

“If the work covers a relatively limited historical period, it manages to encompass almost all aspects of Tibetan civilization.”

Kaplanian on *L'Âge d'or du Tibet (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles)*

At the same time, there were still other genres of literature such as the treatises of regional history such as the *Annals of Kokonor*, histories of monasteries (*denrab; gdan rabs*, p. 222) and of genealogies (*drungrab: drung rab*, p. 222) like the one composed by the regent Sangye Gyatso for the 5th Dalai Lama. The author also notes that the regent Sangye Gyatso encouraged the publication of treatises of grammar (p. 223). The literature on pilgrimages did not just guide pilgrims; those dedicated to the sacred mountains aimed to install the Buddhist pantheon in the landscape.

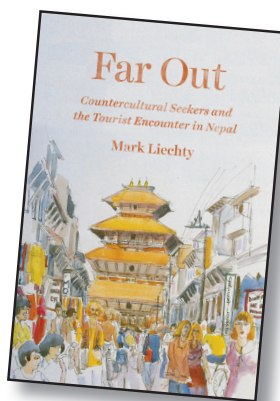
The field of poetry also flourished in 17th and 18th centuries. There was a return to Indian sources with the rediscovery of treatises on poetic composition (p. 226). At the same time, rediscoveries of great texts like the *Ramayana* inspired the writing of novels (p. 227).

If the author has done an excellent job, the same cannot be said of the publisher. The book is crammed with cross-references like « cf Lhasa, ville cosmopolite; chapitre II » (“see Lhasa, cosmopolitan city; chapter II”) instead of “see p. 73” where this subtitle is exactly located, which make the reader lose a lot of time. The publisher, having no cartographic department, did not draw maps suitable for the work. Because of that, the author was forced to gather different maps published in other works. As a result, there is a lack of unity and consistency and, above all, most of the maps are not adapted to the

format of the book and are therefore indistinct.

But these are minor faults. This is a book that should be read by all of those interested in Tibet that will also be a resource for specialists.

*Patrick Kaplanian is an independent researcher working on the ethnology of Ladakh since 1975.*



***Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal.***

**Mark Liechty.** Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. 387 pages. ISBN 9780226428949.

**Reviewed by Jolynna Sinanan**

In an ideal world, tourists in their guesthouses or in any number of the “free-wi-fi-with-drinks-purchase” bars in Kathmandu would be thumbing through *Mark Liechty’s Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal*, rather than Jon Krakauer’s Everest disaster account turned Everest folklore *Into Thin Air*. Not that *Into Thin Air* isn’t a

great read, but its effectiveness is in taking an event we think we know well and turning it into a personal account of the adventure and then disaster that has shaped how we relate to one of the most notorious tourism destinations in Nepal.

The adventure in Liechty’s *Far Out* is the production of the imaginations of Nepal itself. The book takes a historicized perspective, based on over four decades of personal experience—from having spent substantial time in Kathmandu as a child, through his parents’ work with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), to his long term ethnography as an anthropologist specialising in youth and the emerging urban middle-class (research focused on 75 individuals in the 2010s), and a great deal of reading. It would be impossible to write a good book about Nepal, with its deep associations with adventure and spiritualism—imaginative escapes from the malaise of 20th century capitalism, without being able to tell a good story. Nepal’s narrative in the modern, Western imagination has indeed become myth because of good stories.

The overall structure follows tourism as colonial adventure to neo-liberal commodity, from the 1960s to 1980, and the intergenerational imagination of Nepal that is wider than this timeframe but concentrates on the countercultural tourist encounter of these decades. Departing from a focus on “tourists” or the “locals” impacted by “their” gaze, *Far Out* highlights the encounter

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**Sinanan on *Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal***

between tourists’ constructions of Nepal and Nepali constructions of tourism.

The five chapters in Part One examine the intersection between economic, political and geopolitical forces that produced Nepal as a tourist destination. The intimate relationship between Nepal’s backwardness—through a lack of working infrastructures, and its exoticness—through a lack of contact with the modern world, appealed as an origin story of the kind of tourist that would be attracted to the country. This is despite its diverse, complex culture and society: one’s self could be found by going, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it in Kathmandu in 1952, “so far out of this world” (p. 26). Tracing influential individuals and ideas in theosophy, spiritualism and mysticism, Part One begins by establishing the tourist imaginary of a lost self. The individual self, created through modernity, the ideals and values of the enlightenment, was also lost through modern capitalism, but ironically, could be found in “untouched” Nepal, equally created as a destination through the same modern processes. Eastern ideas and practices as “other places” of escape, located in the ethereal and impressive Himalayas were reinforced by travel writing, books, and films alongside historical events including the Chinese invasion of Tibet and post-World War Two development and decolonization.

Part Two and its four chapters outline the rise of countercultural

seekers that followed. In contrast to wealthy, elite tourists chasing dreams of images from *National Geographic*, a younger generation of beatniks, backpackers and hippies sought to find themselves through delights and deprivation in Kathmandu’s material culture of drugs (and lack thereof), consumption, and cuisine. These chapters showcase Liechty’s expertise in urban anthropology, rich with portraits, vignettes and quotes of expatriates and the Nepalis who reflected on the city’s changing social landscape in the 1970s and its hub, Freak Street. The era of Kathmandu as the end of the road is heavily intertwined with Nepal’s changing politics and economic aspirations. King Birendra’s coronation in 1975 marked the beginning of an agenda to commercialize tourism and clean up Kathmandu’s reputation as a hippie haven, coinciding with the rise of Nixon’s War on Drugs.

Part Three presents the origins of what most contemporary tourists would be familiar with or at least would have seen in the most recent marketing of Nepal as a global attraction. These three chapters focus on trekking and the emergence of the tourist suburb of Thamel near to Kathmandu’s royal palace and historic Durbar Square. Unlike tourists from Nepal’s relatively young 30-year tourist industry, these new adventure tourists came to Nepal to find “their own mass-mediated image-memories” (p. 320) shaped by decades of popular culture. The theme of self-seeking endured,

but with a particular neo-liberal consumer sensibility, where treks play a role in managing risk, but a sense of accomplishment can still be acquired.

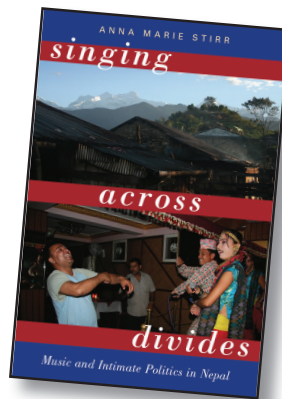
The detailed impressions and life histories of the characters that appear in key moments in Nepal’s tourism could be treatments for movies themselves. Some portraits of well-known figures such as Tenzing Norgay (who made the famous first ascent of Everest with Edmund Hillary) appear in fleeting encounters in footnotes (p. 48). Others are vividly drawn out, where these making-of-selves are integral to understanding later narratives of the self made through tourist encounters. Royal Hotel founder Boris Lissanevitch (ch. 4), subversive Nepali hippini Vidhea Shrestha (ch. 9), and actress-socialite turned Tibetan nun Princess Zina Rachevsky (ch. 12) are some highlights of the book’s opulent storytelling.

*Far Out* draws on a wide range of scholarship on Nepal, from anthropology, history and geography as well as journalistic resources, and reads easily for an intelligent but not necessarily intellectual audience. For researchers in Nepal studies, scholarly references are commented upon but are not treated with depth of engagement. Instead these discussions are pointed to in handy footnotes (The footnotes themselves are little gems of trivia. For example, a trekking permit granted in the Maoist insurgency years of the 1990s

is considered a prized possession amongst global backpackers).

From my own disciplinary perspective, anthropology has had a long-standing interest in individual and collective imaginations, even though these are quite difficult to gather empirical data on. *Far Out* keeps the focus squarely on Kathmandu and the tourist encounter, and it situates the encounter within wider global influences, but the focus on Nepal is effective for not privileging the West's perspective without problematizing it. By presenting a historicised geography of individual and collective narratives, *Far Out* is a valuable resource for scholars and enthusiasts of tourism history and Nepal studies and provides a cornerstone for further research on contemporary tourism in South Asia.

*Jolynna Sinanan is a research fellow in Automated Decision-Making and Global Contexts in the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society and the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. Her current research focuses on digital media infrastructures and practices in work and the tourist encounter in the Everest tourism industry.*



***Singing Across Divides: Music and Intimate Politics in Nepal.***

**Anna Marie Stirr.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 288 pages. ISBN 9780190631987.

**Reviewed by Mason Brown**

Ethnomusicologist Anna Stirr is a minor celebrity in Nepal. She is known for her mastery of *dohori*—“dialogic, conversational sung poetry” in the Nepali language (p. 3), usually between a man and a woman, which is associated with courtship, flirtation, and competition. As a performer who has worked for over a decade with, and is highly respected by, some of the main players in the “*dohori* field” (p. 9), Stirr enjoys a kind of honorary “insider status.” That, combined with her immersion in various strands of scholarship and theory, makes for a beautiful book that threads deft theoretical synthesis through lovingly written ethnographic vignettes and big-picture historical and cultural framing. The book also won the Bernard H. Cohen prize from the Association for Asian Studies.

*Dohori* is part of a larger array of traditions across the Himalayas in which young men and women improvise rhyming couplets in response to each other. It is particularly associated with *janajāti*

(indigenous) groups like Gurung, Rai, and Magar that traditionally live in the middle hills of rural Nepal. As originally practiced, it was a way for teenagers to spend lightly supervised time together. Singers would compete to see who could go one further in improvising couplets. If a contest was framed as binding, the boy could win the girl's hand in marriage, or the girl could win labor or in-kind payment from the boy. Stirr lays out how this rural, ethnically specific practice came to be appropriated by high-cast Hindus and used to represent a unified Nepali culture in urban spaces and mass media, inadvertently sneaking in its transgressive potentials to mainstream discourse.

Those transgressive potentials bear on what Stirr theorizes as “intimate politics.” Starting with a Rancièrian view of politics as actions that oppose obscurantist logics that mask inequality, she fleshes out a Nepali idea of closeness (*ghaniṣṭha*), with reference to writings on intimacy by social theorists like Martin Stokes, Lauren Berlant, Michael Herzfeld, and Alexander Kiossev, and posits that “intimate publics” are created to unite strangers in the same emotional world. *Dohori*, she says, poses a challenge “to fictions of harmoniously coexisting social differences: it exposes the lines not to be crossed, and delights in their crossing” (p. 14). She brings in and expands on numerous other strands of scholarship, such as work on music and the rural/urban divide by Thomas Turino, Christine Reiko Yano, Aaron Fox and Alexander Dent, which she complicates by de-linearizing the narrative, with respect to South Asia especially: “Rural performance settings survive not only in a nostalgic imagination, but also in everyday life, in villages integrated into a complex set of relations with