable songs and lyrics, and about differences between rural and urban performance. I am also conducting