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Inter-Ethnic Dynamics in Asia

Considering the Other through ethnonyms, territories and rituals

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8 The illness is the other people

Cross-representations and ritual management of alterity and illness among the Kulung (Nepal)[1]

Grégoire Schlemmer

The Kulung – a small Himalayan population with an oral tradition – sometimes call in officiants from other groups for the performance of certain rituals.[2] These may be Brahmins (so members of this specific caste), sometimes invited by households to carry out the rituals for driving away evil influences (*graha-sânti* N), or for more prestigious rites such as that of cow-giving (*gâiko dân*). They may be Sherpa Lamas, for some Kulung go to Buddhist temples so that the Lamas will enable their dead to obtain advantages. They may also be 'shamans' (*jhânkri*); we shall talk about the latter again. The *other*, by virtue of his specific ritual skills, is therefore sometimes physically present at Kulung rituals. However, in the attempt to present this aspect of Kulung religious life, which combines the management of misfortune with the management of alterity, it is above all the question of the *other*'s presence in the narration and the staging of the ritual – a presence which occurs via certain spirits[3] connected to the other groups – which we should like to develop here. By showing the similarities between the ritual treatment of these spirits and the relations maintained with the groups from which they are said to come, we shall endeavour to show that the relationship with the *other* may be considered as being at the heart of Kulung ritual life.

For the following observations to be properly understood, it is necessary to present certain data concerning the population about whom we are going to speak.

The Kulung are a population of about 30,000 individuals. In their original settlement area they are divided into ten or so villages situated on the flat land of the Hongu valley, which opens onto the Everest massif, in eastern Nepal. They belong to the *Rai* ensemble, which consists of some twenty groups who tend to be endogamic, and each possesses its own territory and language (Thulung, Mewahang, Yamphu, etc.). Last, these various groups, along with the Sunuwar, the Limbu and a few other groups, are part of the *Kirant* ensemble. A former people of land-clearers and hunters, the Kulung today live off terrace cultivation of millet and corn and the rearing of poultry, pigs and cattle. Each village contains several localized clans, and though each localized clan is the main politico-ritual unit and superior to the house, each household (mostly composed of one nuclear family) has a strong sense of independence.

Isolated geographically, the Kulung community was for a long time independent of the Tibetan centres of power in the north, the Kathmandu valley Newar kingdoms and the Hindu kingdoms of the plain. However, the Kulung, like all the populations of what would become eastern Nepal, were gradually integrated into the Nepalese nation from the late eighteenth century onwards (Pradhan 1991). A large migratory flow of caste people (from the high Brahmin and Ksatrya castes to low-status members like the Blacksmiths and Tailors) and ethnic groups (Sherpa, Tamang, Gurung, etc.) in search of new lands moved into the eastern hills. Familiar with the law and possessing financial capital, some of these migrants gradually bought the land they were occupying from the Kirant who were in debt due to loans contracted. This is how many Kirant were dispossessed of their own lands and sometimes found themselves in a minority on them (Caplan 1970). Although, because of its altitude, its isolation and its steepness, the zone inhabited by the Kulung did not attract a large number of migrants, various populations nevertheless settled in the vicinity.

The Hinduism (and to a lesser extent the Buddhism) practised by these populations influenced Kulung religious conceptions and practices; we shall see that many rituals are performed in Nepali and are common to all the region's populations. However, the Kulung maintained their own particular socio-religious organization, the *ridum*, a term which literally means 'genealogy' and 'myth', but also refers to all the know-how inherited from the ancestors in order to manage relations with the multiplicity of invisible forces – the spirits – via the rites. Self-referential, a legitimate source of action, the *ridum* is performative speech which connects the present to the ancestors' world through the use of a special language, the *sumring*. In fact simply a glossary of complicated double-barrelled words, which is meant to be an archaic form of the Kulung language, this language will be called the 'ritual language'.

Ridum is ritualistic and pragmatic: for the Kulung, the rite is a technique which requires neither an inner attitude nor personal conviction. Its purpose is not any form of salvation, but rather the obtaining of immediate benefits: health, vitality, prosperity, etc. The rite involves, however, a certain representation of the world and structures, by its very performance, the whole of society (relations with the environment, social roles and status, accession to statuses of power, inter-ethnic relations...). It is thus through ritual action itself, in which everyone must participate, that these representations operate. Rites therefore form a central element of Kulung life. Each household performs some thirty a year, celebrated either by the head of the house or by ritual specialists (of which there are four main ones; it is the principal form of technical specialization).

The spirits of the others

'We do not make gods of our dead' a Buddhist Sherpa living in the highlands of the Kulung region said to us one day, in a critical tone, referring to the latters' practices. Indeed, among the Kulung, most of the 'gods' – which we prefer here to call 'spirits' – are said to be from the dead. But, unlike what this Sherpa

seemed to think, it is rarely a question of the dead from the group. When a Kulung dies, he is said to become – thanks to the cycle of funeral rituals – an ancestor, *khal*, who thus joins all the community's dead. Although the ancestors are benevolent and dispense prosperity to their descendants, they have lost all singularity. It is collectively that they are said to act. In the case of an individual who has died a bad death – that is to say, in theory, otherwise than at home of illness – burnt, hanged, drowned or, if a woman, in childbirth – the dead person's spirit, which is angry, will become a wandering spirit, an *ilwa*, one of the bad dead. Whilst he is then said to keep his individuality, in fact when a harmful action is attributed to one of the bad dead nobody attempts to identify which dead person is involved. The bad dead therefore also form, de facto, a collective group.

Most of the singularized spirits are thus not the spirits of the group's dead but are said to come from other human ensembles: other clans, other villages, other groups. These spirits – along with the bad dead, the forest spirits and sorcerers' spirits – belong to the broader category which can be called 'outside spirits' or 'wandering spirits'. These spirits are primarily defined by the fact that they have no fixed altar and by their non-integrated nature – which implies that the rituals addressed to them are expulsion rituals. Not to be integrated is not to be fed, and is therefore to be situated outside any regular exchange cycle. Envious, jealous, predatory, these spirits which are not fed are then said to make up for this lack themselves by feeding on the living – that is, by stealing their souls. Famished, solitary, desocialized, 'delocalized', these elements characterizing these outside spirits are a reminder that emotional and nutritional satiety stem from harmonious integration in the group. In this, therefore, these spirits contrast especially with the ancestors who represent the *same* and who, though they too come from the dead, are transformed into a positive force by a well-ordered gift of food which inscribes them in a socialization network (Schlemmer, forthcoming a).

There are not really any particular terms to indicate the wandering spirits, but a set of terms used in different ways: *cap*, *kuyamma-mayamma*, *mang* or, in Nepali, *bhût-prêt*, *jagitra*, *bâyu*. Although these terms are just so many variants for designating these spirits, there are nuances in their use. The term *mang* designates – like the Nepali one *bhût-prêt* – spirits in a generic sense. When the Kulung are asked the meaning of the term *mang*, out of any context, they frequently translate it into Nepali as *bimar*, 'illness'. This translation which confuses spirit and illness (or this metonymy which designates the effect by the cause) illustrates well the negative aspect associated with the spirit world. But the term *mang* – like those of *jagitra* and *bâyu* – is also employed in a more specific manner to designate individualized spirits. *Mang* therefore evokes a specific category of the dead (they have a particular history), puts the emphasis on their harmful aspect (illness) but does not describe their 'nature'. For, if asked what these spirits are, people reply that they are *cap*. *Cap* (or *kuyamma-mayamma* in ritual language) designates first the dead person's transitory state, before he becomes a pacified ancestor, *khal*, but this term is also employed to designate the non-integrated dead who are not bad dead but are characterized by the fact

they are individualized, like those spirits from other groups about whom we are going to speak. The transitory state of the dead person seems therefore, in certain cases, to go on indefinitely, thus maintaining his individuality, which does not dissolve into the anonymous mass of the collective dead.

If there is no one term for these spirits from other groups, it is not really possible either to make a list of them, for they form an open, fluctuating ensemble. However, it is possible, by observing the rituals, to separate them into two categories which are, to use a formal criterion, those whose ritual is performed in 'ritual language' and those whose ritual is performed in Nepali.[4] It is to be noted, nonetheless, that intermediate cases exist which prompt one not to insist too strongly on this distinction.

The spirits whose ritual is performed in ritual language are said to be spirits of the dead from other Kirant clans, villages or groups: this is the case for the spirit Dunima who was a Khaling Rai woman; for Mamang, the daughter of a Rai man and a Sherpa woman; for Shampulomo, the spirit of a man from the Walakham clan; for Gem, the spirit of a Sotang Rai man, etc. Some of these spirits go so far as to take the actual name of these groups – for example, the names of the spirits Yamphumang and Limbumang (or Limbuwan) are derived from 'Yamphu' and 'Limbu', two Kirant groups and the suffix *mang*. Even more than just associated with the dead of the groups from which they are said to come, these spirits seem then to be a kind of personification of the dangerous alterity intrinsically linked to these *others*, combined in the same alterity.

These dead have a specific name, and a particular history is attributed to them which is meant to have been theirs and survives them. Often frustrated by unsatisfied desires and having died a violent death (like Dunima, hanged, or Mamang, in childbirth[5]), these spirits have manifested themselves to humans by subjecting them to incessant illness; the latter have then tried to appease them by worshipping them. But although these spirits are characterized by their own particular history, the details of this history do not really interest the Kulung. They tend to refer anyone who might want to know more about these histories to the groups from which these spirits are said to come. The Kulung acknowledge that these spirits may be important among the populations from which they are said to originate, that they are perhaps the object of periodic rituals there, but what counts above all else, in their eyes, is that these spirits only bring them problems.

The spirits needing the Nepali language for the ritual intended to ward them off and who all have Nepali names are also multiple. Into this group can be included 'the Black Spirit', Khâlo Bhût; the 'Trochus Spirit', Rângko Bhût; 'the headless Spirit', Murkuta; the *kiskandi* and the *chudel*, which are kinds of vampires; and finally, the *bâyu*, wandering spirits of the dead, and the *masân*, wandering spirits of the cremation grounds. The Kulung present the *masân* as being evil spirits from the Indo-Nepalese dead (and particularly from members of the Blacksmith caste[6]); the Indo-Nepalese cremate their dead, whereas the Kulung, like all Kirant, bury them. This link between other groups and wandering spirits is also manifest in the incantatory speech made in a rite to ward off evil

spirits and which mentions the: 'female demons/sorceresses[7] (*dankini*) [from the castes of] Blacksmiths, Tailors (Damai), Tamang, Brahmins and Ksatrya', that is all the castes of the region – the Sherpa seem to have been forgotten by the reciter – with the notable exception of the Rai and the Kirant.

The different spirits from the other groups can therefore be put into two large ensembles that could perhaps be described as spirits of Kirant origin and spirits of Indo-Nepalese origin, or as 'Kirant spirits' and 'Indo-Nepalese spirits'. However, one must be careful not to attach too much importance to this terminology, which is not the Kulung's. For we have mentioned that the notion of Kirant unity is recent (see Chapter 2 in this volume), and we shall also note that spirits from partly Buddhist populations who speak a language belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family, such as the Tamang, are included in this category of 'Indo-Nepalese spirits'. It therefore seems to us that this is more a distinction between spirits of long-established populations (the Kirant) and spirits from populations who have been present for a shorter time (mainly the Indo-Nepalese). But let us for the moment, to make language simpler, retain this categorization, while bearing in mind its limits and being aware that this distinction is above all based on the analysis of the rituals addressed to these spirits, which we must now present.

Ritual

As each kind of spirit is the recipient of a ritual with its own peculiarities, it is not possible, in the context of this article, to describe them all in detail. Therefore, we shall content ourselves here with the general framework to which they can be reduced. In doing so, we shall endeavour to show the similarities and differences existing between the rituals in Nepali and those in ritual language, notably in what concerns the spatiality in which they are inscribed and the forms of material representations they involve (or not). Let us also point out that all rituals addressed to these spirits take place because of an illness or on divinatory prescription. They are not regular, and they have a remedial purpose. The ritual consists in appeasing these spirits with a gift of food, then driving them away and bringing back the souls they may have stolen from the sick person. Finally, it must be noted that the officiants who carry out these rituals are not necessarily specialists. Any elder who knows the ritual can perform it, even if those who know the procedure are not actually very numerous and are, in fact, generally shamans.

The rituals performed in ritual language take place in the house, or in the yard outside the house if it is a short form of the ritual which is involved (for example, if the illness is mild). When these rituals are carried out in the yard, the ritual elements are reduced to a minimum: a piece of bamboo serving as a beaker and a branch of artemisia are enough. In the house, the altar is limited to articles of food (uncooked rice, boiled corn, buckwheat, etc.) and their recipients (containers for beer, winnowing baskets or other woven trays on which to put the food, etc.). These rituals therefore do not involve representations of the spirits as such.

In order to drive away the spirits, the officiant makes a ritual journey which retraces in the opposite direction the path that the latter are said to have taken. This ritual journey (*natabom*) is one of the characteristic elements of these rituals. It consists in the recitation of a series of place names (which are said to be so many 'resting' or 'encampment' places) that form a route leading to the place of origin of these alien dead so as to send spirits and misfortunes back there. The place names of most of the ritual journeys can be located on a map, ritual geography being superimposed on known geography (however, with the exception of the journey which takes place towards the south of the valley and is said to retrace the ancestors' route, these journeys do not correspond to routes particularly used by the Kulung). To make this journey, the officiant sits behind the sick person, who is facing a door (through which the spirits must be made to leave) or the journey's destination. At various moments, the officiant throws handfuls of food offerings onto the latter's back. Once the destination has been reached, the officiant uses incantations to imprison the spirit behind a 'double spirit barrier' (*bacikhapkher-kuyakhapkher*), sometimes sacrifices a chicken (which is then killed with a blow to the head), and exhorts the spirit never again to leave the place where he now is. Then the officiant leaves in the opposite direction, while mentioning in the reverse order all the place names which marked the stages of his outward journey and driving, like a shepherd, all the lost souls before him. To miss a stage in the recitation would be to run the risk of leaving souls there. When he arrives home, the ritual is over. The altar is then taken down: the recipients are put away, and the remains of the altar (leaves, food for the spirit) are left a short distance away from the house. If the ritual has involved a sacrifice, the animal is eaten. However, this is not a ritualized communion meal: the animal is reduced to the state of meat and does not possess the powers associated with the spirit (or if he does, these powers are negative: some say that eating this meat can be dangerous and forbid it to children).

Let us now describe the rituals performed in Nepali. Their altars are generally built near a stream which will enable the evacuation of the evil influences carried by the spirits who are being addressed.[8] The altars involve stones called by the Nepali (N) term *sthâpanâ* (which literally means 'to fix', 'to establish', 'to found'), or little statuettes, in clay or dung, called *naksâ* (N, drawing, diagram) crudely fashioned for the occasion. To these different forms of spirit representations other elements are always added: a leaf plate for the offerings, a small flag, some vermilion, an incense stone, etc. The officiant sits facing the altar, next to the patient. He begins to recite the ritual incantations by announcing the time and place of the rite, naming the spirits concerned and the reason for the ritual, and by asking the spirits to return the stolen souls, in good health, in exchange for the various offerings present intended for them. During the flow of incantations, the officiant takes the chicken and dedicates the animal offered using beer and grains of rice taken from the spirits' plates, which he pours over and rubs into the animal's backbone. Then he cuts the chicken's throat, freeing the animal's breath, and lets the blood run out abundantly (this is literally a 'blood offering', *rakta dân*, N). The officiant aims this flow of blood towards the altar,

thus delighting the spirits who are said to be greedy for it. Once the sacrifice has been made, the souls can be called back (this operation, which involves a component of the person's identity, is always performed in ritual language, even if it is a ritual in Nepali). Thus summoned, the souls are then said to come of their own accord to the altar: the officiant peers into the invisible world and, with a swift gesture, catches them in his fist and forces them back into the body of their owner by 'making him eat' them. After this operation, there is a short pause during which the sacrificed animal is cooked. This done, the second part of the ritual begins. It takes place in almost exactly the same manner as the first but involves, in addition, offerings of pieces of the sacrificed animal, which are placed on the spirits' plates. When the ritual is over, the altar is not taken down but abandoned. As long as it remains standing, people will avoid coming near the place. As for the sacrificial meat, it must be eaten on the spot for, it is said, that the outside spirits' left-overs (*jhuto* N, the 'impurities') must not be taken into the house; eating them can also be dangerous.

Let us now look at what links and what distinguishes these rituals. In the rituals in ritual language, as in those performed in Nepali, the aim is to cast out and drive away the evil influences from the patients' bodies with a gift of food which is clearly seen as a substitution. In Nepali, the formula is expressed as follows: 'Today, we, humans, in exchange for the body, a body has been given, in exchange for breath, breath has been given' (*jiuka badali, jiu dieko cha, sâska botli, sâs dieko cha*). In ritual language this is summarized in the expression *tobuphaim-ririphaim*, literally 'body to exchange'. During the dedication procedure (*repcham* in Kulung) performed in the two types of ritual, the grains (or the sacrificial animal itself) are brought into contact with the body of the ritual's beneficiaries on the aim of 'driving out' (*galm* K) the illnesses from their body (and sending them into the animal?), but also of marking the identity of the rite's beneficiaries for the spirit to whom it is being offered. When the sacrifice has been made, it is then possible to 'summon the souls' (*law kachom* K, *sâto bolâune* N) which the spirits have stolen and to bring them back during the ritual journey.[9] Among the elements differentiating the two types of rituals, it will be noted that in the rituals performed in ritual language, the altar – which does not involve any representation – is built on the patient's place of residence and the spirit is brought back through a ritual journey. In the case of rituals in Nepali, the altar goes to the spirit so to speak. It is no longer made in the house or the yard but outside, in the kind of place inhabited by the spirit. Therefore, a ritual journey is no longer involved. We are already, as it were, on its territory. The spirit is then materialized there by a stone or a figurine as if the ritual, since it does not use a ritual journey to bring back the spirit which manifested itself by illness in the sick person's body, exteriorizes it in this stone, as if to reduce its invasive presence.

The arrival and pacification of the spirits

All these 'Kirant' and 'Indo-Nepalese' spirits are wandering spirits and are worshipped outside. It is said that, formerly, this was the case for all spirits. But by

dint of making humans ill and of therefore having sacrifices offered to them repeatedly, certain spirits ended up being the object of a regular cult, materialized in a permanent worshipping place. Fixing a spirit means giving him a place, but also the guarantee he will periodically find something to eat there. It is therefore both the sign and the source of the contractual relationship between humans and spirits. This is how, it would seem, the Kulung gradually moved from a temporary, conflictual exchange with certain spirits to a lasting, beneficial relationship. Thus, the fact of being worshipped periodically – and having therefore a permanent altar – raises the spiritual being concerned from the status of spirit, *bhût*, to that of (virtual) divinity, *deutâ*. An elder explained to me that 'the spirits are all dead people, all *bhût*', reminding us of our Sherpa interlocutor's words, but he added: 'it is by worshipping them [regularly that] we made divinities of them'. Let us take a more detailed look at how the rituals to these pacified spirits work, taking into account that, once again, the way of fixing and pacifying the spirits differs according to whether they are 'Kirant spirits' or 'Indo-Nepalese spirits'.

The pacified 'Kirant spirits' were accommodated in the house. This is the case for the Wayome, Dolemkhu, Sitakau, Tamsoborn spirits, etc. They went so far as to occupy the body of the sacrificers.[10] The rites the Kulung celebrate to them have many characteristics in common with those performed for the wandering 'Kirant spirits', but they also show differences. Most of these rites no longer involve a ritual journey. If they do, the ritual journey's objective is the search for vitality and wealth, and in this case it takes place in a northern direction where the primordial source *Yowna* is to be found, a place of prosperity. For these spirits are said now to live on the spot; they are house spirits. They are not exactly located within the house: the whole house is their temple. These spirits, unlike wandering spirits, also have objects attributed to them. These are mainly recipients for beer, reserved for their cult, and when the rite is over the recipient which has been used to contain the offerings of cereals is left in place, a sign of their permanent presence in the walls of the dwelling. The meats and the leftover cooked cereals will then be eaten by the participants. This ritualized communion meal is called by the Nepali term *prasad*: 'offering made to the divinities', 'grace', 'favour', 'indulgence'.

'Indo-Nepalese spirits' – such as Aithabare, the Nag, the Devi, etc. – have also been pacified. They are then fixed by altars situated not in the house but in the village, where periodic and collective rituals are performed in Nepali. Nothing, either in their altar or in the rites addressed to them, is really different from the rites addressed to the wandering spirits (the incantations and requests are virtually identical), apart from the fact their altar is fixed. It is less the space itself than the ritual space which counts, and the existence of a permanent support stone. This stone, then called *mandir*, 'temple', and not anymore *sthâpanâ*, no longer resumes its role as a stone once the rite is over. It remains definitively in place, and the altar area can be marked by a low stone wall which forms, like the four walls of the house, the spirit's habitat. These spirits, with definitively fixed altars, are then the objects of neighbourhood, even regional, cults aimed at obtaining the benefits they are supposed to dispense.

A way of managing alterity

Whether they be wandering or fixed, we have seen that 'Indo-Nepalese spirits' and 'Kirant spirits' are conceived of differently and receive distinct cults. It seems to us that a parallel can be drawn between this differential form of treatment and the type of inscription in geopolitical space of the groups from which they are said to originate and, more generally, with the kind of relationship they have with these *others* from whom they are said to come.

Contacts between the localized clans, between the villages or between the Kulung and the other Rai and Kirant groups were for a long time few, and took place when they moved around (hunting, trade, religious meetings) and sometimes also in marriages with women from these other groups. For it is said that the spirits who are the objects of rituals in ritual language were brought into the village by women from other groups, and that they then 'struck' the men of the group in which these women settled after marriage. It is, therefore, in the form of illnesses that they are thought to have been 'caught'. So people try to appease these spirits by feeding them and to send them back home by telling the path leading there. 'Kirant spirits' can thus be seen as the manifestation of the other groups' alterity and ambivalence. For women, whether they come from another group or another clan, are people from outside the group formed by the patriclan. As foreign bodies in the unit of filiation, they represent a danger. However, wives, like these spirits, are necessary for the renewal and the prosperity of the group in question. Thus, when a father marries one of his sons and a new wife enters the household, it is said that, with this woman, prosperity – in the form of 'flowers' (*bung* K) – enters the home. Women, once they have become part of their husband's group, therefore constitute a positive element for the latter. Likewise, certain spirits subsequently received a ritual, that is to say a periodic gift of food which transformed them into beneficial elements and they became guardian spirits of the house and its inhabitants. They were then inherited, by men as by women, and thus also became ancestor spirits. While it is not possible to draw a direct parallel between the circulation of such spirits and marriage with such women,[11] it is, however, possible to draw a parallel with the ambiguous relationship to alterity represented by these 'outsiders' in the form of the women and these spirits seen as both potentially dangerous and beneficial.

Unlike the Kirant groups, who are territorialized, the Indo-Nepalese migrated in more or less large groups throughout the Kirant region and settled near, even in, Rai villages. On the other hand, in accordance with the caste system, there are no marriages between people of different castes, *a fortiori* between the Kulung and the Indo-Nepalese. No spirit can, therefore, be transmitted by women. However, they can be transmitted by the places occupied by the Indo-Nepalese or associated with them (the river banks used as cremation grounds or for other purposes). As we saw, in the ritual treatment of the spirits who are spoken to in Nepali, there is no longer any question of a ritual journey, for these spirits, like the Indo-Nepalese, are already present on the territory. It seems, therefore, that the introduction of these spirits into Kulung religious life accom-

panied the Indo-Nepalese migrants' progression and their settlement in the Kulung region. Whatever the case, in the rituals addressed to the fixed 'Indo-Nepalese spirits' we can see a process of inscription, on the Kulung's part, in an Indo-Nepalese universe and the birth of the village as a multi-ethnic entity. The rites addressed to the Nepalese spirits are in fact the only rites which are capable of mobilizing all the village residents: every member of the village, even if from another group, takes part in them. Unlike the collective rituals addressed to the ancestors which mark territorial anchorage via alliance, these rites therefore mark territorial anchorage via residence. Similarly, while the fixed 'Kirant spirits' are only present in the same ethnic group, the fixed 'Indo-Nepalese spirits' are regional spirits who transcend ethnic frontiers: their cults are found among many groups in all eastern Nepal, even beyond. The Kulung villages and their inhabitants are thus inscribed in the broader regional, even national, ensemble.

To sum up, the successful pacification of the 'Kirant spirits' involves their integration into domestic space, of which they then become an integral part, and whose prosperity, like women, they ensure (as formerly was also the case for political power which necessitated the elaboration of a network of relations via marriage relatives; Sagant 1981). As for the successful pacification of the 'Indo-Nepalese spirits', this involves them being fixed in the village. These *other* forces are integrated into public space – like the members of the Blacksmith caste who work for the Kulung. Thus, the village community, which becomes multi-ethnic, is integrated into a broader socio-political ensemble, the Nepalese nation. 'Kirant spirits' and 'Indo-Nepalese spirits' would seem to represent two figures of alterity – each having two facets, according to whether they are wandering spirits, non-pacified and dangerous, or fixed, benign spirits that are concerned – which inscribe the Kulung in a larger human community while reflecting the ambivalence of the relationship to the *other*.

The shaman, on the border between the other and the same

To conclude, let us return to the other's possible physical presence in the ritual, by looking at the case of the shaman, this specialist of disorder who manages relations with the predatory forces of alterity that manifest themselves concretely in illness. What is particular about the case of the shaman among the Kulung is that the functions attributed to this officiant – unlike all other religious functions – can be assumed by a member of another group.

It appears that the characteristics of the different spirits we have presented, such as their connection with exteriority and alterity, can help us to understand this fact, and also why certain rituals carried out by the shaman are performed in Nepali. For the prestige of a shaman from another group, just like that of a travelling shaman who learned his trade outside his community, seems to depend on the fact that, as illnesses come from outside and from other groups, he must be acquainted with this alterity and know a great many foreign remedies. We then understand why a foreign shaman is just as good as a Kulung shaman. We

also understand better why the rituals linked to some of these outside spirits take place in the language of the groups from which they are said to come and which is the language of exteriority *par excellence:* the Nepali language.[12]

Struggling against forces seen as transcending ethnic borders and having no other obligation than that of results, it seems understandable that the shamans of the region's different groups influence each other, each one adopting the techniques of his neighbour if these have proved efficient. Everything takes place as if in the presence of a desire, or at least a predisposition, to mix traditions. This is perhaps how the pan-Nepalese figure of the *jhankri* (N) shaman came into being. From Sikkim to central Nepal, this term is used to designate the shamans who come from different groups but who wear a similar costume, use comparable techniques and share the same set of religious references. It seems vain to try to find a single origin for this officiant figure, which would have been a centre for diffusion towards other groups.[13] Being neither an archaism, nor an inheritance from an 'Asian' or 'autochthonous background', nor the result of a 'Hindu influence', the *jhankri* would seem to have originated from the permanent interaction between the different ethnic groups and the symbiosis of their local traditions. What could at first sight be interpreted as mere borrowing resulting from an acculturation phenomenon – whether it be of spirit figures, ritual techniques, the use of Nepali or characters like the *jhankri* – must therefore, we believe, be understood according to a particular logic of the conceptions of what concerns misfortune and the management of alterity.

Notes

1 This chapter was written from data collected during field work in 2002 and 2006 in the Hongu valley in Nepal. The first mission, undertaken in the context of my thesis, was financed thanks to a research grant allocated to the LESC (Paris X, Nanterre). It was possible to finance the second mission thanks to the financial support of the Louis Dumont foundation, whom I thank here. I also thank V. Bouté, G. Rozenberge and B. Schlemmer for their comments. The terms in foreign languages are in italics. A 'K' indicates that it is a Kulung term and an 'N' a Nepali term. In this chapter, I will use a simplified form of Nepali transcription: long vowels are specified with a circumflex accent, diacritic signs are not specified. There is no official transcription from Kulung, and mine should be taken simply as an indication. The names of groups are transcribed without any accent, and are invariable except when they are translated by a function (the Blacksmiths, the Brahmins).

2 The mountain populations of Nepal, the country in which the Kulung live, can be roughly divided into three cultural ensembles. The first are the Indo-Nepalese populations, Hindus divided into high castes (Brahmins and Ksatrya who control the country) and low castes (Blacksmiths, etc.), who constitute more than half the population and who are spread all over the country. The second are the populations of Tibetan culture, Buddhists who live in the high mountain zones formed by the northern fringe of the country (Sherpa, Tamang, Bhotiya, etc.). The third are the 'tribal' populations, who generally speak languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese family and who occupy the centre and the east of the 'hills', or middle mountain zones (Limbu, Rai, Sunuwar, Magar, Gurung, etc.); they have their own religious practices (with, nonetheless, interactions with Buddhism and/or Hinduism), sometimes described as 'animist'.

3 By 'spirits' we shall designate here all the personalized spiritual forces (including the ancestors, the bad dead, wandering spirits, etc.). Though the Kulung use different categories to designate them, they themselves sometimes group them together under the term *bhût-deutâ*, and it appears to us pertinent, notably because these entities can only be considered with regard to each other, to class them all together under one and the same term.

4 Nepali is a language belonging to the Indo-European family (like English), whereas Kulung belongs to the family of Tibeto-Burmese languages. Nepali is the Indo-Nepalese populations' language and the *lingua franca* of Nepal. Although Kulung women and children speak it badly (if at all), men generally speak and understand it well. Most of the ritual speeches made in Nepali by the Kulung were probably taken from the region's Indo-Nepalese populations; this would explain in particular the wealth of the vocabulary used in these incantations.

5 However, these spirits are not designated as being those people who have died a bad death, *ilwa*; it must be remembered that the Kulung bad dead, unlike those of whom we are speaking here, are not individualized: they go to join the troop of harmful spirits and have neither an individual name nor their own history.

6 The particular link established between these spirits and Blacksmiths can be understood by two connected factors: Blacksmiths (present even in the remotest corners of Nepal, like in the upper Hongu valley, where they constitute the only permanent Indo-Nepalese community) form a low status caste, and the pejorative association of this caste with the evil spirits represented by the *masân* reflects the contempt with which they are regarded; moreover, Blacksmiths are associated, perhaps because of their link with the telluric world, with dangerous, infernal forces and also with the Black Spirit, who is said to be a blacksmith. For an analysis of this ritual, see Schlemmer (forthcoming b).

7 For the Kulung, the sorcerer category is quite close to that of wandering spirits: in both cases they are invisible forces, non-integrated and uncontrolled, created by unsatisfied desires, which have the power to make humans, the objects of their envy, ill.

8 This spot can, however, be near the houses. The Kulung habitat is semi-dispersed – while houses are generally quite close to each other (twenty or thirty metres apart), they are nonetheless dotted about the fields and there is no real village space strictly speaking: outside the four walls of the house, one is already in the outside space.

9 The notion of *law*, which we translate for the sake of convenience by 'soul', has nothing to do with conscience, nor even with thought or emotions. The Kulung conceive of souls (for humans have several) as kinds of active elements which animate the body, enabling it to move and act. Souls form a somewhat obscure and abstract reality for the Kulung, who usually only ever refer to this notion in the case of a problem – that is to say, when they are thought to be absent. For souls are more or less independent of the bodies they inhabit and can leave them, after a fright, a fall or when, having left the body to wander about and play, they are captured by a spirit. Souls therefore seem above all to be seen as a form of human energy used as food by the spirits. Finally, let us note there is no connotation of wrong associated with the loss of souls: like prey, they are captured by spirits looking for food.

10 For it is said that a spirit who is periodically worshipped will in the end live in the person's body, on his shoulders. It should be noted that this idea of a spirit living in people's bodies (which is also found in the Tibetan world, Stein 1987: 139, 153) has nothing to do with possession. It is less a matter of the spirits' incarnation than of a kind of lack of distinction between the spirit and the power they are supposed to bring to the individuals who worship them; the spirit here becomes a synonym for life force.

11 Marriages tend to be as close as possible (in accordance with the rules of exogamy, that is, within one's own clan, after seven generations and outside the clan of one's mother, grandmother and great grandmother). Thus, though there is a Yamphu spirit, we have never heard of a marriage with a Yamphu woman.

12 It should be noted, however, that there is wandering spirit said to be of Sherpa origin whose ritual should ideally be done in this group's language; it is therefore the idea of performing the ritual in the supposed language of the spirit's origin which counts. However, as few Kulung speak this language, people from this community are called on to perform this ritual or, failing that, the ritual takes place in Nepali; here we find the idea that Nepali does indeed represent, generically, the exterior language.

13 The diffusion hypothesis is problematic; the absence of a figure like the *jhankri* in western Nepal, a zone mainly inhabited by the Indo-Nepalese, makes it difficult to envisage the hypothesis of an Indo-Nepalese origin for the *jhankri* figure. It is just as difficult to imagine that the *jhankri* figure came from one particular ethnic group before later spreading to all the other groups in the region.

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