

# DEATH DIVINATION WITHIN A NON-DELUSIONAL MYTH: *THE PROCESSION OF THE DEAD* FROM THE ALPS TO HIMALAYAS...WHEN A THEORIA OF “PHANTOM-BODIES” MEETS ITS NEURAL VERIDICTION THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

One of the avatars of the *Return of the Dead* occurs in Europe as their *Procession*. It is attributed to the so-called Birth of the Purgatory in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries, which reinvested older cohorts of “*Phantom-Bodies*”, say the *Wild Hunt*. Related to this “*theoria*”, motif D1825.7.1. *Person sees phantom funeral procession some time before the actual procession takes place*, is endowed with D1825.6.: *Magic power to “see” who will die during coming year*. In spite of their disbelief in the Purgatory, Protestant countries, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Germany, England, etc., currently meet this *Procession of the Dead* (compare *Totenprozession*, in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, 13, 820, which forgot more Southern Romance Processions). As precursors of the Reformation (since the 12th-13th century), Waldensians were more efficient in wiping out revenants from their Refuge in the Piedmont Alps. As for India, except an indexing by Thompson and Balys

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(1958) for a pair of narratives, there was nothing else available. Present fieldwork in Hindu and shamanistic Nepal elicited new data, including ones with death divination. And the least surprising was not that Tibeto-Burman Newar tradition made of the five Hindu male *Pandavas* a cultural melting “*theoria*” of five malevolent female spirits, the *Panchabhāya*, which meets Tibetan *Dākinis*. All these *Phantom-Bodies’ Processions* were not considered as delirium, but as non-delusional reports, as neurally real as *phantom limbs*. The BRAINCUBUS model framework offers *an interface between Folkloristics and Neuroscience*, a theory allowing the grounding of such *over-intuitive experience-centered* narratives, giving fair prevalence, worldwide, to the “4th brain state” diagnosed as *sleep paralysis*.

**Keywords:** Procession of the Dead, divination, phantom bodies Theory, Alps, Himalaya, Nepal, Tibet

In *Aurélia*, Gérard de Nerval retells a well-known German tradition: every man has a double and, at the time he sees it, death is coming<sup>1</sup>. This tradition highlights a particular supernatural skill: the capacity to predict the exact time of the oncoming death of an embodied person by the vision of her “*phantom*” *body*. The specificity of this experience in the narrative heritage of humankind is identified in *EM*<sup>2</sup> (13, 726-731, *Todesprophezeiungen*) and *ATU*<sup>3</sup> tale-types 934 *Tales of the Predestinated Death* (sqq.). By a series of motifs in Thompson<sup>4</sup>, from the general D1825.1., *Second sight. Power to see the future happenings*, to this one, closer to our topic: when *Person of remarkable sight can see the soul* (F642.7.), with the exact *Foreknowledge of hour of death* (D1812.0.1.; see also for the time span D1825.6. *Magic power to “see” who will die during coming year*).

In this contribution, while exploring the involvement of *death divination* in different alpine cultural domains, from the Gallo-romance/French-speaking Alps to the Newari/Nepali-speaking Himalayas, we take advantage of an approach combining neuro-cognitive psychology and field ethnography of storytelling (from Cathiard *et*

1 Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia...*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. 130.

2 *EM*= Kurt Ranke, Wilhelm Rolf Brednich et al. *Enzyklopädie des Märchens. Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*. De Gruyter, Berlin, 1975-2014.

3 *ATU*= Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, 3 vol. (Part I–III), *Folklore Fellow Communications*, No. 284–286, Helsinki, 2011 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2004).

4 Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of folk-literature: A classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends*, revised and enlarged, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & London, 1966.

*al.*<sup>5</sup> to Cathiard<sup>6</sup>, Cathiard and Armand<sup>7</sup>, and Armand<sup>8</sup>, see **Addendum**). Among collected data we focus our analysis on “experience-centred” narratives, according to Hufford<sup>9</sup>, a subset of “belief” narratives, since our main concern is to preserve the most significant correlates of such experiential reports with the neural bases that are at their source. Hence these narratives are approached in a shared *non-delusional* stance, without considering them as outcomes of deliration, taking advantage of the specific *sleep paralysis imaginarium*, a *dissociated* state of the brain, with a fair amount of prevalence (up to 40%), where one can experience similar *phantom body* visions.

As a test case, we start with the folk avatars of the dogmatic Catholic belief in Purgatory, as the basis of the implication for our topic of death divination within the myth of *the Procession of the Dead* (E491), a mediaeval Catholic *remythification* of the Wild Hunt (E501), settled more broadly within the *return of the Dead*. This narrative is well known to be present in German-speaking Alps as summarised in *HDA*<sup>10</sup> 6 (805), under *Nachtvolk*, *Nachtschar*. In spite of *EM* general scope, the recent *Totenprozession* entry (*EM* 13, 820) relied mainly on the German domain, mentioning Savoy and Provence, forgetting Italian Alps, for France, Brittany, Pyrenees, Corsica,

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- 5 Marie-Agnès Cathiard, Nicolas Abry and Christian Abry, “Our Brain as an Incubus Incubator for the core folktypes of supernatural ontologies: From the mammalian sleep paralysis *sensorium* to human *imaginaire* in its biodiversity”, *TricTrac, Journal of World Mythology and Folklore*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 3-19.
  - 6 Marie-Agnès Cathiard, “Et il fallut attendre le début de ce XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle pour que deux intuitions fondamentales, de Jung et Bachelard, inspireurs du CRI naissant, se conjuguent en corps neural”, In Ana Tais Martins Portanova Barros (Ed.), *A Teoria Geral do Imaginário 50 anos depois: conceitos, noções, metáforas*. II Congresso Internacional da rede CRI2i (IIème Congrès International du Centre de Recherches Internationales sur l’Imaginaire), Porto Alegre, Brasil (29 e 30 de outubro de 2015), Imaginalis, 2015, pp. 278-306.
  - 7 Marie-Agnès Cathiard and Fabio Armand, “BRAINCUBUS. Vers un modèle anthropologique neurocognitif transculturel pour les “fantômes” de l’imaginaire”, in Patrick Pajon et Cathiard Marie-Agnès (dir.), *Les imaginaires du cerveau*, Intercommunications & Editions Modulaires Européennes, Fernelmont, 2014, pp. 53-87.
  - 8 Fabio Armand, *Paroles des Alpes et de l’Himalaya. Essai de psychologie intuitive sur une anthropologie des ontologies fantastiques dans deux imaginaires narratifs en milieu alpin. Entre Vallée d’Aoste et Népal*, Thèse de doctorat en anthropologie, psychologie et sciences du langage, de l’Université Grenoble-Alpes en co-tutelle (JointPhD) avec l’Università degli Studi di Torino, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 2016.
  - 9 David J. Hufford, *The terror that comes in the night. An experience-centered study of supernatural assault traditions*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1982.
  - 10 *HDA*= Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli and Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1927-1942.

and for Spain, Galicia, Asturias<sup>11</sup>. We analyse this myth in contrast with the *pre-Reformation* principled non-belief attitude of the Piedmontese *Waldensians*, who survived preaching against such predictions, in the same Gallo-romance speaking alpine region. Notice that the *Mass of the Dead* (E492. *Mass (church service) ...*; *ML*<sup>12</sup> 4015, in *The Migratory Legends* by Reidar Christiansen initiated for Norway) is told both in Catholic and in post-Reformation areas of Europe (see *Geistmesse* in *HDA* 3, 535, and *EM* 5, 933). These alpine European attitudes have to be compared to the ambient practice of *moksha* in Nepal Himalayas. And we succeed in enhancing the scarce documentation available up to now (which starts essentially from Thompson and Balys, 1958: D1825.7.1. *Person sees phantom funeral procession some time before the actual procession takes place*), demonstrating that the narrative setting, where such a prediction occurs, is definitely known both in Europe and India. More internally our fieldwork feedback in Nepal shamanism indicates that the homologue procession, called *Panchabhāya*, is deeply embedded at the meeting (melting) point of Indo-Tibetan traditions within Tibeto-Burman Newar heritage.

## PURGATORY AND THE CATHOLIC FOLK BELIEF IN THE PROCESSION OF THE DEAD

The concept of Purgatory grounds the development of folk Catholic belief in the *Procession of the Dead*. Jacques Le Goff<sup>13</sup> has written a remarkable study on the birth of Purgatory and its imaginarium, tracking the rise of this concept in the history of Catholic religion. He traced the genesis of Purgatory to as recently as the 12th century, when the existence of a purgatorial fire (*ignis as poenae purgatoriae*) and the effectiveness of the prayers for the Dead were dogmatised. The development of the concept of Purgatory as an intermediate place was accompanied by an attempt to find a geographical location in contrast with the two opposed traditional after-life conditions, hell and heaven. The Catholic Church recognised and formalised the existence of this institution only in the second half of the 13th century. Another important feature concerning a new reflection of life in the Otherworld was implemented: the connection between human behaviour in this life and the punishment of bad actions after death. This innovation assumed an important status

11 These four last regions have to be added here to the other *EM* oversights mentioned in the alpine synthesis by Christian Abry, “Sur les traces des sentiers des âmes dans les outre-monts. In *memoriam* Gaston Tuaille”, in *Nouvelles du Centre d’Etudes Francoprovençales*, Saint-Nicolas (Aoste, Italie), vol. 64, 2011, pp. 56-70. We discussed the elements of this introduction with Hans-Jörg Uther, Editor at *EM*, who helped us kindly in tracking what could be tracked from catalogues, more scarce for India than for Europe.

12 *ML*= Reidar Thoraf Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends: a proposed list of types with a systematic catalogue of Norwegian variants*, FF Communications n. 175, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki, 1958.

13 Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981.

in the development of a “sale” of indulgences, and the prayers of the living became crucial for the salvation of the deceased.

The development of this new otherworldly communication between the living and the dead represents the basis from which sprang the belief in the Procession of the Dead. In fact, if the prayers were not enough to support salvation, the dead could appear and request them from the living. It is possible to evaluate the individual experiential effects of this relational breach in some alpine narratives, which recount the double life of *la guida*. In Piedmont, *la guida dei morti* (grammatical feminine gender for both male and female leaders) is able, when recognising a person in the Procession, to foresee precisely the day and hour of death – either that of the *guida* or that of a village neighbour. This is the mediator between the two worlds who leads, in the evening, the prayers of the Rosary for the Dead and, in the night, helps the procession to cross rivers by stretching her/his body as an overarching bridge (best literature and fieldwork synthesis by the late Sergio Ottonelli<sup>14</sup>). In such accounts, it is possible to find the narrative motif of the supernatural capability to predict the exact time of the oncoming death when the living perceives his/her own double as a participant of this cortege of wandering souls (D1825.7.1. *Person sees phantom funeral procession some time before funeral actually takes place*). The same experience is related in the folklore of the *vaqueiros* from the Asturian mountains, bovine breeders considered as mediators for the dead, where the spirit of a dying person appears to their parents or friends in the fields or on the road, while the body is located several kilometres away, bed-ridden (*la Santa Compañía* in Galicia).

## A NON-BELIEF ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PROCESSION OF THE DEAD IN THE WALDENSIAN ALPINE VALLEYS

In this section, we highlight only the essential differences between belief in the *Procession of the Dead*, highly folk-elaborated in the Catholic alpine communities, versus the radical attitude of disbelief of their Waldensian neighbours. In order to consider a possible interpretation of such a versatile disposition in the belief, we must acknowledge a complex connection between religion and popular beliefs, with both enhancements and inhibitions.

The Waldensians are a still living precursor of the Christian reformation movement, founded by Peter Waldo from Lyon in the 12th century, which ultimately found refuge in the Piedmont and alpine valleys around Torre Pellice. The members of this congregation sharply criticised the compromise of the Church with the power and wealth of this world, rejecting two of the main Catholic dogmas, Purgatory and

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14 Sergio Ottonelli, *Lu marmelin avisk (Il mignolo acceso). La morte nelle Valli Po, Varaita, Maira e Stura. Riti e credenze*, Edizioni Valados Usitanos, Torino, 2004.

transubstantiation (in the sacrament of the Eucharist). This movement soon entered into conflict with the Catholic Church, and in 1184 Waldensians were declared heretics by the Pope and so subject to persecution. In fact, the evangelic message of this group underlined the fact that all human sins were expiated by the death of Christ and therefore there were no more left, neither in life nor after death. The result was that all the religious practices having the alleged power to shorten time spent in a supposed Purgatory were ruled out.

This radical rejection of Purgatory had a strong influence against beliefs regarding the *Procession of the Dead* in the alpine Waldensian communities. It is the reason why in the two most important traditional narrative collections from these valleys, published by Marie Bonnet in 1910-1914<sup>15</sup> and Jean Jalla<sup>16</sup>, we only found a few stories regarding wandering revenants (possibly by informants of Catholic persuasion). Hence the failure to find, in these narratives, motifs connected with the supernatural capacity to predict the time of death.

## DEATH PREDICTION AND DEATH RITES IN THE HINDU CULTURES OF NEPAL

In this comparative analysis of individual experiences of precognition and death divination in our two alpine biomes, we must recall the differences in the development of practices – and their related beliefs – focusing mainly on the Hindu milieu in Nepal. In particular, we examine experiences from the Brahmin castes of Central Nepal and from the Newar ethnic group in Kathmandu Valley and in Dhading district. Hence we must first take into consideration the Nepali belief system in the existence of malevolent spirits and observe it in relation to the funeral rituals (*antyeshti*), one of the fundamental rites of passage (*samskāra*) in the Hindu tradition. Beliefs in the supernatural and rites of death are deeply related to each other in a process of inference, which describes the existence of spirits in a liminal period related to the journey of the departed soul to reach the cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*) or the final liberation (*moksha*).

The difficulty in describing precisely the death ritual in the Hindu cultures of Nepal is due to the significant diversity that characterises these rituals, which differ considerably depending on the city, the caste, the priests and the religion<sup>17</sup>. In short, it is possible to categorise two main rituals associated with the death of a person. The first one can be defined as “a ritual for and with the dead”<sup>18</sup>, a funeral ritual *tout-court*, which includes all the gestures and words performed from the agony of the

15 Marie Bonnet, *Tradizioni orali delle Valli Valdesi del Piemonte*, Claudiana edizioni, Torino, 1994.

16 Jean Jalla, *Légendes et traditions populaires des Vallées Vaudoises*, Torre Pellice, 1926.

17 Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels, *Handling Death. The Dynamics of the Death and Ancestor Rituals among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal*, Harrasowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2005, p. 9.

18 Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 132.

dying person until the cremation of his or her body. The second aspect of the death ritual entails complex transformation rituals for the dead, *srāddha puja*, followed to further the transformation of the dead person's spirit (*pret*) into an ancestor (*pitṛ*), which helps him or her to reach the *samsāra* cycle or the ultimate *moksha*. The loss of the physical body during the cremation process leads to the urgency of re-creating a body for the spirit and of giving him or her the opportunity to continue his or her way to reincarnation or liberation. It is only through the correct performance of the *srāddha puja* that it becomes possible to feed the spirit and help him or her to rebuild a subtle body, a substitute for the physical body, and to integrate him or her in the group of ancestors. If any kind of problem – especially related to the pollution of the ritual performance (pollution derived from being touched by a lower caste member, from an inter-caste marriage, etc.) or if the death occurred by accident – comes up during this liminal period, the transformation process cannot take place. The spirit remains, in a raw and uncooked state (*kancho bāyu*, uncooked spirit), in this world as an unsatisfied ghost. Quite the opposite happens if the ritual performance succeeds; the spirit is transformed into a *pakeko bāyu*, a well-cooked (*pakaunu*) spirit, which can merge into the ancestor group.

This brief overview of the transformation of spiritual ontologies in the Hindu's death rites of passage can help us to explore the phenomenon of death divination in the particular Nepalese context. The starting point for the experience of precognition of the exact time of the oncoming death is obviously established when, among the Newars of Bhaktapur, a local physician of the Ayurvedic tradition, a *Baidiya*, is called to the bedside of a dying person. He is said to be able to predict the exact time of death, listening for the sound of the *pranāvāyu*, the vital breath, leaving the body<sup>19</sup>. The role of this practitioner in the organisation of the first ritual step is central to recognising the right moment to take the dying person's body to the ground floor, the best place where the preliminary ritual of preparation of the dead body will take place.

To better approach the phenomenology of death divination in Hindu Nepal, we must confront ethnographic documentation with the yogic literature on *siddhis* (the powers of *sādhus*). One of the most important texts in this literature is the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patanjali, a collection of 196 *sūtras* dated from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. In the section regarding the nature of the different types of *siddhis*, we find an interesting passage underlining a particular power that develops a death divination technique similar to the one we just disclosed for the Newar community of Bhaktapur. The *Yoga Sūtra* III.22 states that “*karma can be of two types, active or latent; by samyama [the way to access to the liberation from the sensible reality] on these two types of karma or on the sign-of-death comes the foreknowledge of the exact time of (own)*

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19 Gutschow and Michaels, op.cit.

*death*<sup>20</sup>. This supernatural skill to foresee the exact time of the death can be related to the interpretation of certain “signs-of-death”. The nature of these signs is clearly explained by Haughton Woods:

*a sign-of-death is of three kinds, that pertaining to self and that pertaining to [other] creatures and that pertaining to divine beings. Of these [three], a sign-of-death : i. pertaining to one's self [would occur when] one with stopped ears does not hear the sound [of the vital spirits] within one's own body ; or when one with closed eyes does not see the inner light. Likewise ii. a sign pertaining to other creatures [would occur when] one sees the Men of Yama, [or] when one sees unexpectedly the Fathers, the Departed. Similarly iii. [a sign] pertaining to divine beings [would occur when] one sees heaven or the Siddhas unexpectedly, or when everything is reversed. By this [sign] also he perceives that the latter end is near at hand<sup>21</sup>.*

The first sign-of-death can be related to the figure of the Newar *Baidiya* hearing the sound of the *prānavāyu* of his dying patients. This is the second sign-of-death that helps us make a close connection between death divination and the Hindu belief in the return of the dead: the possibility to foresee one's own death when someone can see “Men of Yama”<sup>22</sup> – terrifying messengers of Yama, the God of death – who come to get the deceased, or the spirit of a departed.

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PROCESSIONS OF THE DEAD IN INDIA WITH HIMALAYAN CONNECTIONS

Thompson and Balys<sup>23</sup> gave us access to two clear reports on The Procession of the Dead that help detailing its belief components in the context of regions of former India (before East Bengal's secession<sup>24</sup>) with close Himalayan connections.

20 Sanskrit : “*sopa-kramam nirupa-kramam ca karma tatsamyamāt-aparāntajñānam ariṣṭebhyo vā*”. We suggest our own translation using the works of different commentators of the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali: John Murdoch, *Yoga Sastra : the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali Examined ; with a Notice of Swami Vivekananda's Yoga Philosophy*, The Christian literature society for India, London and Madras, 1897; James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga System of Patanjali, or the Ancient Hindu Doctrine of Concentration of Mind*, The Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1914; Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtra of Patanjali: a new edition, translation, and commentary with insights from the traditional commentators*, North Point Press, New York, 2009.

21 James Haughton Woods, op.cit., p. 251.

22 For an example of this connection with Yama, see the document from F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Bengal Fairy Tales*, John Lane Company, London and New York, 1920, pp. 70-73, quoted in the following section.

23 Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India*, Indiana University Press, 1958.

24 Now divided in Hindu West Bengal (state of India), and Muslim East Bengal (Bangladesh in 1971, after the second partition in 1947, and change of the 1955 East Pakistan's name).

The first narrative document comes from the Himalayan region of Kumaon<sup>25</sup>, now part of the Uttarakhand state of India.<sup>26</sup>

Near to Aneriyákot, a village on the banks of the river, there was a *ghat*, a cremation area where all the dead bodies of the near town of Almora were cremated. This place is supposed to be haunted by ghost and evil spirit and “these ghosts occasionally, and generally on the day Amabashya or the 30th of the lunar month (when the moon is invisible) rise up and beat their drums and dance after midnight”. One night, a villager was coming back to his village and, by mischance, met with their procession: “For some of them were without heads, some without legs, some without arms, some with eyes jutting out and bleeding, some with eyes depressed looking like two holes, some with bleeding hair, some in huge shape with frightful faces and teeth, some walking on the ground and bearing their king who was in a still more appalling form, others flying and dancing round him, but all in hideous and prodigious human form with their feet turned backward”. Afraid to be in the middle of this ghostly situation, he seized the leader of the procession, which was forced to submit to him. The man asked him that a lot of heaps should be carried to his village and that all the millet crops should be weeded. The king of evil spirits agreed and was released by the man. The morning after, he found the heaps but the millet crops were not weeded. He went back to the leader of the ghostly procession and asked him why the crops were not weeded; the ghost told that they did not know how to weed. The process was explained to them and the ghosts did the work and they promised to remain at their will in the future. So, the man released the king of ghosts and, since this time, the residents of the village became famous as mendicant exorcisers of evil spirits.<sup>27</sup>

This narrative contains many characteristic motifs that have nothing to envy to what can be found in Europe<sup>28</sup>, notably since Orderic Vital’s report of the vision of Herlechinus’ troop and similarities with the European predecessor of the purgatorial procession, the *Wild Hunt* (E501). In fact a wild hunting supernatural ontology that shares some important features with the European *Procession of the Dead* does exist

25 In 1791, during the period of expansion of their nascent kingdom westwards, across the Kali River, the Gorkhas of Nepal (Shah dynasty) invaded Almora, the seat of the Kumaon Kingdom and other parts of the region. At the end of the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816), the Treaty of Sugauli was ratified on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1816. As per the treaty, Nepal lost Sikkim, including Darjeeling, the territories of Kumaon and Garhwal and most of the lands of the Terai region. The Kumaon region was so joined with the eastern half of Garhwal region in the Kumaon Province and was governed by English administrators until Indian independence.

26 With still resilient Himalayan shamanistic healing traditions (see review article by P. C. Joshi, “Psychotherapeutic Elements in Shamanistics Healing in the Context of Himalayan Traditions », in *Delhi Psychiatry Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2010, pp. 254-257.

27 Pandit Ganga Datt Upreti, *Proverbs & Folklore of Kumaon and Garhwal*, Lodiana Mission Press, 1894, pp. 282-283.

28 Besides fertility revenant spirits as harvest helpers, F455.6.8.1. *Trolls help with grain harvest*, see for feet backwards, E422.1.6.1. *Ghost with feet twisted backward*. India: \*Thompson-Balys. F401.9. *Spirit with feet turned wrong way* (cf. F451.2.2.1.) India: Thompson-Balys. F451.2.2.1. Dwarf’s feet twisted backward. Swiss: Jegerlehner Oberwallis 322 N° 86. F451.2.2.1. F441.4.4. *Forest-spirits with wings and with backward-pointing fingers and toes*. (cf. F401.9, F451.2.2.1.) Philippine (Tinguian): Cole 14, 46.

in Nepal. Lecomte-Tilouine<sup>29</sup>, from her fieldwork in the region of Gulmi (Central Nepal) describes the *sikāri* as a forest deity, master of animals and the hunt. She is a feminine wrathful divinity *supposed to cause nightmares* and to drive people mad. She usually wanders near the forest riding a horse and giving terrible screams (p. 57). In the east part of Nepal, the word *sikāri* refers to a group of sylvian hunters' spirits that used to move together. MacDonald<sup>30</sup> relates the existence of sixteen different types of *sikāri*, each of them is the carrier of a particular disease (implicit death prediction). Quoting the research of Schlemmer<sup>31</sup> among the Thulung Rāi, Toffin<sup>32</sup> adds that this supernatural group is wandering in the form of a dog or surrounded by a troop of dogs (cf. E501.4.1.5. *Black dogs in wild hunt*). These spirits live near big trees and carry with them the bows and arrows that *Mahādev* gave them to protect the *dhyangro*, the sacred drum of *jhākri* shamans.

The second document begins with a Brahmin's resting place on the shore of the river Ganges, where members of a Muslim tribe coming from Himalayan North India and from Terai in Nepal appear at his awakening, and it ends felicitously by his being rewarded in Burdwan (now West Bengal):

A Brahmin named Lochan<sup>33</sup> was landed, by the captain of the ship where he was travelling, on the shore of the Ganges, in the middle of the jungle. Lochan decided to stop near to a stretch of grass, where he fell asleep. He was waked up by the noise of sweeping brooms: some people were brushing the grass, followed by *Bhishiti* Muslim tribe, laying the dust. Behind them, other people came and put a number of bolsters, circled by white candles, with a throne. "The preparations being complete, there marched on to the lawn a procession of richly dressed beings who were apparently human" and took their seats near to the throne occupied by another being. Lochan watched the scene and, when the chief of this procession started to smoke a *kalkay*, a sort of pipe, he asked to smoke too. The chief recognized Lochan as the husband of his father's sister and they started to talk. He told him that, when he was with the British army in the battlefield, he was killed by a soldier that severed his head from the body: "My body lay on the battlefield unnoticed and soon became food for dogs and jackals. My skull, however, remained intact, till a yogi took it to his hut in the forest, and made a cup out of it. During the day it remains unused, but at night the ascetic fills it with Ganga water for his ablutions. An accidental death has turned me into an evil spirit, and during the day I have to live in the torments of hell, but during the night I enjoy the bliss of heaven, for then my skull contains the holy water. What you have seen is my nightly court, where, empowered by Yama, I administer Justice to those departed spirits who have been

29 Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, "Hommes/divinités de la forêt. À travers le miroir au Népal central", in *Études rurales*, n° 107-108, 1987, p. 55-69.

30 Alexander W. MacDonald, "Notes préliminaires sur quelques *jhānkri* du Muglan", in *Journal asiatique*, 1962, pp. 120-122.

31 Grégoire Schlemmer, *Vues d'esprits. La conception des esprits et ses implications chez les Kulung Rai du Népal*, Nanterre, Thèse de doctorat, 2004.

32 Gérard Toffin, "La forêt dans l'imaginaire des populations de l'Himalaya népalais", in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 2, 2005, p. 188.

33 In Sanskrit, "eye". We suggest a possible relation between the name of this character and his remarkable capacity to see spirits.

wronged by their fellow spirits". Lochan helped his uncle to find back his skull and then he was taken to a cave full of treasures near Madras: the spirit placed some gems in a basket and, asking to Lochan to close his eyes, they carried him to his home in the Burdwan district, where he lived happily with his family.<sup>34</sup>

This report points out the narrative motifs of the *Procession of the Dead*, in this case organised as a court of Justice, headed by a leader, and the capacity of a man to see it.

The importance of the two documents quoted above is that they attest the presence of the motif of the *Procession of the Dead* in the nearest borders of the Himalayan region of Nepal. In the Nepalese Hindu narrative folklore, it is not so difficult to find references to human encounters with ghosts. Normally, most of these narrations entertain the idea that this sort of ghostly encounter causes misfortune or sickness (E265. *Meeting ghost causes misfortune*; E265.1. *Meeting ghost causes sickness*). In such cases, it is possible to appease and feed the spiritual ontologies concerned (*bhut*, *kichkanni*, different types of *bāyu*, etc.) by performing a ritual *puja* or putting some offerings or gifts near to a *dobato*, a crossroad, or by asking the intercession of a *jhakri* or *dhami*, shamans and spiritual practitioners. But on the other hand, it seemed – before our recent fieldwork – more difficult to collect narrations containing precisely the narrative motif of the *Procession of the Dead*, and even more so to keep it in connection with the phenomenon of death divination<sup>35</sup>.

## DEATH PREDICTION AND PROCESSION OF THE DEAD IN NEPAL

During our fieldwork in Nepal, we discovered a complex of beliefs that substantiate the existence of such a narrative type, death divination included. But first let us begin by establishing the existence of the actual procession complex.

The *Procession of the Dead* as the wandering of a huge group of spirits emerges clearly in the following narrative, collected from an anonymous man in Jyatha (Kathmandu), which concerns corn harvesting like that for the millet crop in Kumaon (above):

My mother was at midnight in a corn field harvesting *kodo* (corn), three or four kilometers from my house. She was near a *kodoko* mill [E501.12.10. *Wild hunt appears at old mill*], a machine to make flour from the corn. It was 11:30, in the night, because in noon-time she had not time to go there and finish the work. She saw, down the opposite side of the hill, a crowd of people with lights in their hands. All on the hill with more than one thousand

34 F. B. Bradley-Birt, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-73. N.B.: meanwhile, India and Bengal had been reunited in 1911, after the first partition in 1905.

35 As the reader will have noted, the two documents just quoted do not contain precisely the predictive motif D1825.7.1. *Person sees phantom funeral procession some time before the actual procession takes place*, attributed by Thompson & Balys (1958), referencing this documents.

people carrying light. She stopped fifteen minutes to see these people moving. Then, some neighbour came in the field and bring a kerosene light to her and, when she got light, all these people disappeared, she could not see all these people more (interview taken the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, in Jyatha, Kathmandu).

To find more recurrence of this narrative motif, we need to turn our attention to beliefs mostly spread in the rural areas outside the Kathmandu valley of Central Nepal, which concern a particular type of fantastic ontology, called *panchabhāya*.

The *panchabhāya* is a kind of procession composed by five or more spirits (*panc*, five; *bhai*, younger brother) that crosses the countryside, from sunset to sunrise, following the same road without ever changing this direction. These spirits are usually white-dressed and they ride horses. If someone meets this ghostly procession during night-time, one can become sick or even die (general interview with the teachers of the Shree Salyantar Higher Secondary School, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2013, Majhgaun, Salyantar VDC, Dhading district).

As for the Kumaon document quoted in the preceding section, this Nepalese avatar of the *Procession of the Dead*, introduces again broadly known elements within a belief that contains overt similarities with the European *Wild Hunt*, including horse-riding (E501.4.2. *Wild huntsman's horse*). Moreover this is not the only narrative motif that alludes to this supernatural chase. During another interview with an anonymous *sārangi*<sup>36</sup> maker from Ranagaun (Bhanu VDC, Tanahu district), the following narrative was collected, which makes also a direct link with the one from Kumaon, where, in order to obtain gift(s) one can capture the king or the first spirit of the procession (G514.0.1. *Demon must bring treasure to those who have released him*).

The *panchabhāya* is a procession of spirits, always preceded by a black dog, which wanders during the night. A common belief says that it is possible to catch the *panchabhāya*: if someone can interpose himself between the ghostly procession and the dog and “cut off the dog”, he can catch the first spirit of the procession and ask him whatever he wants. Only when the ghost realizes the wishes of the man, he will be free to continue his wandering (interview the 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014, in Thamel, Kathmandu).

Again the reference to the black dog (E501.4.1.5) is another element of comparison with the *Wild Hunt*. These two narrative motifs (E501.4.2. and E501.4.1.5.) are corroborated by another version of the same narration, collected from Mohan Keimrick, in the Gorkha district:

The *panchabhāya* is a white woman, very beautiful, that wanders in the night-time. She is always preceded by a black or red dog in a fearful attitude and, sometimes, followed by the *murkātta* [a ghost without head riding a black horse, typical of the Nepalese narrative folklore] that protects her and activates her energy (interview in December 2013, Dallu, Kathmandu).

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36 Short-necked string instrument.

Adding to these similarities, we gained further information with a narrative linked to the auditory sensation that, sometimes, can accompany the manifestation of a *Procession of the Dead*, as for example, the sabbat (“synagogue”) of the French-speaking Alps, the Wild Hunt or *Nachtvolk* in Austria (E501.13.2. *Wild hunt heralded by music*, E501.13.1.4. *Wild hunt heralded by ringing of bells*, E554. *Ghost plays musical instrument*).

The mother of one of our informers, Dipak Shrestha, from Boksignaun (Salyantar VDC, Dhading district), told us that, sixteen years before, she was renovated her traditional newari house and for this reason her family used to sleep on the wooden ground in front of the house. Each evening, before going to sleep, she blocked the entrance to the courtyard using a *bāsko jhāl* (a collection of bamboo sticks and other brushwood). One night, she was waked up by a strange music. She opened her eyes and she saw ten figures, white-dressed, some tall, other small, stopping in front of her house, along the road. They were playing music using *ghanti* (traditional bell), *mādal* (traditional Nepalese two-headed hand-drum) and *dholak* (Indian two-headed hand-drum). They stayed there for a few minutes and then continued their walk following the road. These ghosts formed the *panchabhāya* and they could not enter in the house’s courtyard because of the *jhāl* blocking the entrance (interview taken the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, in Boksignaun, Salyantar VDC, Dhading district).

Note that until now we have not yet proved that we ultimately discovered that the complex of beliefs about *panchabhāya* integrates death divination, none of the above-quoted documents mentioning this motif. Actually the basic form of this narrative component is not represented simply by the danger of a ghostly encounter *per se* (e.g. in E265.3. *Meeting ghost causes death*): it requires the presence of a predictive component, which the following minimal narrative element satisfies (E574. *Appearance of ghost serves as death omen*):

An interview to Bhuwan Maharjan, a Newar from Chhobar (Lalitpur), brought back the idea that “if you meet a black (*kalo*) spirit near to a *masān ghat*, a cremation area, or to a junction of two rivers, this is a very bad sign: it means that after few days you can die” (interview taken the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2014 in Kupondole, Lalitpur). This statement is better explained by Dipendra Bajracharya, a Newar from Dallu (Kathmandu), when he told us that “if you encounter a procession of dead people in your dream or if you see this in real, it means that they are calling for you” (interview the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2014 in Kupondole, Lalitpur).

Both documents confirm that the presence of a precognition experience of one’s own death by meeting a spiritual entity, in reality (or during a dream), becomes structured in the narrative folklore of Nepal. The first testimony is of interest, at least for the place, the cremation area, where the procession appeared in another report (see above Datt Upreti<sup>37</sup>); in spite of the fact that this time there was only a single *kalo* spirit. But the second testimony was actually the first and unique confidence we heard, since the beginning of our dedicated fieldwork to this chase, with the explicit

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37 Datt Upreti, *op.cit.*, pp. 282-283.

link between meeting a procession of dead people and its predictive power for your final days.

Another testimony, coming from the same informants as above (interviewed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, in Jyatha, Kathmandu) was more implicit, while there can be hardly any doubt that the two ghosts in question were waiting to take her away:

[My mother] also told me that another day she was resting near a *chautara*<sup>38</sup>, after coming back from the market. It was 11 pm and she saw two people coming with a white horse but the drivers didn't have the head. They stopped there for half hour as if the driver, with white dress, was waiting for her. But after half hour, she could not see these figures, they disappeared.

With these narrative milestones just completed in the field for Nepal, the possibility of developing a comparative analysis of individual experiences of death divination in two alpine environments opens up. This freshly disclosed narrative material focuses on the particular aspects of this specific region, concerning a supernaturalistic phenomenology that, to our knowledge, never emerged until now in other studies of Nepalese Hindu folklore. This complex of beliefs, with the meeting point between the narrative setting of the *Procession of the Dead* and the explicit experience of death divination, was difficult to hold for Nepal until it was found in an integrated form. We can now consider the process of the above-mentioned narrative pieces as different degrees of the whole *predictive* belief in the *Procession of the Dead*. From a “zero degree” so to say, represented by the narrative motif E265.3. *Meeting ghost causes death*, we started with the prediction content in E574. *Appearance of ghost serves as death omen*, and we met the lavishly illustrated oral tradition of beliefs in the *panchabhāya*, highlighting the elements that the myth of the *Procession of the Dead* shares in the Alps and within these Nepalese narrations. However it seems that in the Nepalese Hindu narrative folklore there are some elements that authorise us to talk about a specific Nepalese *Procession of the Dead* – this *panchabhāya* – in close relationship with the phenomenon of death divination, as supported by ethnographic ritual death documents from the Newar community of Bhaktapur and, through yogic literature, as outlined previously above.

## NEPALESE PANCHABHĀYA: BETWEEN HINDU PĀNDAVAS AND TIBETAN DĀKINĪS

In this section, we test the most specific hypothesis that can help us to better understand the linguistic and mythological complex of the Nepalese folk belief in the *Panchabhāya*. A linguistic approach, linking toponymy and anthroponymy,

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38 Traditionally a stone resting place (known in Europe since it became emblematic for Nepalese sherpas).

is our starting point to highlight some onomastic points leaning on the mythical etymology of this word. With a return to the Hindu epic, the *Mahābhārata*, we insist on the intrinsic feminine composition of the Nepalese *Panchabhāya*, making it, in spite of strong parallels with Hindu *Pāndavas*, somehow closer to Tibetan *Dākinīs*.

In the Indian region, it is possible to find a good incidence of Indian people bearing the surname “*Panchabhāya*” or its variants<sup>39</sup>. Interestingly, references for place names focus on the Himalayan region of Nepal, where *Panchabhāya* folklore is widespread. We can find the terraces of Panchbhaiya, in the Shivalik Hill range, also called “outer Himalayas”, between northern India, southern Nepal and Nord-East of Pakistan<sup>40</sup>; the Panchabhāya village, located in the Central Region of Nepal, at about 76 km south-east of Kathmandu; and Panchabhāya Danda<sup>41</sup>, a forested hillock between Begnas lake and Rupa lake, at about 15 km from Pokhara, in the Western Region of Nepal, in the foothills of the Annapurna range. Another important toponymy-related reference is attested for the village name Pancha Bhaya, in the locality of Bairhatta, in West Bengal. This reference is particularly significant for our ongoing research because it contains, in its etiology, a specific link with Hindu mythology. The official internet site of the district of Dakshin Dinajpur tells us the explicit information that: “A village in the locality has been named Pancha Bhaya (five brothers) after the Pandavas”<sup>42</sup>. In a paper dealing with intracaste kinship organisation of the Kanya-Kubja Brahmans of Northern India, Khare<sup>43</sup> notes that medieval and immediate ancestors, as the genealogical (*vamshāvali*) accounts repeatedly emphasise, were achievers of ritual goals and hence they and the places where they lived became indicators of ritual rank. As already noted, a genealogy may often combine the names of locations with nicknames, or ritual or kinship characteristics of medieval ancestors; for example, Vihārpur (Panchbhaiya) is related to locality and to the information that the medieval ancestor was one of the five brothers (p. 626, note 5).

In order to understand the etiology of the name of this Pancha Bhaya village from West Bengal – in a region fully steeped in Hindu mythological accounts – we

39 The Forebears genealogical portal proposes a geographically indexed and cross-referenced directory of sources for family history researches. For the anthroponymic entry “Panchabhaya”, it attests an incidence of 541 people who bear this surname, or some of its linguistic variants in the Indian regions (<http://forebears.io/surnames/panchabhaya>).

40 G. Philip, N. S. Viridi, and N. Suresh, “Morphotectonic evolution of Parduni Basin: An intradun piggyback basin in western Doon valley, NW Outer Himalaya”, in *Journal of the Geological Society on India*, vol. 74, n. 2, 2009, pp. 189-199.

41 Shailendra Pokharel and Masahisa Nakamura, “Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) for the sustainable conservation of Himalayan lakes of Nepal”, *Wetland Conservation Publication Series no. 2.*, National Lake Conservation Development Committee (NLCDC), Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal, 2010, pp. 15-22.

42 [[http://www.ddinajpur.nic.in/Archaeological\\_Assets/archaeological\\_assets.html](http://www.ddinajpur.nic.in/Archaeological_Assets/archaeological_assets.html)]

43 Ravindra S. Khare, “Hierarchy and Hypergamy: Some Interrelated Aspects among the Kanya-Kubja Brahmans”, in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 74, 1972, pp. 611-628.

need to recall one of the two major Sanskrit epics of Ancient India, the *Mahābhārata*. This epic poem relates the Kurukshetra War between a group of five brothers, the *Pāndavas*, and their malevolent cousins, the *Kaurava*. The *Pāndavas* are considered as the (pseudo)sons of Pāndu and his two wives, Kunti and Madri. Indeed, since a curse bans for Pandu any sexual acts, Kunti, who received in her childhood a gift that allow her to convene any *deva* and ask him to give her a son, decides to help his husband. She summons Dharma and she conceives Yudhishtira ; with Vāyu she conceives Bhīma (sometimes called Bhīmasena) and with Indra, Arjuna. She also helps the second wife of Pandu to conceive, with the twin gods, the Ashvins, Nakula and Sahadeva. Thus, these five brothers with semi-divine origins are considered the earthly *avatars* of their divine fathers.

The comparative approach in the mythological studies developed mainly by Georges Dumézil suggests (based on discoveries by Stig Wikander<sup>44</sup>, that Vedic and pre-Vedic mythologies are conserved in the *Mahābhārata* where archaic themes and relationships of an eschatological theory are transposed from the level of myth to that of the legend. The semi-divine *Pāndavas*, on the continuation of their related divine fathers, would constitute a mix of the canonic trifunctionality attributed to the Proto-Indo-European society: Yudhishtira-Dharma(-\*Mitra) embodies the first function of order and duty (*Dharma*); Bhīma-Vāyu and Arjuna-Indra represent two different types of warrior in the second function; Nakula and Sahadeva, twin Ashvins, represent the social welfare in the third function<sup>45</sup>. Just as the *Mahābhārata* can be considered a continuation, in a rejuvenated form, of Vedic and pre-Vedic ideas, we suggest that the pentadic figure of the *Pāndavas* has undergone a fundamental “folklorisation” by allowing the formation of the specific Nepalese folk belief in the *Panchabhāya*. Nepalese *Panchabhāya* can therefore be considered as the result of this narrative linguistic genre transformation process, as we found it, that kept the link with the pattern of Hindu classical epic mythology.

The intensive fieldwork performed with *jhākri* Umesh Kumar Rajbhandari (U.K.J.) in Dallu (Kathmandu), elicited the intrinsic composition of the *Panchabhāya*. During an interview on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2013, he explained that the *Panchabhāya* is classified as a *bhut-pret*, a malevolent spirit of the lowest level, and that it is composed of five sisters, from the oldest to the youngest: *kālo bhut*, *kichkanni*, *domase*, *pisāc chini*, *dānkini*<sup>46</sup>. His testimony allows us to suggest another

44 Stig Wikander, “Pāndavasagen och Māhabhāratas mytiska förutsättningar”, in *Religion och Bibel*, vol. 6, 1947, pp. 27-29.

45 Georges Dumézil, *Mythes et dieux des Indo-Européens*, précédé de *Loki, Heur et Malheur du guerrier*, Flammarion, 2011, pp. 261-267.

46 Therefore, in another interview (18<sup>th</sup> of April 2014) about his healing techniques, *jhākri* U.K.J. suggested a tantric interpretation for the *Panchabhāya*. Recalling that, during a healing session, a *jhākri* “plays with energy” (*sakti khelne*), the *Panchabhāya* is a particular condensation of five different forms of feminine energy (*deviko kali*) that he can incorporate (*uttarnu*) to heal people or to fight against spirits or witches (*boksi*) that attack human victims.

possible etymology for the word *Panchabhāya*: as already noted, *panch*, five, with *bhāi*, younger brother. But note that, unlike the pentadic masculine brotherhood found in the *Pāndavas*, our informant describes explicitly this group of spirits as uniquely feminine, and from other very pervasive narratives we can recognise at least two clearly current female beings: *kichkannī* and *dānkinī*. Obviously these five sisters cannot be considered as the direct heiresses of the *Pāndavas*.

To better understand the nature of the *Panchabhāya* we need first to focus on the notion of spirit, *bāyu/vāyu*. In his *Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of Nepali Language*, Turner<sup>47</sup> translated these words as “wind ; spirit of the dead”. *Bāyu/vāyu* is related to the Hindu ritual of death: when the corpse is burnt at the cremation area, the vital breath (*pranāvāyu*) leaves the physical body and, founding a temporary abode in the subtle body, continues its existence as a spiritual form until it is integrated in a new physical body (*samsāra* cycle) or merged in the *moksha*. Fieldwork with *jhākri* U.K.J. enabled us to disclose a classification of these spiritual ontologies, in the Nepali-speaking Himalayan folklore, based mainly on 49 different types of *bāyu/vāyu*. Interestingly, Höfer and Shrestha<sup>48</sup> give the same number for the Maruts<sup>49</sup>, 49 Vedic storm divinities. This relationship is enhanced since Vedic texts present these divinities as rain makers and cloud holders (Rig Veda, I 85.8-10); but also – and this is the most important for our topic – as aerial psychopomps leading the *bāyu/vāyu* of the deceased outside of his physical body (Atharva Veda, XVIII 2.7-8 et 2.22). We may also recall one of the primary Vedic deities, *Vāyu*, that is, one of the five great elements (*pancha māhabhūta*), in Ayurveda, Lord of the Wind and, as we already noted, the father of Bhīma<sup>50</sup>, one of the *Pāndavas*.

47 Ralph Lilley Turner, *A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Nepali language*, K. Paul, Trench Trubner, London, 1931, p. 435.

48 András Höfer and Bisnu P. Shrestha, “Ghost Exorcism among the Brahmans of Central Nepal”, in *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1973, pp. 51-77.

49 The Maruts have been associated, rightly or wrongly, with the warriors of the Germanic horde of the Wild Hunt, since Dumézil’s works. Anyway the functional analogy with the *Panchabhāya* as the *Procession of Dead* does not need to be emphasised again here.

50 In Nepal Bhīma is known as Bhīmsen and he is considered to be the protecting lord of merchants and the tutelary spirit of matrimony. Newar traders particularly worship him as their patron deity who is said to help them to get riches through trade. However, the fact that Bhīmsen is associated with trade and prosperity can be explained as the result of a popular amalgamation of Bhīmasena and Bhīmamalla, or Bhīmalla, the minister of King Laksmīnarasimha Malla of Kathmandu (1620-1641) who is credited to have established regular commercial connections with Tibet (Siegfried Lienhard, *Song of Nepal. An anthology of Newar Folksongs and Hymns*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1992, p. 17, note 114). It is possible to find numerous shrines and temples within and outside the Kathmandu Valley – the most known Bhīmsen temples in Kathmandu (AD 1140), situated in Tachupal Tol, in Kirtipur (AD 1587), or in Patan (AD 1681) – where the Newar groups are settled (Jagadish Chandra Regmi, “The cult of Bhīmasena”, *Ancient Nepal*, n. 61-64, 1980-1981, pp. 35-36). The worship of Bhīmsen is attested in Nepal in the reign of Mahendra Malla (1560-1574) (Dilli Raman, Regmi, *Medieval Nepal*, volume 2, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2007, p. 612) and within some ethnic groups of the Northern India, like the Gonds (cf. William Crooke, *The Popular*

The five spirits making up the complex of the *Panchabhāya* appear as single fantastic ontologies in many traditional narratives of Nepal and they are generally related to the spirit of a person who committed suicide (like the *kichkannī* and the *domase*) or died accidentally. The *Kālo bhut* (black *bhut*) is one of the most powerful spirits related to the category of *bhut*, a general term used throughout the Indian Subcontinent to indicate a deceased person. In the classification of supernatural beings given by *jhākri* U.K.J. (17<sup>th</sup> April 2014), the *Kālo bhut* is considered one of the most important spirits at the head of the cluster of twelve *bhut* spirits. The *Domase* is another kind of *bhut* but he is classified as an outsider from the twelve main types of this category: he was a *hinjāda* (most commonly spelled *hijrā* in Hindi), an hermaphrodite or transsexual who committed suicide, remaining as a malevolent spirit in this world. *Domase* is a very wicked and persistent ghost (*domase dherai harāmi ra jiddi hunuhunchha* “domase is a malevolent and immoral spirit”) that attacks girls in particular, spitting at them (*thuknu*), hitting or scratching them (*pitnu; chitarnu*). The term *pisāc* generally means ghost or demon and it is used in Nepal to refer to a ghost whose dead body was polluted by involuntary contact with a member of an *achut jāti* (Untouchable caste).

The two last spirits composing the *Panchabhāya* are exclusively feminine ontologies. The Nepalese folklore revolving around the figure of the *Kichkannī* and the *Dānkinī* is a composite and complex belief system that shares some elements with other fantastic beings widespread on a broader area in Central and South Asia, especially in the Himalayan foothills of India, in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The *Kichkannī* – with her homologues: the *churell/churail*, the *pichal peri* (Northern Indian regions, Pakistan and Bangladesh), the *jakhāi*, *mukāi* (Punjab district in Pakistan) or the *navalāi* (Mumbai)<sup>51</sup> – is a wrathful ghost of a young woman who died during pregnancy or on the day of her child’s birth. She appears in the form of a pretty girl in a white *sāri* to seduce youths at night, but she has her feet turned backwards, heels in front and toes behind (again E422.1.6.1. *Ghost with feet twisted backward* and F401.9. *Spirit with feet turned wrong way*). The *Kichkannī* and the *Dānkinī*

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*Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, vol. 1, Archibald Constable & Co., Westminster, 1896, p. 182). However, the cult of this hero, related more to the theme of the *Mahābhārata* and less often described as a supernatural being or a deity (Regmi, 2007, *op.cit.*, p. 613) seems to be much older. Indeed, Wright relates an account that links the presence of Bhīmsen in Nepal during the mythical period of foundation of the Kathmandu valley’s civilization: “The valley continuing to be a lake, some say that Bhīmsen (one of the Pāndavas of the *Mahābhārata*) came from Dolkhā and used to amuse himself on it in a stone boat. The daughter of Dānāsūr, seeing Bhīmsen, ran away. After this Vishnu came, and, having killed Dānāsūr, opened a passage for the water through the Chaubahār or Kachhapāl mountain” (Daniel Wright, *History of Nepal with an introductory sketch of the country and people of Nepal*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1990, p. 96).

51 Crooke 1896, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-271. Rajaram Narayan Saletore, *A Study in Indian Occultism*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1981, p. 121.

share the same function of “blood-suckers”<sup>52</sup> (*asrapa*) that recall the figure of the *dākinī*, feminine demon (*rāksasa*) typical in classical Hinduism. The *Kichkannī* can attack a man and/or establish a sexual relation with him: in this latter case she meets him every night and, during their intercourse, she sucks the blood from his body (*kichkannīle ragat liera jāne*) keeping and storing it in her femur bone<sup>53</sup> (*nalikuttāko haddi*). Her victim becomes more and more weak and sick (*sukdai, suk dai jānchha; suknu* meaning to dry), until he dies.

In the Hindu Himalaya, the *Dānkinī* (*dākinī*) blends in with different local spirits or deities. She is strongly related to witchcraft. The myth of origin of witchcraft explains that when Shiva Mahādev taught his wife, Pārbati, she fell asleep during the teaching of positive mantras, and she woke up only to learn the negative ones that, later, she transmitted to the first witch, the *Dānkinī* (U.K.J. 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014). As a homologue of the *Kichkannī* and the *Churel*, as we just mentioned, the *Dānkinī* can be considered in Nepal and Eastern India to be a fantastic being that lures young men and can live with them or even marry them<sup>54</sup>. An apotropaic technique to repel the coming after-death of a *churel/dānkinī* displays a pervasive *modus operandi* used against fairy con-sisters: “the Churel rises from her grave at nightfall and seeks to return to her friends; she sees the minute grains of the mustard scattered abroad and stoops to pick it up [F405.6. *Grain scattered as a means of dispersing spirits*], and while so engaged cockcrow comes [G273.3. *Witch powerless at cockcrow*], she is unable to visit her home, and must return to her grave”<sup>55</sup>.

52 Lecomte-Tilouine (1987, p. 58) proposed an etymological derivation for the name *kichkannī* using an onomatopoeia to explain the prefix “kich”: a *kanyā*, a virgin, that makes the sound “kitch, kitch” during her nocturnal wandering in the forest. We prefer to consider another etymological explication for this prefix: for us, *kich-* seems to derive from the Nepali verb *kichnu*, to pound, to smash. Our interpretation gives us the possibility to consider this supernatural being as a succubus with the characteristic function of blood-sucker that comes, in the night time, oppressing her victims and sucking their vital forces. This consideration allows us to link this important figure of the Nepalese folklore and the semantic field of oppression typical of a sleep paralysis experience (nep. *aīthan lagnu*).

53 The folklore of the *Kichkannī* relates a traditional ritual that a *jhākri* can perform to save the victim from this malevolent spirit. During a night visitation, the victim needs to tie a rope (*dhāgo*) to the spirit’s body and, the next morning, he follows this until, near to a river bank, he will find a little bone attached to the wire. A *jhākri* burns this bone and the victim is saved. The bone, sometimes full of the blood that the *Kichkannī* sucked from her victim, represents the *sorup* (popular form for *swarūp*), the main form or energetic appearance of this fantastic ontology: by destroying it, a *jhākri* can free both the spirit and his victim.

54 We find an interesting story in Northern India about a cohabitation between a human and a *churel* in a dilated space-time kingdom: “[the *churel*] generally assumes the form of a beautiful young woman and seduces youths at night, especially those who are good-looking. She carries them off to some kingdom of her own, and if they venture to eat the food offered to them there, she keeps them till they lose their manly beauty and then sends them back to the world grey-haired old men, who (...) find all their friends dead long ago” (Crooke, 1896, op. cit., p. 270).

55 William Crooke, 1896, op. cit., pp. 273-274.

In the Buddhist Ladakh and on the Himalayan border of Nepal and Tibet, *dākinīs* enjoy a much better reputation than in Hindu popular beliefs. Among the numerous deities belonging to the Tibetan tradition, we focus our attention on a group of goddesses known as the “Five long-lived sisters”, *Tshe ring mched lnga*. For the Vajrayana Buddhism, this type of goddess is classified as *dhārmapala* (tib. *chos sKyong*), a category of wrathful deities considered as protectors and defenders of the dharma<sup>56</sup>. The five female deities belonging to this group are ancient Buddhist mountain goddesses who are said to have been defeated by *Padmasambhava*, considered the founder of the Tibetan Buddhism, called by the Tibetan king *Khri-srong-lDe-bTsan* (754/55-797) to subdue ancient Tibetan chthonian deities. These five goddesses are supposed to live near to *Jo mo gangs dkar* or *La phyi gangs*, situated, following the tradition, on the border of Nepal and Tibet<sup>57</sup>. Another reference to the Tibetan oral tradition gives us the opportunity to emphasise the aerial nature of storm-maker belonging to another category of Buddhist *dākinīs*, the *mKha' 'gro ma lnga*, the Sky travellers. These entities are supposed to live on Mont Zhari (Tibet) playing the game of *go* in the storm and the wind: when black and white clouds meet in the sky, it means that two groups of *dākinīs* are playing<sup>58</sup>.

By not forgetting the Tibeto-Burman component of Nepal-Newar, our anthropological approach went through two parallel series of Himalayan belief narratives, the Hindu and the Buddhist. As found elsewhere this gave us the possibility of grasping some of the “theosis” process at work to conceive of a pantheon-like segment, a pentadic one at the cornerstone of Nepalese *Panchabhāya*. The bistable pivotal nature of the transhimalayan *dākinī*, as a single ontology or with her con-sisters, appears first as an aerial witch storm-maker, but also as a desirable and marriageable creature. The syncretism<sup>59</sup> of the *Panchabhāya* as merged from the “theosisation” elicited by *jhākri* U.K.R., wrapped in his Newari cultural substrate,

56 Most gods and goddesses of this specific Buddhist pantheon are divided in two main sections: 1) gods and goddesses of higher rank who stand outside the worldly sphere (*'jig rten las 'das pa'i*); and 2) the lower-ranking deities still interfering with mundane affairs (*'jig rten pa'I srung ma*) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976, pp. 75-76). In particular, the *dGe lugs pa* school claims that *Tshe ring mched lnga* belong to the second category whereas the *rNying ma pa* and *bKa'rgyud pa* school allege they have already reached the higher rank (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1996: p. 178).

57 René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracle and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of Tibetan Protective Deities*, Book Faith India, New Delhi. 1996, pp. 178-179

58 Peter Shotwell, *The game of Go in ancient and modern Tibet*, 1994 [*Go in the snow*, originally published in *GoWorld*, n. 69 (1993)], now online: [history.chess.free.fr/papers/Shotwell%201994.pdf](http://history.chess.free.fr/papers/Shotwell%201994.pdf)

59 In spite of a caveat against “formulaic invocations of syncretism”, no conclusion at all emerges from the survey by the reputed “equanimous” conceptualiser of religion, Benson Saler (*Conceptualizing Religion*).

deploys the notion of the (pre-) Buddhist five-clustered *dākinī* in parity with Hindu *Pāṇḍavas*.<sup>60</sup>

## WHEN A THEORIA OF “PHANTOM-BODIES” MEETS ITS NEURAL VERIDICATION THEORY

No doubt Christian *Processions of the Dead* and Indo-Tibetan *Panchabhāya* will remind of the Classicist, *ceteris paribus* Greek etymological features of *theoria*: a solemn procession to a shrine, such as delegates sent by the city to Delos for the Apollonian spring festival, in order to consult (contemplate) the oracle, then coming back to transmit the divine advice – which ultimately resonates with the prediction aspect under focus here. The theory or *framework*, which was developed (see **Addendum**), with our BRAINCUBUS model, to account for the numinous contemplation (vision) of such *counter-intuitive* phenomena, including *intuitive* or *counter-intuitive* speculation (reflection=reflexion), doesn't make us forget to have been inspired by personal *sleep paralysis* experiences or professional care for *phantom limb* pain. Both give an *over-intuitive* access for patients to weird ontologies, disbelieved and discarded for a long-time by academics, a lot of them being still reluctant to accept the *neural tangibility of cortical maps, both for “phantom” limbs and “phantom” bodies*, as for physical bodies and body-parts, all with neural plasticity<sup>61</sup>. Due to a lack of a neurocognitive theory<sup>62</sup> to account for these *over-intuitions*, a stance – non a priori positivist, neither reductionist, nor Progress

60 Last but not least: this syncretic five-storied organisation of a *theoria* of phantom-bodies recalls again the European traditions for the *Procession of the Dead*, together with its sabbath avatars, the “synagogues”, including the pantheonic tentative “theosisation” of “five elements”, in Val d'Aosta, by a reflective informant Tobie Deval (Alexis Bétemps and Lidia Philippot, “*Aspects de la “Synagogue” en Val d’Aoste*”, in *Le Monde Alpin et Rhodanien*, n° 1-4/1992, p. 258).

61 Marie-Agnès Cathiard, 2015, *op. cit.*

62 *Pace* the so-called “cognitive turn” in religion studies (CSR) claimed by cognitivists. For a fair equanimous overview of their pitfalls (Mickey Mouse and Santa Claus as gods?) and expressed confidence in their capacity to improve their approaches, see Bulbulia and Slingerland (2012). As concerns the core Barrett-Boyer's MCI (*Minimally Counter-intuitiveness*) concept, Bulbulia and Slingerland (Joseph Bulbulia and Edward Slingerland, “Religious Studies as a Life Science”, *Numen*, vol. 59, 2012, pp. 564-613) quote the only brain activity test (EEG : Sabela Fondevila, Manuel, Martin-Loeches, Laura, Jiménez-Ortega, Pilar, Casado, Alejandra Sel, Anabel Fernández-Hernández and Werner Sommer, “The Sacred and the Absurd. An Electro-physiological Study of Counterintuitive Ideas”, in *Social Neuroscience*, 2011, pp. 1-13; EEG incongruity peaks), but did not notice that MCI ranking was not correlated with brain activity. In addition, since Porubanova *et al.* (Michaela Porubanova, Daniel Joel Shaw, Ryan McKay, Dimitris Xygalatas, “Memory for Expectation-Violating Concepts: The Effects of Agents and Cultural Familiarity”, *PLOS ONE*, 9 /4, 2014, e90684), with a classic memory testing, found that this ranking was agent- and culture-familiarity-dependent, MCI remains finally neither neurocompatible nor universal.

addict by pure scientism – like the one advocated by Wiseman and Lamont<sup>63</sup> in a correspondence to *Nature*, remains rare:

“Unravelling the Indian rope-trick”: “Accounts of miracles appear in many religious texts, and the evidential testimony of such testimony has long been debated. Where the historicity of such accounts is considered theologically important, scholars have been particularly concerned with their reliability. Sceptics have suggested that testimony became exaggerated over time but the nature and extent of the evidence has not allowed this hypothesis to be tested empirically.” This is quoted by Fink (2014) in his commentary of Blanke (*et al.*, 2014) “feeling of a presence” experiment (a variant of our basic AP3S component) which: “exemplify the problem of assessing allegedly extraordinary events: testimony of such events is chronically unreliable and empirical evidence remains elusive. When attempting to investigate a supposedly ‘supernatural’ phenomenon, such as the feeling of presence, one faces the very same problem: the feeling that people sometimes experience of another presence, typically behind them, is a spooky sensation. It is associated with non-scientific topics (and often also ‘madness’!), and, accordingly, rarely reported voluntarily and investigated scientifically. [This paper] is a very interesting extension of the authors’ previous work on out-of-body experiences [OBE]. It is a wonderful demonstration of how persistence and endurance over time can eventually lead to an important scientific contribution. The results provide a mechanism for bizarre reports that previously have been considered to be non-explicable. As Elliot stated in 1936 (when dismissing testimony relating to the Indian rope-trick as the product of unreliable evidence): “always look for a natural explanation of any phenomenon, and when one is not forthcoming, await the advent of more knowledge, confident that a normal and not supernormal explanation is always forthcoming, provided we have requisite knowledge”.”

What became, with Blanke *et al.*’s experiment with a robotic assistance, a milestone now available for our endeavours, in order to disclose the main components of experience-centred narratives as the core of the vague cover-termed “popular belief” stuff, was their now clear acknowledgement from the outset that: “*Tales of ghosts, wraiths, and other apparitions have been reported in virtually all cultures. The strange sensation that somebody is nearby when no one is actually present and cannot be seen (feeling of a presence, FoP) is a fascinating feat of the human mind, and this apparition is often covered in the literature of divinity, occultism, and fiction.*” (p. 2081)<sup>64</sup>. It is highly significant for us that the phenomenon they induced this time, after OBE and, what we called AP3S, was the presence of another double

63 Richard Wiseman and Peter Lamont, “Unravelling the Indian rope-trick”, in *Nature* 383, 1996, pp. 212–213.

64 Compare with the blatantly counterfactual assertion in Sperber and Hirschfeld (Dan Sperber and Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, “The cognitive foundations of cultural stability and diversity”, in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 8, n°1, 2004, pp. 40-46): “*It is implausible [...] that representations of supernatural beings and events of the type found in all religions (and also in folklore, art and literature) are grounded in an ad hoc cognitive mechanism.*” (p. 44). Guess why? “*After all, supernatural beings, unlike living kinds or social groups, were not part of the environment in which humans evolved.*” Hence MCI trick!

(connected with AP3S for the alien aspect, but not antagonist): Lhermitte's autoscopia, his "hallucination du compagnon". This is a phenomenon they chose to illustrate first by recalling experienced mountaineers' experiences under adverse conditions (first studied by their pioneer colleague in Phantomology, Peter Brugger<sup>65</sup>).

Descending with his brother from the summit of Nanga Parbat, one of the ten highest mountains in the world, Reinhold Messner felt a third climber "descending with us, keeping a regular distance, a little to my right and a few steps away from me, just outside my field of vision". Messner "could not see the figure" but "was certain there was someone there," sensing "his presence" (Messner<sup>66</sup>, quoted in Blanke *et al.*<sup>67</sup>).

Of course this first claim coming from Blanke's group of a connection to "tales of ghosts... in the literature of divinity, occultism, and fiction", or, to be less vague, folkloristics, will not refer explicitly, apart from children's companions, guardian angels, and so on, to a belief type of soul like Scandinavian *Fylgja* ... But – besides accounts by sensory illusion from external stimuli, in the range of say *Fata Morgana* – this is the right track for understanding the brain endogenous generation of a phenomenology like the *Procession of the Dead*, the *Wild Hunt*, *Perchta* and her party (not forgetting the whirl of unbaptised dead children...), and so on. One must add that beyond the recurrent evocation of night-time and sleep in the related narratives, the link with *sleep paralysis* will be found in more precise detail such as: when the Wild Hunt arises people are wrestled to the ground; if they do not throw themselves prone to avoid the Perchta looking into their eyes; and they can explicitly be left paralysed for a relatively long period afterwards.

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65 Peter Brugger, Marianne Regard, Theodor Landis and Oswald Oelz, "Hallucinatory experiences in extreme-altitude climbers", in *Neuropsychiatry Neuropsychol. Behav. Neurol.* 12, 1999, pp. 67-71.

66 Reinhold Messner, *The Naked Mountain*, Seattle, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

67 Olaf Blanke, Polona Pozeg, Masayuki Hara, Lukas Heydrich, Andrea Serino, Akio Yamamoto, Toshiro Higuchi, Roy Salomon, Margitta Seeck, Theodor Landis, Shahar Arzy, Bruno Herbelin, Hannes Bleuler and Giulio Rognini, "Neurological and Robot-Controlled Induction of an Apparition", in *Current Biology*, vol. 24, Nov. 17, 2014, p. 2081.

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## ADDENDUM

## A HEURISTIC FRAMEWORK IN NEURO-COGNITIVE ANTHROPOLOGY FOR THE STUDY OF (OVER-) INTUITIVE FOLKLORISTICS: INTUITION, COUNTER-INTUITION AND OVER-INTUITION

(According to Abry and Cathiard, 2015<sup>68</sup>)

The heuristic frame we propose here starts from our theoretical framework BISO (a *Brain Incubator for Supernatural Ontologies*), which led to the elaboration of our BRAINCUBUS model that fundamentally supports the case of the birth of supernatural beings – for us *over-intuitive* ontologies – in a specific *dissociated* state of the brain, namely *sleep paralysis* (SP with a fair prevalence; SUNDS rare epidemic of the *Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome*; case studies: cortical stimulation, irritative lesion, etc.). This approach differentiates two different types of supernatural ontologies. The ones induced by neural activity in the right *Temporo-Parietal Junction* (TPJ) for *Out-of-Body Experiences* (OBE), like witch flight, where visual and proprioceptive body maps are dissociated; the others in the left TPJ when experiencing an *Alien Presence Sensed from Self Shadowing* (AP3S), like when hag-ridden, where the Alien left map takes over the right one for the Self. This heuristic frame helps us disentangle *counter-intuition* (in Science since Galileo), *intuition* (in “naïve” developmental domains, from intuitive physics to intuitive psychology), and supernatural *over-intuition*, like when experiencing phantom limbs or full phantom bodies<sup>69</sup>.

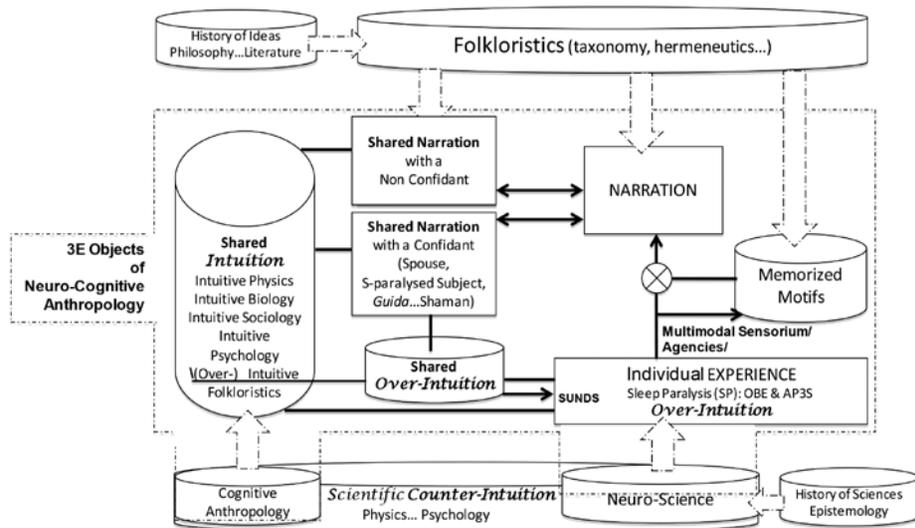
Boxes are classically for processes; cylindrical disks containing information in their memory. Solid line connections are for permanent links, in a flow of processing, directional (arrows) or not. Large dashed band arrows indicate relationships between disciplines (including meta-disciplines like philosophy, etc.) and their objects. 3E Objects in the realm of Neuro-Cognitive Anthropology (circumscribed by a dotted line) are in an *Embedded, Embodied, Embrained* multisensory-multimodal format, as proposed by Tim Van Gelder (Entry: *Dynamic Approaches to Cognition*, MITECS, 1999). They include just the major part of cognitive Anthropology; and a part of Neuro-science which is necessary to understand *over-intuitive experiences* like in *SP brain state*. Of course an open domain with possible extensions.

68 Christian Abry and Marie-Agnès Cathiard, “Commentaire du Cadre heuristique : intuition, contre-intuition et sur-intuition”, in Fabio, Armand, “L’espace-temps d’agentivités en sur-intuition dans les narrations des Alpes francoprovençales et de l’Himalaya népalais”, in *Actes de la conférence annuelle du Centre d’Etudes Francoprovençales*, Saint-Nicolas (Aoste, Italie), 2015, pp. 43-44.

69 To avoid any humanistic confusion with *reductionism* (a rare success like Pauling’s quantal chemistry with physics), what we performed is a *unification* of phantom bodies with physical bodies, since they are of the *same nature*, namely, neural maps. (Needless to add that neither Newton, nor Maxwell “reduced”: sublunar terrestrial apples to the celestial moon; or magnetism and light to electricity...)

How to manage such an *interface* between Folkloristics (taxonomy, hermeneutics), from Humanities, and Neuro-science?

1. Necessity to take into account both *Intuitive* and *Over-intuitive Folkloristics*; the latter being not on the same status as “naïve” domains, notably for Sperber and Hirschfeld (2004) and for Barrett-Boyer’s MCI supporters (cf. note 24).
2. The *Intuitive* or “naïve” mode is restricted to domains where counter-intuitive physical, biological, sociological... science has been proven to be in conflict with developmental psychology (« naïve » does not cover the layman opinion or common sense, as “there is no smoke without fire”, but statements or questions like “No shadow on the wall for a flame?”); the same for intuitive Anthropology and Folkloristics.
3. The *Over-intuitive* mode deals with what is called “supernaturalism” (e.g. Sperber and Hirschfeld, 2004: *The case of supernaturalism*). It is grounded on the advancements in neuroscience on brain states generating illusions or hallucinations. Necessity of transmissibility: these *over-intuitions* are shareable via narrative reports, and with their experiential load for whom shared such an experience with a confidant: friend, relative; or specialist: e.g. shaman, *guida dei morti* (see text).
4. *Counter-intuitiveness* remains reserved classically to epistemology for what is scientifically – theoretically and/or experimentally – testable, and clearly conflicts with developmental intuitions (cf. 2.).



A Heuristic Framework in Neuro-Cognitive Anthropology for the Study of (Over-)Intuitive Folkloristics:  
*Intuition, Counter-Intuition, Over-Intuition*