Ülo VALK is professor of Estonian and comparative folklore, University of Tartu (Estonia). During 2000 and 2001 he served as visiting professor of folkloristics at the University of California, Berkeley, between 2005 and 2009 he was the president of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR). His publications include the monograph *The Black Gentleman: Manifestations of the Devil in Estonian Folk Religion* (Helsinki, 2001, Academia Scientiarum Fennica), *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief,* co-edited with Marion Bowman, London and Oakville, CT, Equinox, 2012) and other works on folk narratives, folk belief, demonology, history of folkloristics and folklore in social context.

The Dancers Complied, the Chicken Denied: Explorations into the Pragmatic Work of Rituals among the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal

MARION WETTSTEIN UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA

Asking what is relevant in a ritual process and to whom, this article follows in detail a short sequence of an agricultural bhume *ritual performed by the Dumi Rai of Eastern Nepal. On the basis of this example, it is suggested that moments of excitement or bewilderment among our local key partners can provide points of entry for a deeper understanding of their culture. Discussing the conceptual difference between correct and perfect ritual action, the article arrives at a pragmatic approach to the "work of ritual." Based on the locally perceived equivalence between ritual work and other, everyday work, it is suggested to employ by analogy a notion of a ritual "working contract" between today's living community and the ancestors who are addressed in the greatest part of rituals among the Rai.*

What is relevant in a ritual process and to whom? Which are the crucial moments and why? These questions cropped up time and again during my research[1] among the Dumi Rai, and most clearly in one particular incident I observed during a *bhume* puja, a ritual for a soil deity, a few years back. The Dumi Rai, which according to the 2001 census consists of 5,271 people (Central Bureau of Statistics 2002), are one of roughly

---

[1] Research project headed by Martin Gaenszle: "Ritual, Space, Mimesis: Performative Traditions and Ethnic Identity among the Rai of Eastern Nepal" at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, 2011–2015), in collaboration with my research partner Alban von Stockhausen, who I thank for his companionship and valuable input. Many thanks also go to Chatur Bhakta Rai for his great support and collaboration in my research for over a decade. Transcriptions of Dumi terms follow, as far as possible, the *Dumi–Nepali–English Dictionary*, for better readability adjusted to standard Romanized Nepali (DKRF 2011).

30 Rai subgroups. They mainly live on the Baksila ridge of Khotang District in Eastern Nepal, some also on the slopes of Jalpa on the other side of the Tap River and on the slopes of Makpa on the other side of the Rawa River. They originally spoke Dumi, a language of the Tibeto-Burman family, but nowadays this has been largely supplanted by Nepali (van Driem 1993). The Rai, together with the Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar, are subsumed under the ethnonym Kirat. Ethnographic and anthropological research on the Rai is still a small field. Published monographs are only to be found on the Mewahang (Gaenszle 1991; 2002), the Lohorung (Hardman 2000), and the Kulung (McDougal 1979; Schlemmer 2004; Nicoletti 2006), while most other research has been linguistic (Allen 1975 on Thulung; Ebert 1997a, b on Camling and Athpare; Bickel 1996 on Belhare; van Driem 1993 and Rutgers 1998 on Yamphu; N. K. Rai 1985 on Bantawa; Tolsma 2006 on Kulung, as well as many locally produced dictionaries, in our context the most relevant one being DKRF 2011). Comparative anthropological approaches are rare (Allen 1974; 1976 with early attempts, Ebert and Gaenszle 2008; and Bagdevi Rai 2008.)

Asking what is relevant for the people who actually perform the ritual, ideally we as anthropologists must acknowledge that opinions on this question may even differ within the studied community, at times greatly so. Likewise in small local communities with relatively independent ritual systems and ritual specialists—such as the one on which I am focusing here—the question of which ritual aspect, which performative element is meaningful, relevant and effective, may be contested. Ethnographers are often informed by an ideal of how to handle such issues which involves diversifying as much as possible—observing as many rituals and talking to as many members of the local community as they can. On the basis of such data, it is common practice to formulate descriptions that are conceived of as average or cross-sectional representations of a local community, its practices and worldviews. However, in many cases, as is well-known, our own opinion as researchers is shaped by our principle "informants," by a key interview, or by single moments that provide deeper access to another culture. This article treats one such moment of revelation and reflects on its relevance from different perspectives. By taking a short sequence of a ritual and following the recorded field data in detail, it tries to interpret ritual from an emic perspective, and in this way ends up approaching the "work of ritual" in the literal sense of the term.

Introducing the Bhume *Ritual and the* Sakhela *Dance*

On 21st May 2011—the season of bhume *rites was in full swing—I sat on the earthen step of the veranda of a traditional Dumi Rai house observing the dances going on in the courtyard in front. My research task was to document the goings on outside the house while my research partners were sitting inside, where a local priest performed offerings and recitations at the same time by the hearth. All of a sudden one of our local research partners pushed his way through the crowd and in a state of great agitation observed what was going on in the courtyard. After a short moment he relaxed and a smile appeared on his face as he nodded with satisfaction. I was curious to learn what had prompted this otherwise coolheaded man to get so excited. Sitting on the other side of the veranda, I hoped to reach him without disturbing the ritual process before he disappeared back into the house.*

*

The *bhume* ritual is an agricultural ritual and festival performed by the majority of Rai groups in Eastern Nepal, some of whom only celebrate it at harvest time, while others also do so for sowing. It is an offering to the *bhume* deities, who in most cases manifest in stones. Their support and goodwill are considered to be essential for the fertility of the soil. Among the Dumi Rai, a local priest (*nāgire nakcho*) leads the ritual assisted by specially designated ritual helpers (*tāyā*). Here, the stones in which the deities—male or female—manifest are small and round and usually placed underground in special locations, the *bhume thān*. Initially, a *bhume* deity must reveal itself to a local *nāgire* priest or a 'shaman' (*sele dhāmi*).[2] This can happen spontaneously, which means on the initiative of the deity itself, or on request, which means if the local community asks a *nāgire* to find, if possible, a hidden deity who is favorable to them in the landscape. A nightlong ritual, which is comparable in structure to a healing ritual (*cintā*), will be conducted by the priest or shaman to locate the deity. Shortly before dawn, the physical search for the deity commences and the ritual specialist digs up the stone in which the deity has manifested itself. The *bhume* deity is now "installed" at its

[2] *Dhāmi* is a local designation often used as umbrella term for all types of ritual specialists, but when necessary (in certain types of rituals), people make a difference between the *nāgire nakcho* (who performs the agricultural and life cycle rituals) and the *sele dhāmi* (who performs the healing rituals). Many ritual specialists can perform both functions.

new *thān,* often under a large *banyan* tree, and given its first offerings. After these celebrations the stones are buried again, and remain there until the next season of *bhume* rituals. From now on the deity must be worshipped with offerings by the *nāgire* and the community at least once a year.

The *bhume* rituals have many local variations among the Rai, and even within the subgroup of the Dumi Rai the traditions vary from village to village. Usually the rituals start at the house of the *nāgire*, who will begin by offering, among other things, local brandy (*raksi*) to the three fire stones and the fire in his own house while reciting parts of the so-called *mundhum*,[3] an ancestral tradition which

> . . . comprises histories of the origin of the ancestors, beginning with the primal creation of the universe and the emergence of natural and cultural orders and continuing to the settlement of the ancestral territory. It also concerns the proper means of communicating with ancestors and ritually maintaining the order they have established. The term, then, has an additional meaning: it evokes a way of life predefined by the ancestors, a self-enclosed world rooted in the past. (Gaenszle 2000: 224)

In a procession including ritual helpers, drummers, singers and dancers, the *nāgire* walks or dances to the *bhume thān*, chanting parts of the *mundhum* at every crossing along the path, at every water source, and at other important spots. Arriving at the *bhume thān*, the stones representing the *bhume* deity are presented with small, preliminary offerings of uncooked rice, small coins, and *raksi*, before the main offering takes place: cocks from every family in the village, brought by the representatives of the households, and a communal offering in the form of a female pig. Part of the ritual consists in most cases of the *sakhela*[4] dance, which is led by a dance leader and performed in circles, preferably around the *bhume thān* or at a spot in front of it. A second ritual on the same day, which is performed before or after the *bhume* puja, is the *jālim* puja, the offering of fresh maize plants. This is likewise performed by the *nāgire* together with the ritual helpers and dancers. Depending

[3] Also designated by other cognate terms, and recited in a special language register that differs from everyday Dumi language.

[4] Also pronounced *sakela, sak(h)ala, sak(h)ewa.*

on local custom, it is held either at a specially designated place for the whole village, at the house that is regarded as the first house of the settlement (*tupsumi kim*), or in every household in the village. After a taboo against planting paddy for three days after this ritual day, the actual rice planting season begins.

Fig. 1. People looking at the deity stones that have just been dug out the ground by the *tupsumi*, the man inhabiting the first house of the settlement, during the *bhume* puja. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 15:18:32 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2738).

The *sakhela* dance is performed by many Rai groups during these ritual events, but not by all. It is found in every village among the Dumi Rai, although some older people remember a time when the dance was not performed, and suggest it was introduced in the early twentieth century and came from "the Jalpa side," which means the region bordering the Chamling Rai. The Chamling and some of the Bantawa Rai are in fact regarded as the "main dancers" among the Rai groups. The *sakhela* dance, or *sakhela sili* as it is called locally, is performed in a circle by men and women moving around a ritual center represented by a leafy branch stuck into the ground, and inaugurated with some small recitations and offerings of liquor. The dance consists of a basic

step and many additional units of movement, which are performed synchronously by the dancers following a dance leader. In former times, only specially designated ritual dancers were dance leaders, the *masume* (f.), the *madume* (m.), or the *masumadi* (pl.), and the dance had a purely ritual purpose. But in recent decades the dance has become popular, mainly because it was propagated by ethnic activist groups (Wettstein in press). While the ritual parts of the dances are still led today by the *masumadi*, the day of the *bhume* ritual has also a festive character, and especially the village youth enjoy dancing far into the night on the local village grounds. The young dance leaders often incorporate dance movements adopted from other Rai groups, and slowly (but still tentatively) newly invented movements find their way into the repertoire.

The repertoire of movements not only differs from one Rai group to the other, but often also varies among the villages within the same group. To date I have been able to document roughly 180 different gestural dance units in 20 different Dumi Rai villages—including the complete repertoire of three dance leaders and a number of movements from the neighboring Chamling Rai communities. The units of movements are mostly imitative and include themes such as agricultural techniques, craft techniques (especially weaving), mythological animals, leisure time and flirting. The themes as well as the dance as such are linked to the myth of the cultural hero, Kakchilipu, and his older sisters Toma and Khema, as they are called among the Dumi Rai. They invented agriculture and all of the crafts, and provided the models for every ritual, worldview and social structure.[5] The sequence of the dance units is up to the dance leader to decide, but usually follows a certain logic. Among the Dumi Rai, the dance movements that are performed by the *masumadi* during the *bhume* puja and *jālim* puja are those of the agricultural cycle, which corresponds to occasions when the ritual is performed as a request for prosperous fields and good crops. But all other dance movements can be observed as well at the simultaneous social dance events on the festival grounds in the villages.

The songs that are sung with the dances either comment on the dance movements and the dance as such, make references to mythological tales, or tell of love and longing. Depending on the type of song and the subject of the lyrics, a considerable amount of freedom for improvisa-

[5] For a comparative analysis of this mythological complex see Bagdevi Rai (2008).

tion can be observed, especially when the songs drift toward a singing competition between the men and the women (often possible marriage partners) known all over Nepal as *dohori*.

An Incident under Investigation

I managed to maneuver through the crowd and ask our friend why he had been so excited, to which he replied: "I saw that they were dancing 'carrying the basket'." Enquiring further, it turned out that inside the house, the ritual performed by the nāgire *and his helpers had in that very moment reached the point when the ritual* laito *basket is carried to the upper floor of the house by an old woman. He was convinced that this moment had not been coordinated in advance by the participants. The obstructions in the view through the closed architecture of the house and veranda and the densely assembled crowd; the noise of the drums, cymbals and voices; and the improvisation factor in both the ritual and the dancing would make a predictable temporal overlap or a conscious coordination of the two movements highly unlikely. The spontaneous simultaneity of this very moment in the ritual had obviously been highly meaningful to our friend.*

*

As a first step in examining this incident I wanted to check whether the recorded field data confirmed the observed simultaneity. In order to coordinate field data concerning simultaneous happenings, our research team has calibrated all of the electronic equipment and synchronized the time, and we always entered the times, especially of ritual processes, in our handwritten field notes. For the incident under investigation, my own diary notes read:

	(. . .)
16:40	"There is dancing in the courtyard again. *The tupsumi*[6] says the *bali* puja[7] will be held somewhere further up, not here. But now they bring the maize plant, so there will be something here after all."

[6] The current house-owner of the *tupsumi* house, the first house of the settlement, is called *tupsumi* as well.

[7] *Bali* puja is Nepali for jalim *puja*, the maize offering.

17:00 “The shaman comes out of the house with the maize and sits down in the entrance. The woman with the *laito* basket dances by his side. (There is dancing going on in the courtyard as well). The *masumadi* are inside. After 1–2 minutes the shaman starts with the *mundhum* sprinkles the plant with *raksi* (several times).”

17:04 “The maize is brought outside and placed in a corner, the shaman goes inside. *CB comes to look at the dancing, it seems he expects a certain step? He tells me that in this moment the* laito *has been brought upstairs and just in that moment the dancers in the courtyard have ‘unknowingly’ been dancing ‘carrying the basket’. His eyes are gleaming. Who else has noticed this?”*

17:09 *“Dhāmi* [‘shaman’] out, on we go. Dancing in the courtyard. He sprinkles [*raksi* on] the spears, etc. *Dhāmi* and *Tupsumi* dance in the opposite direction to the dance circle.”

(. . .)[8]

With this the timing of the events can be determined quite precisely. Also my research partner sitting inside the house took notes around the same time, which read:

(. . .)

ca. 16:40 “The old helper explains something that sounds like a translation (it can be heard in the background). At 41 minutes I switch to internal microphone as the old man seems to be relating a myth.[9] Stop the tape at around 50 min. It seems unclear whether the *bali* puja will take place here at all.”

17:15 “Track 106. *Bali* puja. The chicken seems to have come to land on an inauspicious side. Discussions. End of the puja. Recorded directly. The shaman moves on (probably going home). Farewell *mundhum* to ancestors.”

(. . .)[10]

Since the notes do not mention the *laito* basket, we can check on the two relevant audio recordings whether any new information concerning our incident can be found:

[8] Research records NP11_NbM01_118.

[9] The wireless microphone was attached to the *nāgire*’s dress during the ritual so that his recitations would be recorded clearly while the volume of the other voices and noises was kept low. During the recording the quality was simultaneously checked via headphones, which explains the comment about what can be heard somewhere in the background.

[10] Research records NP11_NbA01_00030.

(. . .)

ca. 16:00 Short ritual recitation, chatting. An old helper, asked about the *sakhela* by a visitor, starts to relate the myth of Toma, Khema and Kakchilipu mentioned above. A woman sitting next to him prompts him to go on telling details by asking questions.

16:45 The story reaches the point where the little brother Kakchilipu sends a cock to call his sisters to his home. The storyteller and the old women melodiously imitate the way he crows, “tomakhemakakchilipu,” in order to lure the sisters to Kakchilipu’s house. The old helper explains that the feast the sisters were invited to was a *chhamdam* ritual.[11] He believes that there was no dancing at this feast, but one of the conversation partners insists that there were *masumadi*, dancing helpers. At this point the discussion is interrupted by a newcomer who wants to know about the foreign visitors, and the myth is not resumed after that.

(. . . recording interrupted . . .)

16:59 Loud cymbal playing, the *nāgire* is outside on the veranda at the place for offerings for the *jālim* puja. People around him ask where the leaves are for the offering, they have to be looked for. In the background one can hear the singing and the cymbals of the dancers in the courtyard. Then the cymbals grow quieter; the *nāgire* is inside the house again. For a while it is quite silent, everybody waits for the start of the offering, only the cymbals from the courtyard can be heard further in the background.

17:02 People are asking for the chicken for the offering, someone is sent to get it.

17:03 The *nāgire* starts with the recitation.

17:04 *Discussions about the chicken, the ritual cymbal player and dancer is next to the* nāgire *as the sound of the single cymbals is quite loud.*

17:05 *Discussions about where the maize is.*

[11] Among the Dumi Rai, the *chhamdam* is the third ritual of status after the *tidam* and *chhidam*. The series of rituals resembles the feasts of merit performed by many groups in Northeast India. The completion of the *chhamdam* qualifies the feast giver for a special ritual name, which will be integrated into the genealogy of ancestors and will be recited as such in other rituals, thus distinguishing him (or her) from other recently deceased people. Not all Rai groups know such status rituals, and the *chhamdam* is hardly ever performed nowadays among the Dumi because of the very high ritual and economic outlay involved and the lifelong ritual duties attached. It is highly likely that the *chhamdam* ritual indeed included dancing, as the literal translation of the term is ‘dance’ (DKRF 2011: 69).

17:06	The helpers start to loudly recite their part, while the *nāgire* calmly continues reciting his.
17:09	A short silence, people moving.
17:10	The singing from the courtyard is loud now while the *nāgire* recites outside the house.
17:11	The *nāgire* is dancing with the dancers in the courtyard, their singing voices can now be understood clearly on the recording.
	(. . .)[12]

The audio recording does not help any further. At the time when the *laito* should have been brought upstairs, the *nāgire* and his helpers were busy with other matters. But the photographs that were taken by my research partner from inside the house show the *laito* basket being brought upstairs:

	(. . .)
16:59:53-16:59:58	Maize plant in the hands of the *nāgire* in the doorway to the veranda.
17:00:16-17:03:29	The *nāgire* and the woman with the *laito* basket in a corner of the veranda.
17:03:50-17:03:53	*The woman walks through the room with the* laito *. . .*
17:03:58-17:04:06	*. . . and starts to climb upstairs on the ladder.*
17:04:37-17:08:26	The *nāgire* and older helpers are sitting around the hearth directing their attention to it. (Which is to say a recitation is given to the ancestors through the hearth).
17:09:01-17:11:14	The *nāgire* is coming out the door of the house into the open and dances in the courtyard.
	(. . .)[13]

[12] Research records NP11_AuL11_00105, NP11_AuL11_00106.

[13] Research Records NP11_Ph5D2_02850 to NP11_Ph5D2_02910.

Fig. 2. A woman carries the ritual *laito* basket through the room during the *jālim* puja, heading for the ladder to bring it upstairs. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 17:03:53 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2868).

We are thus able to confirm that the *laito* really was brought upstairs. But there was never any question about this, for otherwise our friend would not have come outside to check which movement was being danced at that moment. Unfortunately, no video recording was taken of that very moment in the courtyard. At every *sakhela* dance event on the preceding days, I had systematically filmed the movements and noted them down with time coding, in order to be able to identify them later on. But for some reason I had decided to take a different approach that day and put the camera away, only observing the overall happenings and the structure of the ritual process as a whole.

Since I was already quite familiar by then with the different dance movements, I am sure I would have recognized and noted it down if I had thought that the movement danced in the courtyard was not "carrying the basket." I am thus confident to take my friend's observation and my own silent agreement on this point as guarantee for the temporal simultaneity, and will treat it as a fact.

Correct Ritual Action and Moments of Ritual Beauty and Perfection

Returning to my observation post I asked myself: "Did anyone else notice this temporal overlap, had anyone else been interested in it apart from our friend?" Looking around, it did not appear so. On mentioning it to three or four people sitting next to me I received an irritated "yes, of course" in return. Owing to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the villagers, I dropped the idea of investigating any further. But the situation stuck in my mind and I started to wonder: What did this moment of temporally overlapping movements mean—or not mean—to the villagers; to our friend as a person embedded in both, the local intellectual elite and the local religious system; and to me as a foreign researcher?

*

Many theories on ritual have been put forth in anthropology and religious studies, some focusing on its relation to myth, others on social function and structure or on symbolism and meaning, as Catherine Bell's overview (1997) proposes, and in more recent times on cognition, communication, emotion, or embodiment, to name just a few aspects (Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2008). To approach the particularity of our incident under investigation, I shall start by considering a classic and highly germane analysis of the nature, reality and effectiveness of ritual in Siberian societies: Taking the bear hunt festival as his ethnographic example, Jonathan Z. Smith wrote in his "Bare Facts of Ritual" that

> . . . ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things. [. . .] It provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done. From such a perspective, ritual is not best understood as congruent with something else: a magical imitation of desired ends; a translation of emotions; a symbolic acting out of ideas; a dramatization of a text. Ritual gains its force where incongruency is perceived. (1980: 125)

To contextualize this approach to ritual, Smith explains that on considering the mythology of the bear hunt (and actual hunting practice) it becomes obvious that "[t]he hunter does not hunt as he says he hunts, he does not think about his hunting as he says he thinks," but is aware of this discrepancy between word and deed (1980: 124). The bear festival

as a ritual provides the perfect hunt, the model in which all variables are under control, a condition never encountered in everyday life. The ritual as a model of action has also recently been described by Meredith McGuire in her look at *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. She stresses action as such when she observes that

> . . . ritual effectiveness depended on performance, not intention or individual consciousness. Thus, ritual action performed correctly was believed to be more effective than one performed incorrectly, even if the incorrect actions were done with greater earnestness and fervor. Likewise, actions done with sacrilegious intent or even by accident could effectively tap religious power if they happened to be performed correctly. The tale of the sorcerer's apprentice (even in its trivialized Disney cartoon version) illustrates this conception of performative power. (2008: 36)

Of course, this approach can also be contested, as Rappaport (1999: 115) has shown: "And if a befuddled cleric recited the funeral liturgy rather than the marriage service I doubt if the couple standing before him would thereby become objects of mourning."

An impressive record of the importance of performing a ritual correctly can, however, be found in the case of a Vedic Agni ritual among the Nambudhiri Brahmins in Kerala, which, when it was the first recorded by foreigners in 1975, had not been performed for almost twenty years. Being the only place in India where the Agni ritual had actually survived as a living performance, it was the subject of Frits Staal's monumental work published in 1983, and triggered a discussion on the "meaning" and "meaninglessness" of ritual.[14] From the Agni ritual we learn once again that "ritual correctness" is not a matter of mental or scriptural concepts (the classic texts of the Vedas in this case), but of performative action:

> When the Nambudiri ritualists are told that, according to classic texts, certain rites used to be performed differently in the past, they say, "Interesting." Not for a moment would they consider changing their own ritual practice in the light of such information. They perform the rituals as they have learned them from their preceptors. It is their tradition. (1983: 2)

[14] See for instance Staal 1979; 1989; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Michaels 1999; 2008; Grimes 2014: 317 ff.; Meshel 2014: 189 ff.

How important the model performance is in relation to the actual performance and in what way the author has handled the dilemma of the ethnographic recording versus the ritual model becomes evident in Staal's introductory note to the description of the performance part:

> It is a description of the *ritual competence* of the participants, rather than of their *ritual performance*. For example, obvious and irrelevant mistakes have not been recorded. Rather, they have been rectified. A general example of such a mistake is a false start, immediately corrected. A specific example is the commotion caused by the *adhvaryu*[15] when he tried to shoot an arrow at the outset of the setting up of the Agni field (page 387), but held the bow the wrong way round. Helpers showed him how to hold it. Such a "mistake" is not recorded. All it would show is that the *adhvaryu* is out of touch with archery, which fact interfered with the exercise of his ritual competence, but does not affect it. (1983: 274)

Mistakes are already anticipated in the ritual and a special priest, the "brahman," has the role of supervising the rites,

> . . . in general without participating. When mistakes have been made, he determines what should be done and prescribes, if necessary, expiation rites." (1983: 46)

Likewise in the ritual performances of our ethnographic example among the Rai, although not based on a written but on an oral tradition, mistakes that occur through a deviation from an envisaged model and the immediate corrections through helpers can be observed on a regular basis. In some rituals, for instance, the lineage of ancestors has to be recited and many ritual specialists take advice from elder members of the family for whom the recitation is given during the performance. It is also not uncommon for parts of a ritual to be repeated spontaneously by the ritual specialists; or that bystanders correct the recitations or performative process or question the performance; or that lengthy discussions occur on how to proceed during breaks between ritual episodes.

The *correct* action is, however, not what is at stake in our incident under investigation. In our ethnographic example, the ritual would be considered correct even if the dance movements in the courtyard did not belong at all to the sequences of agricultural technique, or if the

[15] One of the chief priests.

dancing had for some reason come to a halt. What was witnessed in the eyes of our protagonist was a moment of *perfect* ritual action. Even if scarcely anyone else attached great importance to this perfection, nobody seemed to be surprised about it either. Such moments of ritual beauty and perfection are part of the experience of most local people who attend, and are assumed to happen every now and then. They are an intrinsic part of ritual satisfaction and persuasiveness.

While *correct* ritual action and the consequences of mistakes have been a theme of thorough investigation in many academic fields (Hüsken 2007), it seems that the notion of *perfect* ritual action as distinct from correct ritual action has hardly been touched on. Apart from J. Z. Smith, we find marginal mention of the phrase here and there, but more as a paraphrase and alternative expression for correct ritual (for instance Smith 1996; Gliders 2009: 246; Schipper 1993: 42; Bell 1997: 225). Staying with our example, we can venture to conceive of perfect ritual action in this ethnographic context as having added value. Perfect ritual actions assume the quality of moments of individual transformation and therefore need not necessarily be replicable, repeatable, institutionalized, commonly recognized, or of the same kind for all participants. But as they happen to people from time to time in different ritual settings, especially in societies in which community rituals are held as frequently as in such local religious systems as those of the Rai, the experience of ritual beauty and perfection as such can be assumed to be commonly known and understood in its essence as shared cultural knowledge. Experiences of transcendence or ritual perfection are often considered to occur individually and spontaneously. And because many participants have such experiences in the course of their lives, single moments like the one we observed are no surprise for them.

However, our incident of perfect ritual action did not come unexpectedly or as a spontaneous revelation: it was anticipated as a possibility in that very stage of the ritual and successfully passed the test on inspection. The ritual sequence of bringing the *laito* basket to the upper floor of the house was identified by our local research partner as a key moment which in his view called for special attention. The perceived possibility of overlapping was based on a predefined model in his ritual knowledge. Viewed from both angles, as a local researcher highly interested in his own culture, and as a knowledgeable practitioner of the tradition of his local group, he was alerted to this moment in advance. Even if the local religious and ritual system is not traditionally codified

or standardized in written form, moments of excitement or bewilderment about our local key partners—if we give them our attention as researchers—can inform us about the unwritten ritual models. They can often only be identified through participant observation in field research, because they are only seldom recalled in interviews. In other words, ritual models are often only revealed when moments of excitement or bewilderment happen in real time. These are the moments when parts of the model get activated in practice.

Fig. 3. The *nāgire nakcho* (local priest, left with spear) dances some steps of the *sakhela* dance together with the villagers in the courtyard of the house where the *jālim* puja (maize offering) is performed. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 13:57:08 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2673).

During our research we attended many *bhume* and *jālim* pujas. In none of the others did I experience our local research partner anticipating such a perfect overlap. I have never observed him check for such or similar connections in other rituals, either before or after this incident. Among other things, this circumstance should alert anthropologists to a crucial but nowadays often forgotten requirement of their craft: Long-term field research—or repeated field visits over many years—is the master key to gaining access to the groups one studies. Of course

a ritual can be described and interpreted after having recorded it once or twice and made some interviews about it. But only in one of maybe twenty rituals—of the same kind—will a situation like the one observed open a door to a different understanding. In our case this different understanding is accomplished by a new knowledge of the existence of a specific ideal ritual model which would not otherwise have come to our attention.

The Work of Ritual

Triggered by the incident, I started to move between inside and outside the house, checking for a special "resonance" or further connections: Might perhaps the special moment of matching movements add to a positive ritual outcome? Everybody eagerly awaited the divination of the chicken sacrifice that was now to be held. After some attempts to escape, the chicken accepted its role as messenger of the ancestors and agreed to being sacrificed by shaking the brandy off its head. But alas, the message of the ancestors—sent through the sacrificed chicken's movements and feet—did not bode well. I caught myself quietly asking whether the ancestors had not just been presented with a wonderful ritual moment and should thus be pleased. But then I remembered a local assistant once commenting: "The ancestors are always dissatisfied. We have to negotiate with them and please them all the time, and yet they demand more offerings, again and again. It's a constant worry and hassle. What can you do?!"

*

To grasp the events during the chicken sacrifice, I shall refer once more to the field recordings. While the chicken was already alluded to in my research partner's notes above, in my own notebook the chicken's moment reads as follows:

	(. . . continued from above)
17:12	"Going inside again (the *dhāmi*), puja at the hearth, dancing continues outside."
17:14	*"The chicken is being sacrificed. One of the* tāyās [*ritual helpers*] *is helping somewhat with the final position of its feet.* Outside they are 'planting *paddy*'. Now they are dancing 'collecting'. Discussions inside. The weather seems to change, a cold wind is blowing."

17:25	"Inside people are getting up, general departure? Dancing continues outside. No, again a *culo*[16] puja with hearth fire, cables already disconnected, Alban has to hold.[17] The shaman goes 'up' (to his house, changing dress?). *The chicken has fallen in a bad way, probably they will have to supply some addition later on.*[18] We are going up [to another house], he [the shaman] is taking off his dress."
	(. . .)[19]

The chicken's message is also documented in photographs . . .

	(. . .)
17:12:42-17:13:23	The *nāgire* goes back inside the house
17:14:05-17:15:49	*The* nāgire *holds the chicken in his hands by the hearth. The chicken is sacrificed and its movements are followed by the camera. After nearly disappearing under a basket, its final position is documented.*
	(. . .)[20]

. . . and the excitement about its movement, which passed however as quickly as it came, can be gathered from the sound of the reciting voices of the ritual helpers on the audio recording.

	(. . .)
17:11	A short break in the dancing, people moving and walking (back into the house). Then the single cymbals of the ritual helper start playing.
17:12	The *nāgire* starts reciting.
17:13	The helpers start reciting their part loudly.
17:14	*A loud mixture of intensely reciting voices.* People have resumed their dancing in the courtyard.
17:15	*The cymbals stop playing, reciting continues.*

[16] Hearth fire (Nepali), here the traditional fireplace with three firestones (*daulo*).
[17] The meaning here is: Alban von Stockhausen, my research partner, had to hold the microphone in front of the *nāgire*.
[18] Meaning an offering or a ritual that improves the situation.
[19] Research records NP11_NbM01_118.
[20] Research records NP11_Ph5D2_2912 to NP11_Ph5D2_2932.

17:16	The recitation is finished, people discuss how to proceed now. In the background the dancers in the courtyard can be heard.
17:19	The *nāgire* gives the signal "*aba jāne belā*," that is, "now it's time to leave." But discussions continue about what to do. The *nāgire* remarks that everybody is dancing now.
	(. . .)[21]

Fig. 4. During the *jālim* puja (maize offering), ritual helpers at the hearth fire are trying to persuade the chicken to shake off the *raksi* (local liquor) that had been put onto its head, and thereby agreeing to being sacrificed. Sabru village, Eastern Nepal, 21st May 2011, 17:15:11 pm. Photo: Alban von Stockhausen (research record NP11_Ph5D2_2925).

What we can gather from this is that a perfect ritual moment—at least in our ethnographic context—does not necessarily lead to a more positive ritual outcome. Also the effectiveness of the anticipated outcome of a ritual is not lessened in the participants' eyes when such a perfect ritual action is missing, just as long as it is correct. But in our

[21] Research records NP11_AuL11_00106.

case "correct" seems to have a dimension that goes beyond the aforementioned underlying model ritual—written or not—which prescribes the correct ritual action and is the basis on which the execution of the ritual process is set: Among the (Dumi) Rai, a correct ritual is essentially one that is done in such a way that the ancestors are pleased and extend their support to the local community. The one who loses the ancestor's support will be struck with misfortune. A great number of Rai rituals have the sole purpose of reestablishing the relationship with the ancestors, or in other words, of keeping them in a good mood.[22] In return, the ancestors support the community by providing health, good fortune, or a good harvest. There is a clear idea about what exactly it means to perform a ritual in a way that pleases the ancestors. In most ritual recitations we hear phrases such as: "We are doing it the way you have done it." The ancestors provide the perfect model for life in general and today's living community receives their support if it repeats the model in exactly that way. This extremely conservative approach to the ancestors bears a crucial and unavoidable problem for today's living community: change and memory. Change has always happened and always will, and memories of what was before fade or become distorted. Therefore troubles are pre-programmed in the system itself.

Depending on one's perspective, one can argue that the problems are either caused by change, or by the stubbornness of the ancestors. A large number of Rai accept change as a fact and in many respects welcome it as a positive development. Social, personal, or economic problems are often attributed to the fact that the ancestors—being as they are long since dead—cannot possibly accept the changes and therefore insist on the primordial model, which, however, is just not suited to conditions of people living today. It is not the ancestor's fault, but theirs is the power to provide support in life, and they will only do so if one lives up to their expectations. Ritual is thus not only an "occasion for reflection and rationalization," as in Smith above. It is the medium through which cause and treatment for problems are actually handled in practice. While the ancestors are both the source and solution of problems in one, ritual is the work that mediates between the two. Argued from a traditional (Dumi) Rai point of view, ritual is necessary work that must be done, for instance, to make the crops grow, just as

[22] Gaenszle (forthcoming) therefore calls the Rai traditions an "ancestral religion."

hoeing the field is necessary for that. Both are indispensable if you want to have food to eat.

Consequently the "work of ritual" is not understood here in terms of the preparatory work for a rite (Grimes 2000: 323) but in terms of the effectiveness of an activity that can be done right or wrong, well or less well. In this respect I am adhering to a point made by Howard and Kathleen Bahr (2009: 273), who argue that formal definitions of ritual have often been made on the assumption that "the work of ritual [is] not (. . .) the same as the pragmatic, means-end oriented work of the world." Cases such as the Dumi Rai rituals clearly show the contrary. The equivalence between ritual work and other everyday work is quite direct. Ritual work falls into the same category as, for instance: If you sow your seeds in the wrong season they will not grow, and if you build a house without a roof you will get wet. Cause and effect in ritual activity are, from a traditional emic Rai point of view, a matter of hands-on experience with the ancestors. Psychological theories of projection or theories of social relations that implicitly or explicitly exclude the ancestors as "real" players and see rituals only as catalysts for social relations are not very helpful here if we as outsiders want to try and understand this "other" culture from within.

Of course we always encumbered with our own personal worldview, with or without an academic background. But as ethnographers I would argue that it makes sense to try to understand what life means to people when we take their accounts seriously. In other words: If the *nāgire* says the ancestors are angry and asking for another offering, then that is just how it is. Just as if your boss says that you have to fill out a form to get your travel costs reimbursed you wouldn't doubt him or hesitate. You might curse bureaucracy though, and that is exactly what is happening when a Rai complains about the constant hassle he gets from the ancestors. So I would like to refrain from saying "the Rai believe that . . . ," and treat rather the ancestors here as members of (Dumi) Rai society just as we would treat any living person.[23] This approach has an impact on my behavior as researcher when in the field because I automatically incorporate the ancestors into my activities there. If, for instance, we want to clip a microphone to the *nāgire*'s ritual dress it is better if we first let the ritual specialists perform a small

[23] For an inspiring discussion on the possibilities of how to handle the "invisible" witch on the tree see Oppitz (1981).

divination and ask the ancestors whether that is okay with them. And if the microphone inexplicably switches itself off during the most crucial phase of a recitation, the intuitive reaction is better not to curse the technical equipment, but to share the opinion of our local companions that we should consider ourselves lucky, because this was surely the most harmless warning the ancestors could have sent. Trying to embody the emic perspective as a researcher, but without compromising analytical distance, also has implications for the interpretation of the recorded data and suggestions for concepts of what ritual is or can be seen as.

Some Concluding Remarks

In our ethnographic example we can test an analogy which was already hinted at above. We can—among other things, of course[24]—conceptualize ritual as a working contract with a relationship of mutual exchange between two parties: the living community and the ancestors (and spirits and deities, which in the Dumi Rai case were all once ancestors). The members of the living community are "the workers" who by performing ritual offerings ("the work") get health, prosperity, and general well-being ("the payment") in return from the ancestors ("the contractors"). Employing a "working contract" analogy to the "work of ritual" elucidates a few other aspects of the incident under investigation: a moment of ritual beauty and perfection can be compared by analogy to one element in a working process—such as for instance a well and intrinsically carved central post in a house, which, as such, gives and will continue to give satisfaction to those who appreciate it. But if the overall working process is dysfunctional, if the roof for instance is not stable, the carpenter will usually not get paid until he has made the house safe to live in. Another detail noticeable in this context is a side note in the diary entries mentioned above: As it became foreseeable that the chicken would most probably come to lie in an unfavorable position,[25] a ritual helper tried to shift the position a bit by nudging it slightly with his foot, hoping that it would continue moving and turn to

[24] What I am focusing on here is one possibility among many. I do not wish to reduce ritual to this one aspect but find it worth considering.

[25] A beheaded chicken dropped to the floor flutters and moves around for about 10 seconds or longer before it lays still.

an auspicious position. "Cheating" in rituals is therefore another pointer to the pragmatic approach to the outcome of the "work" of ritual. What counts is the agreement in the negotiations, and in this ritual sequence it is a performative, not a spoken negotiation. In our case the ancestors didn't buy it. But in other rituals I observed "cheating" or "helping a bit" worked quite well. The analogy to contract work, of course, has its limitations, for instance when we consider some current transformations in the Rai cultural context. An ever-growing part of Rai society doubts the impact of the ancestors and rituals, agrees to have roads built right through landscapes that are inhabited by important ancestral spirits, stops performing certain rituals, and even converts to other religions. We might easily say that this corresponds to ending, or not renewing, a contract—and taking up another one to sustain oneself. But it is not as simple as that. As I have shown elsewhere (Wettstein and von Stockhausen 2013), turning away from the ancestors can have a severe impact on some people, especially on those who have been chosen by ancestral spirits to be the main communicators, such as the shamans, and for those who have aspired to get incorporated into the remembered lines of ancestors by performing a *chhamdam* ritual and constructing a *chhamdam* hearth (see footnote 11).

Although the working contract analogy may be oversimplified, it can help us to understand ritual from a perspective other than "psychological" or "sociostructural," and to forego concepts such as "transcendence" or "religion." In many regions of the extended Himalayas we find communities similar to that of the Rai, who largely rely on "autonomous ritual specialists" (Huber 2015). I suggest that in such societies, whose ritual practitioners are not organized in larger institutions, the employment of a pragmatic approach to ritual might—and this remains to be tested and discussed—prove beneficial for getting close to an understanding of ritual from within, from the emic point of view.

References

Allen, Nicholas J. 1974. "The Ritual Journey: A Pattern Underlying Certain Nepalese Rituals." In Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (ed.) *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips. 6–22.

—. 1975. *Sketch of Thulung Grammar with Three Texts and a Glossary*. Ithaca: Cornell University.

—. 1976. "Studies in the Myths and Oral Traditions of the Thulung Rai of East

Nepal." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Oxford University.
Bahr, Howard M. and Kathleen S. 2009. *Toward More Family-centered Family Sciences: Love, Sacrifice, and Transcendence*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
Bell, Catherine 1997. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bickel, Balthasar 1996. *Aspect, Mood, and Time in Belhare: Studies in the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface of a Himalayan Language*. Zurich: ASAS Press.
Central Bureau of Statistics 2002. *The Population Census of Nepal 2001*. Kathmandu.
DKRF (Dumī Kirāt Rāī Fansīkīīm) 2011 (BS 2068). *Dumi–English Dictionary*. DKRF: Baksila, Nepal.
Driem, George van 1993. *A Grammar of Dumi*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
Ebert, Karen H. 1997a. *A Grammar of Athpare*. München: LINCOM Europa.
——. 1997b. *Camling*. München: LINCOM Europa.
Ebert, Karen H., and Martin Gaenszle 2008. *Rai Mythology: Kiranti Oral Texts*. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 69. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
Gaenszle, Martin 1991. *Verwandtschaft und Mythologie bei den Mewahang Rai in Ostnepal. Eine ethnographische Studie zum Problem der 'ethnischen Identität'*. Beiträge zur Südasienforschung 136. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
——. 2000. *Origins and Migrations: Kinship, Mythology and Ethnic Identity among the Mewahang Rai of East Napal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.
——. 2002. *Ancestral Voices: Oral Ritual Texts and their Social Contexts among the Mewahang Rai of East Nepal*. Münster: Lit Verlag.
——. Forthcoming. "Redefining Kiranti Religion in Contemporary Nepal." In David Gellner, Chiara Letizia, and Sondra Hausner (eds) *The State of Religion in a Non-religious State: Discourses and Practices in the Secular Republic of Nepal*.
Gliders, William K. 2009. "Anthropological Approaches: Ritual in Leviticus 8, Real or Rhetorical?" In Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards (eds) *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. 233–50.
Grimes, Roland L. 2000. *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
——. 2014. *The Craft of Ritual Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hardman, Charlotte E. 2000. *Other Worlds: Notions of Self and Emotion among the Lohorung Rai*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers.
Huber, Toni 2015. "Descent, Tutelaries and Ancestors. Transmission among Autonomous, *Bon* Ritual Specialists in Eastern Bhutan and the Mon-yul Corridor." In H. Havnevik and C. Ramble (eds) *From Bhakti to Bon: Festschrift for Per Kværne*.

Oslo: Novus forlag (The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture). 271–89.
Humphrey, Caroline, and James Laidlaw 1994. *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*. Oxford: Clarendon.
Hüsken, Ute (ed.) 2007. *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual*. Numen Book Series 115. Leiden: Brill.
Kreinath, Jens, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (eds) 2008. *Theorizing Rituals*. Vol. 1. *Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*. Leiden: Brill.
McDougal, Charles 1979. *The Kulunge Rai: A Study in Kinship and Marriage Exchange*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Meshel, Naphtali S. 2014. *The "Grammar" of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings* (with the "Grammar" of Σ). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Michaels, Axel 1999. "Le rituel pour le rituel? Oder wie sinnlos sind Rituale?" In Corina Caduff and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (eds) *Rituale heute: Theorien, Controversen, Entwürfe*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimers. 23–47.
——. 2008. "Ritual and Meaning." In Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (eds) *Theorizing Rituals*. Vol. 1: *Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*. Leiden: Brill. 247–61.
Nicoletti, Martino 2006. *The Ancestral Forest: Memory, Space and Ritual. Among the Kulunge Rai of Eastern Nepal*. Kathmandu: Vajra.
Oppitz, Michael 1981. "Schamanen, Hexen, Ethnographen." In Hans Peter Duerr (ed.) *Der Wissenschaftler und das Irrationale*. Vol. 1: *Beiträge aus Ethnologie und Anthropologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat. 37–59.
Rai, Bagdevi 2008. "Hecchakuppa in Kiranti Folktales: A Comparative Study." Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Kathmandu: Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University.
Rai, Novel Kishor 1985. "A Descriptive Study of Bantawa." Ph.D. thesis. Deccan College.
Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Rutgers, Roland 1998. *Yamphu: Grammar, texts & lexicon*. Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region. Leiden University. Vol. 2. Leiden: Research School CNWS.
Schipper, Kristofer Marinus 1993. *The Taoist Body*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Schlemmer, Grégoire 2004. "Vues d'esprits. La conception des esprits et ses implications chez les Kulung Rai du Népal." Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction des theses.
Smith, Brian K. 1996. "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage in the Veda." *History of Religions* 35(4): 285–306.
Smith, Jonathan Z. 1980. "The Bare Facts of Ritual." *History of Religions* 20(1/2): 112–27.
Staal, Frits 1979. "The Meaninglessness of Ritual." *Numen* 26(1): 2–22.
——. (ed.) 1983. *Agni, the Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*. In collaboration with C. V. Somayajipad and M. Itti Ravi Nambudiri and with photographs by Adelaide deMenil. 2 vols. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
——. 1989. *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras, and the Human Sciences*. New York: Peter Lang.
Tolsma, Gerard J. 2006. *A Grammar of Kulung*. Leiden: Brill.
Wettstein, Marion, and Alban von Stockhausen. 2013. "Contesting Power, Negotiating Influence: Rai Shamans and New Religious Movements in Eastern Nepal." In Diana Riboli and Davide Torri (eds) *Shamanism and Violence: Power, Repression and Suffering in Indigenous Religious Conflicts*. Farnham, Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate. 103–18.
Wettstein, Marion In press. "Dancing Who We Are: The Embodiment of Rai Ethnic Identity in Sakela Performance." To be published with Social Science Baha, Kathmandu.

Marion WETTSTEIN is a postdoc researcher in anthropology at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, currently conducting research on ritual dance among the Rai of Eastern Nepal. Her research regions lay in the extended Eastern Himalayas, especially Nagaland and Nepal, and her thematic interests include the anthropology of material culture, craft and arts, visual anthropology, performance and dance, religion, as well as ritual and mythology. She is the author of *Naga Textiles: Design, Technique, Meaning and Agency of a Local Craft Tradition in Northeast India* (Arnoldsche 2014) and co-editor of *Naga Identities* (Snoeck, 2008).

VOL. 23. NOS. 1-2. SHAMAN SPRING/AUTUMN 2015

Ladakhi Shaman in the Multi-Religious Milieu: An Agent of Incorporation and Mediation

TAKAKO YAMADA KYOTO UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

This paper is, on the basis of a diachronic methodology, to explore how religion in a local society, in particular Ladakhi shamanism, has changed or transformed in the present process of interactions with religions and ethnicities. Ladakh is one example of such societies that have maintained their indigenous cultures under constant interactions with other religions and ethnicities. Buddhism flourished in this region from as early as the middle of the eighth century. Since the sixteenth century Ladakhi have had a history of encounters of other religions: Islam and Christianity. The analysis is based on source materials collected during my field research on village shamans in the 1980s, 2003 and 2009. First, the impacts of Tibetan Buddhism on Ladakhi shamanism are examined based on the field data collected in the 1980s. Second, the outcome of recent encounters of religions is explored focusing on the relationships between shamans and multi-ethnic/religious clients, including Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others, in terms of changes of shamanic practices during the 1980s and 2000s. Finally, the trans-bordering and/or trans-cultural characteristics of Ladakhi shamanic practices are presented in order to show a new framework for the mechanism of religious interactions in the face of modernity.

The history of anthropology has provided a variety of theories on the mechanism of the encounters of cultures. Classically, the theories of diffusionism, acculturation, assimilation, syncretism, nativistic movements, and culture change have formed the major analytical framework, while recently the perspectives of hybridity and continuity have been suggested for understanding this mechanism. A theoretical shift in the anthropological framework of understanding the encounters of cultures can be considered as the shift from the viewpoint of the outsider (Other) to the viewpoint of the insider (Self).

A recent trend toward the revival of shamanism can be partly considered the consequence of religious and cultural interactions under