GABRIELA KILIÁNOVÁ, CHRISTIAN JAHODA, MICHAELA FERENCOVÁ (EDS.)

RITUAL, CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS
CASE STUDIES FROM ASIA AND EUROPE

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JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA

F®ictions, Frames and Fragments: Belonging and Ethnic Boundary-Making in Nepal's Contested Ritual Communication

In contemporary political communication, social realities tend to be portrayed in two alternative ways – both of which can have a bearing on ritual practice.[1] On the one hand, collective boundedness is stressed: nations continue to be taken as key categories in our understanding of the contemporary world (see Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), and nation-building has significantly buttressed ethnicity formation (Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983). The "*ethnic explosion*" (Hall 1996) has resulted in a collectivisation of the public understanding of contemporary sociability – which translates into all social spheres, including the economic markets that increasingly cater to "the ethnic lens" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). On the other hand, "the social" increasingly presents itself as fragmented, flexible, individualised, or even atomised. Mobility and reflexive scrutiny of established orders as well as conflictive dynamics of ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2008; Lamont and Molnár 2002) have contested holistic understandings of social boundedness. The second perspective challenges the first one, and in doing so it questions the salience of rituals, because their raison d'être is to forge collective cohesion and hence common belonging.

This tension will be in the forefront of this chapter, in which I ask how rituals fare and evolve under the conditions of rapid social change and what their contribution is in a time when collective belonging is under siege. The empirical basis for this analysis will be the recent ethnicisation of political communication in Nepal, which has turned the ritual complex 'Dasain'[2] – also known as 'Durga Puja' – into a moment of crystallisation in ethnic self-assertion. This Hindu ritual complex came into the focus of ethnic activism because in the course of the last two centuries its powerful architects instrumentalised it in order to forge a vision of national unity that co-evolved with a pronounced hierarchical order, rendering ethnic minority groups inferior to Hindu rulers and other members of high castes. Today, ethnic minority activists position themselves against hierarchies and inequalities as well as vis-à-vis Hindu domination. Their conflicts have evolved around these issues, even thrive on them, especially in targeting Dasain. Time and again, ethnic minority activists have questioned Nepal's unity, by challenging the very bases of its self-depictions and the ensuing ritualisation of state power through this ritual form.

Political challenges to the Durga Puja ritual complex became an intrinsic, almost ritualised element of ethnic activism in contemporary Nepal, inspiring extensive scholarly research. Before ethnic self-assertion and its going public started in 1990, the sheer magnitude and the elaboration of this Hindu festival prompted a number of academic inquiries. Scholars went into the specificities of ritual performance as well as into the relations of power and hierarchy (see in particular the collection edited by Krauskopff and Lecomte-Tilouine 1996) in Nepal's political space. Bennett (1983) had a fascinating take on how the ritual was enacted in the interpersonal relations among kin. She demonstrated that the hierarchical nature of the polity was mirrored in the kin interrelations and showed how "the public" penetrated into "the private". After 1990, the scholarly interest turned to examining why and how Dasain became a focus of political conflict. The ensuing publications revealed resentment of numerous Nepalese Buddhists seeking publicly to cleanse Nepal's realm of the sin incurred through animal sacrifice accompanying the celebrations (see below). Other accounts discussed political conflicts in towns and villages conducted by ethnic minority leaders reacting to the way the ritual symbolised the political and economic supremacy of high-caste elites (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996) within a society characterised by a pronounced ethnic and religious diversity. Recent inquiries discuss the challenges to

[1] The author wishes to thank Christian Jahoda, Gabriela Kiliánová, Michaela Ferencová as well as the participants of the Martin Chautari venue for their comments to the earlier versions of this article, while naturally accepting full responsibility for any shortcomings of this text.

[2] For the sake of legibility, all Nepalese terms will be transcribed without diacritics.

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the Durga Puja by ethnic minority activists aimed at transforming the political and symbolic framework of the polity (Hangen 2005, Shneiderman 2005, 2009, Holmberg 2010).

The opposition to Hindu ritualisation of the Nepalese politics and to Hindu domination in most societal realms, materialising in the Dasain boycotts, is currently an integral part of a much larger project geared at restructuring state politics and at re-defining its nature and its legitimising features. Precisely because of its importance, the Nepalese Durga Puja came into the focus of political challenge – while so far retaining its salience. Because of its centrality, both in the Hindu ritual practice as well as in the agonistic movement(s), the negotiations surrounding Dasain provide us with a fertile ground for a reflection on the process of shaping public meanings in contemporary Nepal's political communication and on the even broader forces shaping political change. In order to grasp this centrality and the resilience of ritual practice it is necessary to pinpoint the central features of power rituals. Of course, it is impossible to do justice to ritual theory, which is thriving at the moment. Nevertheless, it is crucial to lay out five approaches that have shaped this inquiry and the following argument.

Five Ritual-Theory Approaches to the Dynamic Nature of Rituals

First I follow David Gellner (1999), who distinguishes three types of religiosity, which translate into three forms of ritual practice. The first type relates to soteriology, i.e. turning towards God, quest for salvation. The second consists in the social character of religion and ritual, forging collective bonds. Third, Gellner highlights the instrumental character of religion and ritual. Ritual can aim at succeeding in any social venture, in attaining a religious merit, or in representing and stabilising political power. Many rituals combine all these three dimensions – which usually results in their ambivalence. According to Kertzer (1989), the polysemies of the ritual meanings are what gives them their strength: actors tend to attach different notions to any given ritual complex and to select from ritual repertoires according to context (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996). In order to understand the following analysis, all three dimensions of ritual must be acknowledged while paying attention to their interlocking nature.

Second I take up the central thesis of the large collaborative research programme since 2003 at the University of Heidelberg (Sonderforschungsbereich 619) examining rituals, suggesting that they need to be understood in their dynamics, as its title "Ritualdynamiken" suggests. In particular, the tension between the ritual script and the ritual performance has dynamising effects (Harth and Michaels 2003). Texts, for instance myths but also the rules underlying the ritual performance, are understood here as "script". The "performance" denotes the ritual action – in which numerous *dramatis personae* join in, all sharing in the production of meanings. The ritual performance therefore does not simply follow predetermined rules; it is embodied and transformative. Following from this, I suggest that the dynamic nature of rituals comes about with the multiplicity of social positionings evolving in the course of ritual practice and their negotiations over meanings. Victor Turner (1967) saw rituals as of "forests of symbols" to which actors relate in their negotiations. In this vein, Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) spoke of conflicting approaches to the world that come to light in the ritual production of meanings. In ritual practice, the negotiations result in symbolic compromises that can further buttress ritual dynamics. Furthermore, when we consider that today, under the conditions of reflexive modernity (to speak with Ulrich Beck et al. 1994), practices are subject to reflexive scrutiny, then rituals can become particularly embattled areas (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996) – where visions of sociability, terrains of cultural transmission and collective memories are at stake.

Third, rituals are very dense social situations (see my analysis of Dasain, Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996) and they reflect and reproduce social orders: hierarchies, norms of belonging, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries, indeed, frontiers of the social. Rituals can cement social orders (in their instrumental dimension), and since they represent normative orders they are particularly well-suited to becoming targets of dissent in times of social upheaval. When power can thrive so well in rituals, then challenges to power, to those in power and their representations, find very fruitful ground in the ritual language. Challengers can then deploy ritual symbols while creatively shaping their meanings.

Fourth, since neither the social, nor the political realm can be thought as devoid of time or space, these dimensions need to be taken into consideration. The research on rituals is not yet sufficiently developed in this field. In particular, it is important to grasp how rituals could and can evolve across significant spatial distances, how they produce the simultaneity and orchestration of ritual action in space-time and how they forge transcendence. With increasing transnationalisation, the way in which rituals are transplanted into new social settings and the dynamics that accompany these processes are also of interest. Also, what properties, what strength do rituals have that compel people scattered across the world to synchronise their ritual practice?

Finally, (fifth) I take up Michael Oppitz's (1999) idea that rituals consist of distinctive elements out of which they are constructed. They are put together, indeed assembled, as building blocks at a construction site in the course of ritual action. This metaphor makes it possible at least partly to grasp how rituals can be transported over long distances in time and space, how they can be transported into different cultural contexts, and how the ritual language can be enriched by continuously including new elements. In addition, it is important to note that the possibility of including new ritual units can render rituals all the more equivocal. In this vein, rituals tend to become polysemic communicative social facts that transmit between yesterday, today and tomorrow while gaining in the symbolic wealth of their repertoires – as has been the case with the Nepalese Dasain.

When I speak of the power of ritual, I am not according it a primacy in shaping action and meanings. I follow Catherine Bell (1997: 73), who very nicely expressed that the rituals do not form people but that actors shape their rituals, which then influence their social worlds. What endows rituals with this power still needs to be researched. The Nepalese Dasain provides us with some important insights, as I shall argue: the speciality of the ritual language; its cyclical, perennially returning character, which confers this ritual with a power of factual force; the equivocalness as well as the repertoire of ritual elements, which can be exchanged, moulded and transported into new contexts. Furthermore, this ritual offers frames, i.e. semantics providing orientation for action, which allows actors to forge their belonging and to position themselves in political communication.

On the Asymmetric Entanglements in Nepal's History

The challenges to Durga Puja, on the one hand, and its resilience in today's embattled times, on the other, reveal the embedded nature of political symbolisation within the country's complex socio-political structure. Of importance here are the country's cultural and religious differentiation, inequality as well as its territorial range and diversity. In order to grasp the social drama unfolding around Dasain, I will use an analytical framework highlighting the entangled nature of political symbolisation in Nepal's past and present. Looking at Nepal's political communication from the perspective of its entangled history means seeing political meanings – enacted in ritual action – as resulting from on-going social negotiations through which meanings are shaped, where they interlock and acquire salience. Entanglements are complex interrelations between actors, discourses, and structures. They come to light particularly well when rituals of power – such as Dasain – are contested in their entirety or in their specific meanings. Furthermore, it is important to stress that their entangled history is a shared one in the sense that processes of change are multidirectional. This gives meanings imposed upon ruled populations, for instance, new local shades and connotations in the course of the negotiations through which they are incorporated into the local practice. This analytical figure takes up the idea of emerging salience of meanings through negotiated interpenetration – as the governmentality approach suggests (Li 2007).

Of course, historical entanglements throughout Nepal's history have always been asymmetric. Durga Puja is a perfect case in point. When a united Nepal came into existence under the sword of Hindu rulers in the second half of the 18th century, Hinduism and its symbols came to embrace Nepal's polity and society, with the Durga Puja from the first half of the 19th century emerging as *the* ritual of power (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1993). Hindu rulers played an active part in imposing the performance of this ritual throughout the kingdom and providing incentives for it, for instance by land donations to temples and priests performing the rituals and by contributing funds for the sacrificial animals. The entanglement perspective sees the subject positions –

for instance those embraced by ethnic leaders – as active in simultaneously contesting as well as incorporating ritual elements of those in power, which resulted in transporting them into the local meanings and practice.

The concept of asymmetric entanglement(s) helps us capture the ways in which imposed symbolic orders could become incorporated into subjugated life-worlds, by means of which they become durably established, and how resentment could be nurtured over long periods – without overtly coming to the fore until the political crystallisation moment of ethnic discontent. Numerous ethnographies published before the current public ethnic self-assertion started have documented the ethnic elites' use of Durga Puja to reinforce their own political position (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996) and different ethnic populations performing the rites of the Durga Puja in a fully affirmative mode (Höfer 1986). The nature of governmentality in Hindu Nepal is fully revealed through the lens of asymmetric entanglement: the scope of the rulers' imposition of the Hindu ritual framework throughout the polity, the negotiated nature of its interpenetration into the local political spaces and life-worlds, and the mechanisms through which this state ritual acquired a salience among the majority of the Nepalese population until the present day.

Mechanisms of incorporation through asymmetric entanglements refer to institutionalised practices maintaining the durability of symbolic orders and making for their naturalness. Power rituals acquire salience through expanding in space: polities thrive on the ritualisation of political communication by demonstrating the territorial span of rule through ritual performance by local elites as well as by highlighting ritual interconnectedness between the diverse sites of ritual performance. Also, rituals become an intrinsic element in practices of temporalisation in a given (national) society. Dates of political rituals are fixed in national calendars following a given religious canon, dictating public holidays and, by doing so, shaping the pace and rhythm of social practices, causing them to evolve. Furthermore, rituals contribute to creating meanings that buttress collective differentiation and hierarchies. They evolve as reservoirs of knowledge and create routines interlinking actors across diverse social sites. The example of Durga Puja reveals how durable such symbolic orders are and how they inspire dissent and challenges. It also shows how it provides grounds for accommodation between political contestants because of the shared salience of meanings. But before introducing the Durga Puja ritual complex of Nepal and analysing its politicisation, it is important to consider Nepal's history in order to understand the momentum of ethnic activism today.

On Ethnic Assimilation Since the Formation of the Nepalese State Until 1990

Nepal came to being in its present form in the second half of the 18th century, after in 1742 King Prithvi Narayan Shah of the small Himalayan princely state of Gorkha started military conquest of some 60 political units within the current territory of Nepal. Under the Hindu sword, the forced unification brought not only different political forms together but also very diverse populations – ethnically, linguistically and religiously. I distinguish three different political phases that characterise three subsequent attempts at forging unity out of the pronounced cultural diversity. The first phase culminated in the year 1854, when the rulers declared that the diverse population formed a hierarchical caste society. The national Civil Code of Nepal promulgated in that year declared Nepal's population in its entirety to be divided into hierarchically ranked caste groups, with the double-born Hindu-castes at the top, the ethnically defined groups – ranked within themselves – forming the middle-range and what were called "impure, untouchable" castes at the very bottom. The caste system saw the social whole as a differentiated hierarchy, defining the mutual rights and duties as well as punishment and fines according to the hierarchical rank. Cultural distinction was the norm (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989).

Hinduism as the rulers' religion created the ideological framework for this social order. However, non-Hindu religions and their ritual practices were not prohibited. Only the levirate was forbidden by decree as clashing with Hindu values. Nevertheless, the rulers undertook decisive steps to highlight the importance of Hinduism in the realm, by imposing a ban on caw-slaughter (Michaels 1997) and demanding that local power-holders should hold the Durga Puja celebrations. Numerous documents reveal that the Nepalese rulers repeatedly had to demand both of these – which provides us with a good illustration of local resistance to

these demands. The (until 1962) semi-autonomous region of Bajhang (far west Nepal) is a good case in point. Documents reveal that fines were imposed for not performing Dasain according to the political prescription. In Bajhang Dasain being a public holiday is an occasion for visiting relatives, but it failed to acquire the political pomp and public elaboration found in other parts of Nepal. Interestingly, the myth of *Devi Mahatmya* recited in other parts of the country throughout the ten days of Dasain-celebrations (see below) underlies the *ceytuli* festivities that take place in Bajhang six months later – which are performed in a very different form. These festivities consist of a 12-day ritual sequence, culminating in a ritual dismembering of the demon Mahisasura. The climax is the villagers' playing a team-game with a ball symbolising his head (own field-observations). In most parts of Nepal, though, Durga Puja was accepted, along with other forms of political ritualisation. The way in which Durga Puja firmly established itself as an important ritual throughout most parts of Nepal is a perfect indicator of how a powerful ritual framework acquires salience in political, social and cultural entanglements between the rulers and the ruled.

The second phase in ethnic minorities' assimilation began by the mid-20th century, following Nepal's opening to the world in 1951 – when the 100 year autocratic rule of the Rana Prime-Minister dynasty came to an end and the Hindu monarchs returned to full political power. King Mahendra (1955-1972) and his son King Birendra (1975-2001) ruled Nepal while promoting modernisation (or their vision of it). They endorsed an assimilatory idiom, propagating, and partly enforcing, homogenisation of the national culture, rationalising their endeavours as necessary for the sake of communication and progress. Paradoxically, but not unexpectedly, the measures at forging national unity had divisive effects, maybe even creating deeper divisions in society than before. The rulers promoted cultural homogenisation by enforcing the cultural mores of high-caste elite groups upon the population. They declared ethnic cultural forms to be backward and protection of them even as dissidence. Symbols of the minorities were banned from the public sphere and were not permitted to form any part of national representation. These historical dynamics are important for understanding the growing ethnic discontent that challenges Hindu supremacy in most spheres of the Nepalese society (see Gellner et al. 1997). In this vein, the Durga Puja, one of the most striking demonstrations of the hierarchical order, became target of ethnic activism – at the same time providing a great deal of inspiration for ways of engaging in agonistic ritual action. Before concentrating on how ethnic activism has evolved in the post-1990 political phase – featuring rapid change of political institutions, politics of contention and a true "ethnicity explosion" – an account of Durga Puja celebrations will reveal the nature of the state-sponsored ritual celebrations that have become bone of contention in the recent years.

Celebrating Durga Puja in Nepal

After Nepal's unification was completed and Hindu rule firmly established, the kings and their advisers sought to design and enforce an ideological pattern that would legitimate their supremacy. Unlike in most parts of South Asia, the Nepalese Durga Puja emerged as the major occasion linking political power with Hindu ritual (see Krauskopff and Lecomte-Tilouine 1996). It simultaneously combined worship of the Goddess Durga, displays of military strength, representation of social and political order and clear-cut displays of hierarchical patron-client relations with demonstrations of fertility and prosperity within the country's territory. The ethnic minority population, largely adhering to other religions than Hinduism, was not forced to convert, but it was compelled to participate in the Durga Puja. For the ethnic elites embracing local political power, Durga Puja provided an avenue to reinforce contacts with central power and, by doing so, to enhance their local strength (Höfer 1986). Along with other instances linking political power to ritual practice, Durga Puja thus provided incentives to convert to Hinduism. Possibly, ethnic elites served as role models to the bulk of the ethnic minority populations who embraced Hindu religion as well. They converted notwithstanding the fact that the Durga Puja's celebrations often also emphasised their inferior position (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996).

There is no ethnographic account of the Dasain celebrations in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. This short description of the celebrations is based upon my own field research in the central Nepalese village Belkot carried out in 1986 (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 1989) and it is enlarged by data published by Unbescheid (1986),

who gave a very thorough account of Dasain celebrations in Gorkha – which largely conforms to the pattern found in Belkot – while revealing some interesting differences that due to space-constraints cannot be discussed here.[3] Belkot is a multi-caste and multi-ethnic village situated between the national political centre in the Kathmandu Valley and in the Gorkha region (considered the cradle of the royal Shah dynasty, which ruled Nepal until 2008). During the field observations underlying my account (1986-87) this local unit comprised ca. 1000 households. The inhabitants belonged to the full range of the Hindu caste hierarchy: starting from the highest Brahmin castes, including Chetris (who correspond to the Indian "Kshatriyas"), comprising a number of ethnic groups – notably the Newars, Magars and Tamangs – and extending to such "low" Hindu castes as the Kamis, Sarkis and Damais – the last of these being tailors-*cum*-musicians. In the period under observation, the Hindu caste hierarchy provided a common ideological pattern. Simultaneously, the village was divided by power differentials, an unequal distribution of resources as well as a growing resentment by members of ethnic minority groups, in particular the Tamangs, against the established societal order (as will become apparent below).

It is impossible here to give a full account that would do justice to the complexity, the importance of individual ritual actions and the full ritual sequence of the Durga Puja celebrations. Some basic information will have to suffice. Durga Puja starts on the lunar fortnight of the month Asoj, in autumn, and continues for ten days. The activities follow the mythical events described in the famous Sanskrit script *Devi Mahatmya*,[4] which Brahmins recite for the entire duration of the celebrations. This myth narrates the fierce battle between the demon Mahisasura and the Goddess Durga, which she eventually wins. The account culminates in Durga's killing the demon on the eight day (astami) of the battle and the victory's celebration on day ten. On both these days, especially on astami, animal sacrifice demonstrating Mahisasura's killing was performed in military fortresses all over the country.

The celebrations start on the first day of the waxing lunar fortnight of the month of *aswin* (September-October). On this day the ritual specialists, the Dasain priest (*pandit*) and the *upasye*, a member of the Magar ethnic group, installed themselves in a house specially designated for celebrating Dasain. Besides fasting with the *pandit* inside the house, the *upasye* was supposed to perform several duties outside the Dasain house. According to villagers, the important position of this Magar ritual specialist in the celebrations is to be traced to the political status of this ethnic group in earlier times. In particular he had to sacrifice animals and to carry a sword (*khadka*) on the procession of the 7th day. The Magars called it the "weapon of the Devi". Some of them claimed that, along with other weapons, it was used during the unification war (1744-1816). In 1986, the *upasye,* being old, restricted his activities to fasting, while two younger relatives carried out his other duties.

The Dasain house was small, not more than four metres square. Its entrance was well hidden from the outside. Only ritual specialists involved in Dasain activities were allowed to enter. The Dasain priest and the *upasye* stayed here together through the entire period, fasting, performing rituals assigned to them, reading and/or listening to the *Devi Mahatmya*. On the first day, the Goddess was invoked by planting *jamaro* (barley) seeds and by establishing a water vessel *(kalas).* Throughout the day Brahmins arrived at the temple and read from *Devi Mahatmya*. The orchestra, consisting of musicians from the Damai caste, gathered and played music in the morning and evening. (The Damais are one of the Dalit communities, formerly belonging to the "untouchable castes". Notwithstanding their low hierarchical and social status within the local community, as musicians they have played a crucial role on numerous ritual occasions, see Fig. 2 and 3.) In the course of the first day four stones were worshipped and covered with red powder in the vicinity of the Dasain house. They were consecrated to the four representations of the Goddess located in the surrounding important temples: Bhairavi of Nuwakot, Jalpa of Devighat, Kalika of Gorkha, and Guhyeswari of Deopatan.

[3] The following description of Dasain-celebrations in Belkot is a shortened version of Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996).
[4] The *Devi Mahatmya* ("Glory of the Goddess") is part of the Markandeya Purana, composed in Sanskrit around c. 400-500 CE.

From the second to the sixth day, Dasain activities were confined to the inner area of the Dasain house. Every day the ritual objects symbolising the Goddess were worshipped, the *pandit* and the *upasye* continued with their fast, and they listened to Brahmins who came occasionally to the house and read the *Devi Mahatmya*. Towards the end of the sixth day several preparatory activities were carried out: the sacrificial ground next to the Dasain house was repaired and ritually purified by the pujari (another category of priest) who was assisted by a *naike* (a village servant). The Goddess's weapons (the *tarwar* or *khadka* and the *khukuri* – see Fig. 1) were cleaned and put into the Dasain house. Interestingly, these battered utensils hang on the wall in

Fig. 1: Members of the Magar ethnic group displaying the ritual weapons (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

the Magar *upasye's* house for the rest of the year. Despite this ethnic group having been defeated during the unification, this extended family group retained an important social position in the village, while one branch of the family lives in Kathmandu and in the Rana period its menfolk used to carry a royal flag (*nisan*) on ceremonial occasions in the capital.

On the seventh day, known as *phulpati*, Dasain activities were carried out in three places simultaneously. While the Goddess and the weapons were being worshipped in the Dasain house, the *naike* purified with cow dung at a spot ca. 200 m down the slope (a *deurali*, "place of worship") where also a *bel* (Aegle marmelos) twig was planted. A third party, consisting of two Magars, went down to collect the *phulpati* ("flowers offered in worship"). According to several informants, in earlier times the *phulpati* was brought from Gorkha, for which Gorkha was sent a small tribute. A procession was formed with the Damai orchestra in front (see Fig. 2 and 3). It was followed by the village servant, then by the temple priest, who carried the *jamaro* plate, his helper (no special name), who carried the *kalas*, the *pandit*, and two men (a relative of the Magar official and a political office-holder or lower rank) each carrying a sword (see Fig. 2).

The eighth day (*astami*) was relatively quiet. Rituals were performed inside the Dasain house. Many private persons visited the temple and the premises of the Dasain house on this day, sacrificed their own animals and listened to the Brahmins' recitations. Towards the evening the sacrificial ground was purified with cow dung by the *naike*. It was only in the evening that the collective sacrifices started – first of buffaloes and then goats (see Fig. 4). The sacrifices continued on the ninth day (*navami*). The minimum number of sacrificed animals could not be less than two buffaloes and nine goats, of which all but one goat had to be sacrificed by the evening of the ninth day. After the sacrifices the meat of the animals (which until three decades ago were said to be provided by the royal brothers, i.e. by the tenants among the local population) was distributed as a religious blessing (*prasad*) to local people.

Fig. 2: The Phulpati being brought to Belkot from Gorkha (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

On the tenth day the last goat was sacrificed in the morning. Its head was put on a leaf-plate and placed in the Dasain house. Outside, Brahmins gathered and they read from the *Devi Mahatmya*. A crowd gradually assembled in and around the sacrificial ground. Inside the Dasain house the *pandit* worshiped the objects symbolising the Goddess. Shortly before, he gave a sign for exchanging *tika* (an auspicious mark placed at a person's forehead) outside and he distributed three *tika* inside the house: the first *tika* went to the King of Nepal, the second to the God Vishnu, and the third went to his own lineage deity. After the ritual objects, including the last goat's head, were taken and arranged outside the Dasain house, the *pandit* gave the first *tika* (with some *jamaro*) to the political village head (i.e. to the *dware* under the Ranas and to the pradhan panc until 1983), the second to the *upasye* and the third to the *pujari*, who all received it with a bow. The *upasye*

Fig. 3. The Damai musicians on the *phulpati* day (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

Fig. 4: Animal sacrifice on the astami day (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

and *pujari* gave a *tika* to the priest in turn; however, he did not reciprocate the bow. Subsequently all ritual specialists distributed *tika* and *jamaro* to the crowd (see Fig. 5 and 6).

Durga Puja's ritual sequence following a mythical event reveals one important facet of this celebration: the interconnection between the God and humans – with the latter seeking divine grace – which is evoked throughout (Gellner's soteriology). The second facet consists in forging and reinforcing social interrelations ("social ritual"). Durga Puja takes place at a particularly nice time of the year, after the harvest has been brought in from the fields, when people have time for relaxation and engaging in social intercourse, in particular with their nearest. Following the Hindu calendar, the rulers prescribed prolonged holidays during this

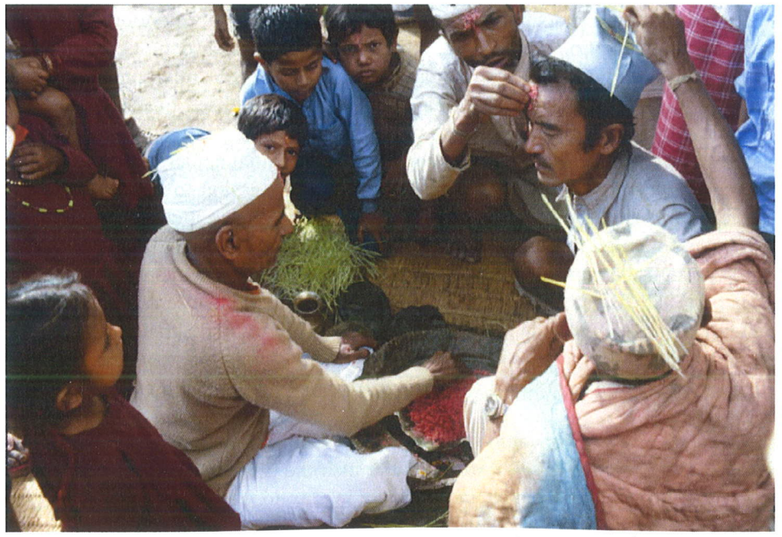

Fig. 5. Distribution of the Dasain-*tika* on the 10th day (*dasami*) (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

Fig. 6: The bow in front of the Brahmin priest, after receiving the Dasain-*tika* on the tenth day (photo: Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1986)

festive season. All offices and most shops close during the final days of Dasain. This allows literally everybody to travel to places where they can meet their closest relatives. Migrants come home and almost everybody engages in extensive shopping before the celebrations start in order to make gifts when they meet and exchange a ritual *tika* on the tenth day of Durga Puja.

The third facet of this ritual complex consists in the instrumentalisation of the ritual action (Gellner's third function). The political architects of the Nepalese kingdom used the Durga Puja to remind the population of the forceful unification of the realm and to highlight the ruling dynasty's victory and its presence at the apex of society. Whenever weapons, in particular swords have been paraded during Dasain-celebrations, they symbolised Durga's triumph and simultaneously the strength of state's monopoly on force as well as the bravery and loyalty of the population. Until 1990, Durga Puja in particular demonstrated the high-caste military leaders' and the ethnic soldiers' wit, strength and courage. It significantly contributed to reinforcing the fame of Nepal's Gorkha soldiers, largely of ethnic origin, who capitalised on this fame in enlisting in the British Indian Army and later in Indian and British military service.

The instrumental value of the Durga Puja also consisted in the ritual depiction of the wholeness and interrelatedness of the entire Nepalese territory and in using ritual expression to highlight the political centre's dominance over the peripheries. Worshipping of ritual stones linking scattered political and ritual sites as well as ritual itineraries followed through ritual processions evoked the ritual interconnectedness as well as the relations of power and allegiance. These displays of political and ritual hierarchies culminated on the tenth day, when people had to gather at power centres and fortresses and engage in ritual *tika* exchange: priests and power-holders distributed the ritual *tika* to political clients and ritual adherents – while the latter bowed and produced gift tokens symbolising allegiance and loyalty. *Tika*-exchange among relatives taking place in private homes mirrors this practice by evoking interfamilial hierarchies and allegiance, among the Hindus of Nepal.

Durga Puja's elaborateness and its value-stress upon political, social and ritual hierarchies not only buttressed the importance of the monarchy, but in particular also the political predominance of Hindu and Hinduised elites, who used this celebration to show their own loyalty to the central power and their own centrality in the local political spaces. From the perspective of the amount of ethnic positioning against the Dasain, it is striking how well the members of the Magar ethnic group were incorporated into Belkot's Dasain celebrations in 1986. On the other hand, the same year in Belkot marked an important moment of ethnic dissent,

voiced here probably for the first time, by members of the Tamang ethnic group, who claimed that the ritual complex was highlighting their political inferiority (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996).

The participation of ethnic elites and ethnic minority populations in the Dasain-celebrations in previous times is today a contentious issue – as will be discussed shortly. Substantial data exists (Höfer 1986; Hangen 2005; Pfaff-Czarnecka 1996; Holmberg 2010; Shneiderman 2009) documenting broad engagement of ethnic minority populations in the celebrations with the ethnic elites grasping the opportunity to use the celebration for their political purpose as well as the local ethnic populations attaching their own meanings to this Hindu ritual complex. In many parts of the country, Dasain morphed into a vehicle for ritually evoking communal spirit and for practising Hinduism. In many ethnic minority enclaves the ritual developed its own logic; partly succumbing to the central rulers' political rationalities, but often creating particularised meanings and hence memory-spaces for localised societies, evolving their own rituals and conferring their own meaning upon the celebrations. Ethnic minority activists today take a strong stance on their participation in Dasain-celebrations in the past, suggesting that they were forced to join in the ritual action. While Dasain had already been contested previously, as the example from Belkot reveals, 1990 brought about acceleration in the voicing of dissent, for instance through ritual communication.

Post-1990 Ethnic Self-Assertion

The assimilationist measures embraced by the Nepalese rulers in an over-simplifying pursuit of modernisation have evoked ethnic resistance. As early as the 1980s there was increasing critique in reaction to the rulers' silencing of ethnic minority voices, to their preventing displays of ethnic minority cultures in public space and to their preventing the appointment of ethnic minority aspirants to office in politics and administration. In April 1990, shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall and the preceding political changes in the Soviet Union and Russia that made it possible and inspired political protest in many parts of the world, there was a confrontation in Nepal that eventually effected system change. Ethnic activism was not in the forefront of political mobilisation that led to a significant reduction of the then King Birendra's prerogatives of power and to the introduction of a multi party-democracy, but it immediately gained momentum after the political sea-change. Ethnic-minority resentment feeling was all the more buttressed when a new constitution was introduced in November 1990, which declared Nepal to be multi-ethnic and multi-lingual – a significant departure from the rulers' assimilatory measures that had been abandoned only few months earlier. Nevertheless, the new constitution declared Nepal would continue to be Hindu kingdom. This overt continuation of endorsing Hindu supremacy while not officially acknowledging the multi-religious character of the population has greatly contributed to crystallising ethnic discontent into a strong social movement (see e.g. Hangen 2010).

The ethnic projects in search for their own identity, self-representation and reassertion have further evolved since then. At the initial stage, ethnic minority activists engaged in politics of identity. It seemed to suffice merely to bring the existence of ethnic minority languages, religions and customs into public attention. Weighted against former silencing of ethnic minority voices, this already seemed to be a substantial political step forward. Against the backdrop of former state's negation of cultural difference and the sheer wealth of a country displaying such cultural diversity, marking presence within the Nepalese polity was a substantial departure from former official rhetorical practice and a fertile ground for ethnic mobilisation to evolve. Memory constructions, entailing remembering past wrongs, on one hand, and the quest to preserve own ethnic groups' cultural heritage, on the other resulted in a wide range of measures aimed at cultural reform, revitalisation and cultural preservation. Almost all ethnic groups engaged in scrutinising their own myths of origin and inventing their own scripts. A reflection upon ritual practice quickly followed.

Dasain Celebrations in Pan-Nepalese Ethnic Activism

Given its symbolic weight and considering the political message it had to carry for almost two centuries, it is not surprising that Dasain quickly became the most cherished target of ethnic activism. At least three different fronts emerged in the course of ethnic minority mobilisation aimed at this ritual. The first reacted to ani-

mal sacrifice. Buddhist activists have been engaged in lavish purification ceremonies seeking to cleanse the sin incurred by killing animals on the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th days. They took this occasion also to remind the Nepalese and international audiences that Nepal has had a longstanding Buddhist tradition, which suffered under the Hindu rule. In a number of ethnic minority villages funeral rites for the animals sacrificed elsewhere were performed. This kind of boycott aimed both, at challenging the symbolic dominance of Hinduism and at a revitalisation of their own traditions. Simultaneously, (religious) dissent could be publicly staged.

The second front grew against the strong nexus between political power and Hinduism. Ethnic minority activists were supported by Maoist leaders – who *nota bene* greatly contributed to the ethnic movement's growing momentum – in their voicing critique that the sacrificial animals should be sponsored from (the always scarce) state revenue. The more the new monarch King Gyanendra – enthroned after the assassination of King Birendra in June 2001 – came under criticism, and the stronger opposition grew calling for the abolition the monarchy and declaring the state secular, the less popular it became to appear in the King's palace seeking to receive a *tika* from him King. State dignitaries from ethnic minority backgrounds came in for particular criticism.

The third front formed against the political suppression of ethnic minority people and its symbolisation through ritual performance. Speaking with Foucault (1991), the Nepalese Durga Puja excluded the ethnic minority population through inclusion. Other than in a number of ethnic areas where ethnic elites emerged in the focus of the ritual, in most areas with a mixed caste-ethnic composition the ethnic subjugation was mirrored and represented through ritual division of labour. Contrary to Halbwachs' (1992), Nora's (2010) and Assmann's (1992) conceptualisation of the past as a source of identity formation and orientation, ethnic activism projects regarded the past embodied in Durga Puja as painful. They prefer a subaltern reading of the events burned into the Durga Puja performative script – as a remembering of organised resentment (Hangen 2005).

The official historiography saw the coercive unification of Nepal as a natural process that resulted in the Hindu Shah dynasty's coming to power and acquiring centrality and supremacy of ritual acts. The new historiography – ethnic activists are anthropologists, historians, sociologists, linguists, political science scholars and geographers – sees the subjugation and partial dispossession of ethnic minority population as a past wrong. The reaction not only envisages political and economic reform, but also symbolic readjustment. The National Mongol Organisation (the first political party based on ethnicity, established in the aftermath of the 1990 "revolution") demanded for instance that Durga Puja be entirely banned from the Nepalese calendar, calling for a prohibition of its performance through public rites, but also in private homes (Hangen 2010).

Boycotting Dasain (Hangen 2005) is thus one important feature of ethnic activism. If the royal decrees demanded the performance of Dasain rites, then a number of ethnic organisations would like to ban them by decree. But is it easily possible to erase memories and the emotional dispositions entailed? The more mobilisation occurred against this ritual, the more prominence it acquires in the public sphere – even if providing mostly a negative script for the ethnic activism's quest to find its own voice.

One important line of ethnic mobilisation lies in the new interpretation of Goddess Durga's struggle against the demon Mahisasura. According to Hangen (2005) a number of activists suggest that this myth provides an account of a real-life battle between the Mongols (to whom the minority ethnic groups belong) and the Aryans (consisting of the high Hindu castes). In this reading, Mahisasura was not a demon, but a forefather of the Mongol tribes. By depicting him as demon in the Hindu myth, it brings a prejudice to the open. The ritual marker on the forehead (see Fig. 5) conferred on people by superiors is traditionally made out of raw grains of rice, yoghurt and red pigment. Now, the red pigment is read as the blood of the Mongols shed in this mythic/non-mythic battle. This new reading has acquired an electrifying effect, because the new historiography not only highlights the historical injustice, but also has the effect of polarising the *drammatis personae*. The new reading of the *Devi Mahatmya* allows for discrimination between the Hindus and the ethnic minority population – which is in itself differentiated – in order to create a collective agonistic front. Speaking with Laclau and Mouffé (1991), the political acquires an antagonistic moment that creates a constitutive other – while producing a putative internal unity. (More moderate ethnic activists demand that at least the red should be got rid of from the Dasain-*tika*, so that it does not remind anybody of the inter-ethnic bloodshed.)

However, this act will reinforce the power of the ritual. The Hindu ritual can be used as a negative to buttress an oppositional *Vergemeinschaftung*. But precisely the efforts to get rid of Durga Puja highlight its tremendous importance in Nepal's social life. This is not only coming evident in state practice and in the life-worlds of the Hindus, but it shows itself in manifold ways in ethnic social spaces. The second trend shows itself therefore in a void created wherever the activists have successfully managed to suppress Durga Puja (as Hangen, 2005, describes). A number of regions report a need to find new social forms to perform specific social interactions. The void calls for different forms of substitution, among which three forms are of particular importance. One calls for finding an occasion where ritual performance can take place that would draw upon the ritual elements of the Durga Puja while (in Oppitz's terms) montaging them into a new form. Another form of substitution calls for finding activities to be performed during the Durga Puja holidays that are fixed in the public calendar. The third lies in the quest to find a vehicle for ritually performing all kinds of social interrelations that have traditionally been enacted during the Dasain season.

Recent studies show that numerous members of ethnic groups find it difficult not to exchange *tika* on Dasain. Hangen (2005) reports that – besides exchanging a white *tika* – the ethnic groups in parts of the eastern Nepal started to perform marriage rites during the Dasain break – which, however, allows for exchanging *tika* with a partly different meaning. The marriage ceremonies will be performed by Buddhist priests, but display elements of Hindu rites that entail *tika* exchange at important points in the ceremony. This substitution has opened the possibility to perform a *tika* exchange without provoking the activists' anger. Hangen, furthermore, shows that members of ethnic groups have not stopped eating meat during the Dasain season. In Nepal's rural areas, Dasain was a rare occasion when meat – provided through dividing up the sacrificial animals – could be enjoyed. The bulk of ethnic minority population did not become vegetarian – notwithstanding embracing Buddhism and notwithstanding the critique of Hindu ritual animal slaughter.

Meat consumption is a good example of the embattled but also very multifaceted nature of ethnic positionings in the current trend towards self-assertion. Some activists may fight against animal sacrifice, others may perform funeral rites for the sacrificed animals, others can eat meat without sacrificing the animals (but just killing them), and yet other sections of ethnic groups may continue, or even revitalise Buddhist Tantric practices, which are especially blood-thirsty in some parts of Nepal (Shneiderman 2005, confirmed by my own observations in Devighat, Nuwakot district). This variety of life-world-practices is mirrored in the diversity of ethnic activists' positions, which differ for instance in the question whether to engage in cultural reforms or rather in ethnic revitalisation. This is an important lesson for ethnicity research: in the local life-worlds, ethnic groups develop very different social practices to those their leaders try to enforce.

Dasain then has emerged as the focal point concentrating ethnic discontent and feeding back into the ongoing analysis of ethnic positions, practices and representations. It provides a rich repertoire orienting ritual possibilities for promoting one's own cultural forms and for forging practices against the established ritual scripts. While drawing upon the Hindu ritual repertoires, the activists have selected a path suited to remembering wrongs endured in history, while rejecting the ritualisation of subordination and oppression. While ethnic minority populations endured a common fate, it made sense to the activists to jointly challenge ritual practice that conveyed a representation of the past, while engaging in projects to perform and to represent simultaneously the ethnic minority peoples' speaking with one voice, while retaining shades of individual ethnic groups' particularities.

A third trend in ethnic activism utilises the Durga Puja to find a common voice in addressing the public sphere. A common ritual denominator was found in the New Year celebrations, commonly called "Losar" (but the diversity of ethnic projects results in different spellings of this term). Lhosar has Buddhist origins – a religion currently converting ethnic minorities and being revived and reformed. During the second half of the 20th century, Losar[5] was performed by the Tibetan diaspora in Nepal, whereas hardly any ethnic group engaged in these celebrations. Throughout the 1990s, ethnic organisations drew up plans and pamphlets pre-

[5] Losar (transliteration according to Wylie system *lo gsar*) literally means New Year in Tibetan. The date for celebrating Losar in Tibetan-speaking societies varied a lot (and there were various different Losar traditions). Nowadays Losar is commonly celebrated according to the Buddhist calendar but divergent local traditions still exist.

scribing when and how to celebrate the Buddhist New Year. It is impossible to give an account of the diversity of calendars that are presently in use by different ethnic groups, with their number growing every year.[6] A number of ethnic organisations have pressed for public holidays equal to those of Durga Puja to be declared around the New Year celebrations.

For a number of years now ethnic umbrella organisations have organised festivities staged on the Martyr ground, close to Thudikhel, where the official Dasain celebrations take place and where military parades were previously held (Toffin 2008). Ethnic activists are increasingly turning into ritual specialists, promoting change of their ethnic groups' ritual practice and defining ritual elements to be performed. The ritual practice acquires a reflective moment and one important facet of this reflection is the location of ethnic groups within the political space.

Furthermore, for the social location of ethnic groups, their cultures and practices, it is crucial that they are currently scattered all over the world. Ethnic activism at home is significantly buttressed by the on-going activities in such far-away places as Hong Kong, Tokyo, Sydney, New York and Manchester. The diaspora activists have played a significant role in replacing Dasain by the Lhosar celebrations, giving Lhosar a number of the social functions that Dasain previously had. It becomes instrumental abroad to have a ritual moment creating simultaneity, strengthening interactions in any given geographic and virtual location. Lhosar makes it possible to structure the time, by sticking to a calendar that would forge a link between the past and the future and give time a rhythm. The beginning of a year affects identity formation, giving it structure and meaning and forging a collective sense of co-existence all around the globe. You can be scattered all around the world, but unite in celebrations that will be staged and stored through photos, videos and communications media. This creation of simultaneity that the routine of the ritual makes possible is all the more conducive to instigating global reflexivity forging a sense of ethnic unity. Lhosar creates a horizon of the social that positions itself against Hindu hegemony while re-creating links of sisterhood and brotherhood (Hangen during a conference presentation in Fréjus, 2008).

Conclusions

Let me come back to the questions formulated at the beginning. I have asked how rituals evolve under the global conditions of mobility, challenges to established normative orders as well as the rapid social change. I have also tried to establish where the contribution of rituals lies while shaping these processes. I have presented the social drama staged within and around the Dasain in order to grasp the ethnic challenges to public representations suggesting a wholeness of the polity buttressed by hierarchical Hindu norms. Contesting Dasain has significantly contributed to the ethnicisation of Nepal's political communication. By using the ritual language, ethnic activists have time and again questioned the legitimacy and salience of Nepal's national unity while trying to draw ethnic boundaries tighter. The ritual language has simultaneously been used to make public statements as well as for the sake of reflection on the values embraced by ethnic activists – which also reveal internal conflicts over meanings and values and the multiplicity of ethnic voices.

I hope that the discussion of the dramatic conflicts evolving around and within the Dasain celebrations contributes to scholarly understanding of rituals. Rituals are actions that can acquire significant transformative properties (Harth and Michaels 2003). Throughout ritual action, the *drammatis personae* take an active part in instigating change. At the same time, the affirmative as much as the critical reflection on values transmitted through rituals provides a critical analysis of symbolic orders that shape ethnic boundary-

[6] According to Holmberg (2010: 2): "Officially recognized new years are the official Nepal new year according to the Vikram Sambat, the new year of the Nepal Sambat (Newar), of the Tamu or Gurung, of the Gregorian calendar, of the Tamang and others or Sonam Lhochhar, and of the Yele era (Kirat peoples)." According to Christian Jahoda (personal communication, Jan. 12, 2011), "Sonam Lhochhar" seems to correspond to Sonam Losar (T. *so nam lo gsar*), as is/was known for example in Ladakh, which is usually explained as "cultivators' New Year" and represents a "local" differentiation from the so-called 'King's New Year' (a New Year tradition associated with the royal Tibetan tradition of past periods). There are another two new years – the Muslim Hijiri and Tola Lhochhar – generally acknowledged but not having the status of official national holidays (Koirala 2010).

making, social inclusions and exclusions. Since rituals of power act as reservoirs of established meanings, values and norms, they are perfectly suited to turning into moments of crystallisation of political discontent, critique and challenge to social boundaries and exclusions.

It has also been my aim to demonstrate the substantial power inherent in the Dasain ritual to provide continuity in times of radical change. The critique, the challenges, even the partial fragmentation of Dasain ritual practice, has not really impeded the strength of this ritual complex. It has rather made it even stronger. It has provided inspiration to the performers of Lhosar while retaining great importance to the millions of the Nepalese Hindus – also numerous members of ethnic groups – who continue to celebrate Dasain. It is too early to prove this claim, but maybe it will evolve further now that it is losing the political-instrumental connotations. Anyone who has ever witnessed the Durga Puja celebrated in Kolkata (India) could see the importance of this ritual complex for expressing religiosity and in forging social bonds that would not be instrumentalised for political purposes. It may come as a surprise, but the Dasain performed in the seemingly traditionally oriented Himalayan world is a perfect example how dynamic the forces involved in rituals can be. The political practice can instigate conflicts in the embattled social worlds, but also offer orientations and forge new dimensions of belonging in today's reflexive modernity.

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CHRISTIAN JAHODA

Rituals between Conflict and Consensus: Case Studies of Village Festivals in Upper Kinnaur and Western Tibet[1]

INTRODUCTION

In October 2009 I asked an old villager in Pooh,[2] a Tibetan-speaking village in Upper Kinnaur[3] (see Fig. 1: map, p. 34) near the Tibetan border, about the participation of musicians in the upcoming celebration of the Sherken festival.[4] He said of these families – who by customary law were obliged to perform on the occasion of this and other festivals – that "only their bodies are still here, naked." What he meant was that the families, who are seen as belonging to a low caste by the dominant landowning population, were no longer willing to fulfil their customary obligatory social duties, as a consequence of which in his view they had lost all their dignity, and ties of cooperation with them were (to be) cut.

Similar accounts of growing tensions between the landowning population and groups of low caste musicians had also been reported before, in September 2009, in the neighbouring area of Spiti.[5] There, too, in some places families of musicians who, in contrast to Upper Kinnaur, make up only a small percentage of the total population had refused to perform for village festivals. I had noticed conflicts like this in Spiti and Upper Kinnaur since 1997, when I started my research there, but they seem to have become more aggressive and visible in the recent past and also to have extended to more remote areas.

On the other hand, in February 2010, in the course of field research in Western Tibet (in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China), the participation and full cooperation of musicians belonging to similar groups could be observed in the performance of an important monastic Buddhist festival in Khorchag[6] village in Purang county.[7] As in Spiti and in Upper Kinnaur, also in Western Tibet, these groups of musicians and blacksmiths are considered as "Rignen" or "low caste"[8] by the local Tibetan majority population of

[1] The research for this article was conducted within the framework of two research projects funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): "Oral and Festival Traditions of Western Tibet: Processes of Cultural Memory and Renewal" (P20637-G15) and "Society, Power and Religion in Pre-Modern Western Tibet: Interaction, Conflict and Integration" (P21806-G19). These projects are carried out under the direction of the author at the Institute for Social Anthropology, Centre for Studies in Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. For helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper I would like to thank Christiane Kalantari, Gabriela Kiliánová and Ernst Steinkellner.

[2] sPu in written Tibetan (WT.). Names of villages, administrative units, etc. are rendered according to the most common present spelling or according to the popular pronunciation. On the first occurrence, a transliteration of the most common variant(s) of spelling in written Tibetan is given (based on the transliteration scheme originally developed by Turrell Wylie). In addition, due to the fact that in some instances the Tibetan origin and etymology of words is unclear or doubtful, the phonetic transcription in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is also given on the basis of sound recordings made by Veronika Hein (collaborator in the Oral and Festival Traditions Project).

[3] WT. Khu nu.

[4] August Hermann Francke, a German Moravian missionary and since 1925 professor in the field of Tibetan studies in Berlin (see Jahoda 2007b: 362), to whom we owe one of the earliest published references to this festival, used Shar rgan as the version in written Tibetan (cf. Francke 1914: 20f.). See below the section *Sherken Festival in Pooh* for a discussion of the name of this festival.

[5] WT. sPyi ti, sPi ti, etc. in written Tibetan (cf. Jahoda, forthcoming b).

[6] WT. 'Khor chags. Also the variants Kho char, Kha char, Khwa char, etc. can be found. In publications by Western and Indian authors until the end of the 20th century, the name of this place (or the name of the monastery) was commonly rendered in an Indianised form as Khojarnath (see Jahoda and Papa-Kalantari 2009: 352).

[7] WT. sPu rang, also Pu rang, sPu hrengs, etc. Purang is one of the seven counties (*rdzong* in Tibetan) constituting the Ngari Prefecture (WT. mNga' ris sa khul) of the Tibet Autonomous Region of the PR China.

[8] WT. *rigs ngan*, literally "of bad descent", is also translated as "low birth or extraction" (Jaeschke 1881: 528) and in a more modern context, also reflecting the Tibetan diaspora in India, as "low birth, outcast, harijan" (Goldstein 1975: 1088). The word *rigs* carries a variety of meaning in Tibetan, for example, family, lineage, descent, tribe, race, nation, etc. It was and still is also a key term in descriptions of the social stratification of Tibetan society and in this sense appears to have been used also to express dif-

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