



[https://www.digi-hub.de/viewer/api/v1/records/1510221856924/sections/LOG\\_0088/pdf/](https://www.digi-hub.de/viewer/api/v1/records/1510221856924/sections/LOG_0088/pdf/)

## Always an Argument

### Persuasive Tools in the Death Rituals of the Jēnu Kurumba

Ulrich Demmer

**Abstract.** – This article analyses the rhetoric of death rituals among the Jēnu Kurumba, a tribal community in South India. It is argued that rituals that are predominantly organised as discursive interaction can be seen as contexts of argumentation and controversy. Rhetoric, then, is not so much understood as monologic manipulation nor as mere adornment of speech or a poetical elaboration of a text but as an alternating process of negotiation. Arguing for a Sophistic concept of rhetoric, the article outlines some of the principal persuasive procedures employed, namely narratives, social memories, and emotions. [South India, Nilgiris, Jēnu Kurumba, ritual, rhetoric, language, culture and performance]

**Ulrich Demmer**, Dr. phil. (1993), lecturer at the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Munich. Several years of fieldwork in South India (Nilgiris) on the Jēnu Kurumba and on religious discourse in rural Tamil Nadu. – Interests: ritual performance, discourse analysis and oral traditions, ethnosociology, language and culture, existential anthropology. Regional specialisation: South Asia. – Publications see Ref. Cit. and several articles on kinship, sociality, and ritual performance.

### Introduction

The question how ritual works is one of the central, long-standing, and controversial topics in anthropology. Moreover, recent contributions<sup>1</sup> testify that the dynamics of ritual is still of vital relevance for the discipline. Despite serious differences as to what it is and how it works, it is undisputed that in ritual two modes of transformation are employed. Thus, specifically symbolic-interpretative anthropologists have shown in great detail, how participants in the “ritual process” (Turner 1969) use symbolic modes of behaviour. In

other rituals, however, language plays a significant or even a primary role. Accordingly, speech acts and “performative utterances” (Finnegan 1969; Ray 1973) are well identified as a crucial linguistic instrument of many a ritual. In addition, we have considerable knowledge of the poetics of ritual speech, in particular of how speakers linguistically construct and renew normative orientations and cultural “concepts unexpressed in daily life” (Laderman 1996: 125).

In contrast, only occasional attention has been paid to procedures of rhetoric so far. Though many ethnographic accounts attest to the substantial role verbal persuasion plays in ritual, empirical research is rather scarce. This is the more surprising as of all disciplines it is the science of rhetoric that is explicitly dedicated to examine, how words and speech are used to influence and transform social relationships as well as the perceptions of audiences or interlocutors. Accordingly there is much unclarity as to how exactly persuasive discourse is employed in the service of ritual transformation and renewal.

The present essay explores the transformative functions of rhetoric in ritual. It suggests to locate rhetoric not so much in the poetic elaboration of monologic speech but rather in the course of communicative interaction. In particular I argue that rituals which are primarily based on verbal exchange are best conceived of as contexts of

<sup>1</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Bell 1992; Houseman and Severi 1998.

conversational interaction, of debate, and, in fact, argumentation. From that point of view, ritual is primarily understood as a discursive arena, where social relations are transformed through the engaged participation of multiple speakers. Taking an analysis of the death rituals of the Jēnu Kurumba in South India as reference, the paper explores some of the discursive strategies within ritual. In particular I will outline social memory and forgetting, narratives, and emotions as important rhetorical instruments.<sup>2</sup>

### Ritual and Rhetoric

Even a cursory review shows that rhetoric plays a crucial role in the transformative dynamic of ritual. Thus Tambiah, to take a prominent example, observes that healing rituals in Sri Lanka are basically a persuasive procedure; they embody, he writes, a "logic of persuasion" (1979: 148) and he consequently calls for an exploration of "how ritual attempts to persuade its clientele" (142).

Likewise Kapferer (1977) demonstrates the extent to which rhetoric is relevant. As his ethnographic descriptions of Sinhalese rituals make clear, it is mainly the rhetorical function of verbal as well as theatrical interaction, through which the participants achieve the transformation of their social relations as of their conception of cultural reality. In the rituals of the Kaluli persuasion plays a crucial role too. As Schieffelin (1985) points out, the speech of the shamanistic media in ritual is meant to evoke the responsiveness of the audience in the form of memories, feelings, and even of critique and resistance.

Corresponding descriptions are provided for the Wana (Atkinson 1989), the Warao (Briggs 1996), and, last but not least, for many shamanistic rituals in South Asia, which are shaped as colloquial debate and persuasive interaction.<sup>3</sup> However, despite its significance, the particulars and procedures of rhetoric are rarely explored in detail. A survey of the rather scanty literature allows the outlining of two approaches.

The first one might be called the "poetic" approach and centres on a basically textual and

monologic notion of rhetoric. The second approach, in contrast, sees rhetoric as being always part of and embedded in the pragmatics of verbal interaction. Moreover, the latter regards the persuasive speech event as dialogic and collaborative performance; as a context of address and response.

The "poetic" line of research is primarily represented by studies indebted to the "ethnography of speaking." Scholars in this tradition, for example, Sherzer (1982) and Kuipers (1990), explicitly address the significance of rhetoric in ritual and consider it so vital a part of performance that they place it side by side with poetics (Sherzer and Woodbury 1987). From that point of view, the persuasive function rests with the poetical construction of a speech or a song. Rhetoric is basically understood as an aesthetic and poetic elaboration of a text and its thus enhanced potential of representation so that Sherzer, in fact, speaks of a "poetical rhetoric" (1982: 319).<sup>4</sup>

The speech genre *ikar*, for example, as sung by the healers in Kuna healing rituals is meant to convince the spirit addressees that "the performing specialist is able to control them" (Sherzer 1982: 308).<sup>5</sup> The healer's accomplish that through the use of poetical forms. Parallelism and narratives depict the healer's power and knowledge but also enhance these descriptions through detailed verbal elaboration. In addition, a figurative lexicon that is elaborated in these songs functions to demonstrate the special knowledge of the healer (Sherzer 1983). Finally, figures of speech, e.g., tropes like metaphor or metonymy are employed to represent the healer's power in detail. "Ideally," Sherzer writes "the spirits, upon hearing and understanding the narrative, and because of hearing and understanding the narrative, do what is described in it" (1982: 308).

In a similar way Kuipers (1990) locates the persuasive function of speech in the poetical shaping of texts. He analyses what Bauman and Briggs have called the "pragmatics of textuality" (1990: 77), i. e., the ways speakers poetically shape the textual structure of their speech. As he points out, the speakers in Weyewa ritual have to convince their audience of the authority of their speech and that they speak in the name of the ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

2 Primarily due to lack of space, I will not touch upon the better known procedures as figurative speech (metaphor, allegory, etc.) or formal elaboration (e.g., repetition and focalization).

3 In fact the Indian examples are too numerous to outline them in detail here and worldwide many more cases could be listed. For an overview see Demmer 2001.

4 Csordas (1996) develops a similar view without, however, exploring the linguistic, textual, or poetic dimensions.

5 The "snake song" (*nakpe ikar*), for example, lasts eight minutes and is sung to drive a spirit snake out of a patient (cf. Sherzer 1982: 307).

6 Kuipers 1990: 6. He also speaks of "rhetorical strategy" (8) and of the "rhetorical patterning" (4) of ritual speech.

According to Kuipers, they achieve this through procedures of textualization, in particular entextualization, so that the authority of their ritual speech derives from a textual structure that "assimilates, encompasses and dominates other voices, obliterating dialogic contingencies and alternative points of view" (1990: 6). A second rhetoric strategy consists in the use of tropes, through which the speakers elaborate and transmit the power and significance of the verbal tradition itself. Thus, a range of metaphors depict the authority of the speech of the ancestors and, moreover, the speakers arrange these tropes with poetical techniques like parallelism and focusation. Ultimately, this poetic arsenal enables the performer to create "the conviction [that] he is not speaking on his own, but on behalf of some distant person or spirit with a legitimate claim on the audience" (1990: 6).

In sum, then, these approaches draw on a well-established scientific tradition, where rhetoric is seen as a science primarily concerned with a text, concentrating on its formal organisation and its aesthetics. As Kennedy has noted (1998: 3–6), rhetorical analysis in this sense concentrates on the planning and composition of a single speech while aspects like style and verbal elaboration with the help of poetical forms are considered to be the relevant aspects. Such an approach is specifically appropriate, wherever we are concerned with what classical Greek rhetoric has classified as epideictic discourses (cf. Kennedy 1998: 6). These are basically monologic speech events where, in terms of participant structure and mutual interaction, one speaker dominates the rhetorical process and where responses of the audience are either impossible or severely restricted by the conventions of the genre. Other examples are welcome speeches, Christian prayers, or some forms of ritual (cf. Bloch 1974).<sup>7</sup>

Yet, such an approach is less applicable whenever we are dealing with the many rituals that are constituted as discursive interaction. These are often contexts resembling not epideictic but rather judicial or forensic discourse. Since in those contexts intense verbal exchange and mutual negotiation between the speakers is most relevant, their analysis clearly calls for a shift of perspective

from a monologic and text-centred to a dialogic and discourse-centred rhetoric.

Within ritual studies it is specifically Strecker (1988) who argues for a rhetoric that concentrates less on texts alone but on ritual interaction and dialogue. On the one hand, his findings add to ritual theory the pragmatic and rhetorical interests of the actors which symbolic approaches did not consider sufficiently. In particular his claim that action in ritual is substantially intentional *and* addressive, led him to develop an interactive rhetorical concept of ritual (Strecker 1988: 129):

"cultural products" may ultimately be seen in terms of actual dialogues between S and H (collective and individual) who are motivated by the wish to persuade each other . . .

On the other hand he was able, for the first time, to ground rhetorical aspects of ritual in a pragmatic theory of social interaction and communication, namely in politeness theory. As his analysis of the transition rituals of the Hamar shows (Strecker 1988), actors intentionally construct ambiguous symbolic statements so that their messages are communicated indirect or encoded. These implicit meanings or "off-record strategies" enable speakers to exert linguistic power because they threaten the addressees "face" and provoke an appropriate reply.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in modifying the politeness theory, he was also able to show that not only implicatures or off-record strategies but all others too, are employed as persuasive devices. Accordingly his "theory predicts that when we find elaborate forms of symbolic action there will exist some underlying motive of persuasion" (1988: 208).

A second major interactive approach is the so-called "new rhetoric." Developed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) as well as by Toulmin (1958), the "new rhetoric" seeks to overcome the widespread reduction of persuasion to monologic "adornment of speech" or even to "art of flattery."<sup>9</sup> Instead it explicitly places the interaction of participants into the foreground. In fact, as Van Eemeren et al. point out "Perelman and Olbrecht Tyteca's new rhetoric reintroduced the

8 "... we must treat rituals as implicatures, as 'ways of not saying what is meant.' More specifically, we can now view rituals as realizations of strategies which have to do with the performance of face-threatening acts (FTAs). As strategies of politeness, rituals constitute means of maintaining face in situations of high risk" (Strecker 1988: 204).

9 For an outline and critique of the long prevailing tendency to reduce rhetoric to aesthetic and increasingly from the 17th century onwards to "adornment of speech", see Vickers (1998) and Billig (1987).

7 Bloch's understanding of rhetoric goes beyond epideictic, since he sees it not only as a formally arranged speech but also as a meaningless linguistic behaviour. But as Paine (1981) has pointed out, ultimately this concept of rhetoric reduces it to a kind of "make believe" and, ultimately, makes description and analysis superfluous.

audience" (1997: 214) into rhetoric. This "dialogic turn," secondly, allows the conceptualization of persuasion as, in the broadest sense, a procedure of negotiation and debate.

To be sure, this notion is not completely new. It rather draws on a concept that was cultivated in the very beginnings of rhetoric by the Sophists in ancient Greece, where it was developed as a form of argumentation (cf. Billig 1987 and Vickers 1998). Accordingly the "new rhetoric" regards, beyond all differences, "judicial argument as a model for rhetoric generally, focusing attention on the interchange between opposing arguer roles" (ibid.). Meanwhile, this approach has developed into an elaborate theory of argumentation. Represented by Van Eemeren et al. (1997) and Billig (1987), it regards rhetorical events as contexts of controversy, as argumentative processes but also as procedures of collaboration. Accordingly, it focuses on the interaction between speaker/audience or between controversial disputants and not on the context-free text of a speech or a song.

Moreover, and for our purpose this is of particular value, it puts special emphasis not only on interaction and verbal exchange but also on the transformative dimension of rhetoric. Indeed one of the most promising elements in argumentation theory is its concern with processes of social transformation. Thus it explores how rhetoric contributes to the reconciliation of conflicting points of views, how it is used to overcome moral crisis, or how participants achieve a mutually recognised consent. As Van Eemeren et al. put it, a central question for rhetoric is "how opposing views come to be reconciled through the use of language" (1997: 215).

Such a concept of rhetoric, I argue, is also relevant for the study of ritual – at least if it is organised as verbal interaction. What are the verbal means that are employed? The few studies that we have, all referred to above, identify some of them. "Poetical rhetorists" explored formal devices like parallelism or focalization but also outlined the work of tropes. Others exposed, as it were, politeness strategies and, last but not least, symbolic action as powerful persuasive devices.<sup>10</sup> All these tools also play an important role in the rituals of the Jēnu Kuṛumba; in the following, however, I want to work out some of the less known verbal means, namely, social memory, narrativity,

and emotions. Their relevance for ritual studies remained almost unexplored so far. Accordingly, to conceptualise these devices we need to draw on studies other than ritual to a large extent.

### Rhetorical Tools: Social Memory, Narrativity, and Emotions

Narratives and reports, i.e., narrativity, are powerful means of rhetoric. Their structure can be impersonal in the sense that the speakers just describe events or facts. Sherzer (1982), for instance, argues for the persuasive function of this type of narrative in the healing rituals of the Kuna. In other speech events narratives are rather personal and, as Bauman (1986) and Hill (1995) make clear, are used rhetorically too. This is in particular the case when social or moral conflicts are at issue. In moral discourse, the moral identity of the involved is put in question and the speakers have to defend and strengthen their points of view effectively, representing them as reliable and legitimate. In those contexts they can use the narration of personal matters to illustrate and elaborate their own positions. On the other hand, personal narratives serve to underline contrasts and differentiations so that one's own points of view are strengthened by the fact that other positions are described in negative terms, for example, as little desirable, bad, or wrong.<sup>11</sup> Narrativity, then, is used to locate and *relocate* the person in the moral space of accountability and responsibility and is thus of particular value in moral discourse. Accordingly narratives are used as arguments to defend or reestablish the moral identities of the speakers. As our analysis below makes clear, this is also the case in ritual discourse. In fact, in those processes a lot is at stake and rituals prove dramatically that also there "performances of narratives provide a forum for negotiating personal and collective identity" (Briggs 1988: 273).<sup>12</sup>

Apart from narratives social memory plays an important role. The claim, representation, or negotiation of collective or personal identities often has a substantial temporal dimension of remembrance. This is the case in contexts of everyday life (Taylor 1989) but also in ritual performances (Connerton 1989; Csordas 1996). That is particularly evident

10 Fernandez (1986), Strecker (1988) and Demmer (1999) show that symbolic action is rhetorical, too. In other words, the rhetoric of ritual consists of verbal *and* nonverbal procedures.

11 See Bauman 1986: 33 et passim.

12 Bauman (1986: 113) also refers to the rhetorical function of narratives when he mentions, that in oral performance people often are "telling stories to each other, as a means of [...] constructing and negotiating social identity."

in cases where the discourse is concerned with personal conflict and the negotiation of identities as, for example, in the so called "Disentangling" meetings in the Pacific (Watson Gegeo and White 1990). In such contexts, the social behaviour of people in the course of their common social history is under scrutiny. What is at stake here is the social self of the participants in its continuity. To preserve or reestablish trust and reliability their "face" needs a kind of reconstitution in the depth of time. The person's regain of its "good" social self, then, is accordingly linked with the reconstruction of its past social relations within the shared life history. It is the narrative "and then" (Taylor 1989: 47) that permits the person to be placed in a temporal context and in a story that finally is its social history. As we will see below, it is in particular in the context of dialogue and argumentation that narratives and, we can add, social memories gain that force as "rhetorical devices of identification" (Bauman 1986: 28) in a powerful way.<sup>13</sup>

Another forceful rhetorical instrument is provided by the linguistic articulation of emotions. Their rhetorical function in ritual is to a large extent unexplored, but the literature provides some hints at least. Thus in the healing seances of the Kaluli (Schieffelin 1985) verbal expressions of feelings play an important role. There, the shamans need to pull their audiences into the ritual performance again and again, and for this purpose they often use emotional means. They evoke and memorise, for example, the common life history with the dead and thus make their audience cry. But these memories and feelings also cause the living to long for the deceased and to communicate and talk with them. In other sequences it is the intention of the shamans to make their audiences laugh and in other parts they try to evoke fear and anxiety, in order to enhance dramaturgically the peculiar atmosphere that goes along with the presence of the spirits. As Schieffelin shows, the use and arousal of emotions is a crucial rhetorical device in the ritual process. Kapferer (1979) too discusses the role of emotions in ritual. In the Sinhalese healing seances the ritual specialists and the comedians seek to evoke the laughter and the amusement of the patients. This evocation of emotions is an important goal of the interaction as well as of the ritual as a whole.

Other anthropologists, outside rituals studies, examine why feelings are so important a rhetorical device. M. Rosaldo (1980) argued early on that feelings are often a kind of pragmatic language.

This is in particular the case, when interpersonal and moral issues are at stake. As an example she mentions the response of a mother who first hears a child cry but then realises that it is her own child. Referring to the mother's immediate reaction to help and rescue the child, Rosaldo points to the appellative and rhetorical force of linguistically expressed feelings that are able to evoke and even to demand morally appropriate replies. Moreover, for Rosaldo emotions and feelings are not only a kind of moral language, but they are also beyond the common separation of rationality and feeling/nature; emotions are, accordingly, "embodied thoughts" (1984).<sup>14</sup>

Subsequent research has shown in detail how relevant indeed these findings are. Thus scholars who worked explicitly on the social relevance of personal experiences (cf. Kleinman 1992; Good et al. 1992) point out that experiences, e. g., social suffering and pain, have a substantial role in the constitution of moral communities, because they are powerful persuasive means. Emotions, they write, have an "important rhetorical dimension: they are meant to arouse a response in audiences, as well as express discomfort" (Good et al. 1992: 201). Moreover, ethnopsychologists were able to demonstrate in detail the persuasive dynamics of emotions in discursive interaction. In the already mentioned meetings of "Disentangling," for example, emotions are evaluations and interpretations of social events, based deeply on the cultural and social values and meanings of the people involved. Thus anger, to cite just one instance, can be a moral evaluation of social behaviour and/or a form of social criticism.<sup>15</sup> As those studies prove, feelings and experiences, articulated in social discourse, serve to define positions of speakers in the social or moral space of their community. This positioning, in turn, gives rise to the rhetorical function of emotions; as moral statements they are experienced as appeals or as inquiries demanding an answer.

Emotions, then, can be seen as discursive acts used to articulate, legitimise, defend, or deny socially relevant claims. In the moral space of responsibility and accountability they have an argumentative function to "move" people towards a culturally and socially appropriate response.

14 The unity of intellect and feeling is the basis of morality and, as Tyler (1978: 166) writes in his defence of rhetoric, is manifest in language itself. The scientific separation of reason and passion, however, "has destroyed the ethical basis of discourse" (167). See also Tyler 1987.

15 For a most lucid case study, see White 1990.

13 Cf. Bauman 1986: 28 et passim.

Feelings, then, play an important persuasive role, wherever people are involved in the negotiation and discursive constitution of social and moral identities. In those contexts, emotions are, as Lutz und White say, an idiom to define and negotiate the social relationship of selves in a moral order (1986: 417).

In the present article I argue that this social dimension is also of paramount importance in ritual discourse. In as much as rituals provide a moral and discursive space where social relations, normative axioms, and worldviews are transformed and reconstructed, emotions, narratives, and social memories are principal rhetorical means. Before we can turn to the description and analysis of the Jēnu Kurumba case, however, we need to know more about the moral conflict and the social crisis that a death initiates among the Jēnu Kurumba. This will provide the necessary background knowledge to evaluate the transformations that the participants accomplish in the ritual process.

### Death and Moral Crisis among the Jēnu Kurumba

The Jēnu Kurumba are a tribe of gatherer/hunters and forest traders in South India. They live in moral communities of approximately 300 to 400 people, scattered over a wide area in the northern Nilgiri region. Sociality within the community is predominantly based on kinship relations.<sup>16</sup>

However, the Jēnu Kurumba have an extended concept of community that includes also the dead and the ancestors thought to live in the underworld. All these beings stand in close social and moral relations; they should support one another, help one another in times of crisis, etc. Moreover, all these beings can also communicate with each other, because the Jēnu Kurumba practice "spirit mediumship": embodied in media, the dead and the ancestors are able to talk and interact with their relatives, though this is strictly confined to ritual contexts and thus to a controlled form of possession.<sup>17</sup>

A death seriously throws the social relations within that extended community in crisis and conflict and the death ritual is primarily concerned with the transformation of it – on more than one

level. R. Hertz (1960: 29–54) has observed that death in many cultures constitutes a time of intermediacy, characterised by separation and crisis. In particular the time after the burial of the body is a time of, to use V. Turner's (1969) expression, "betwixt and between." Among the Jēnu Kurumba this concerns the social relationships among all, the living, the dead, and the ancestors.

The deceased, for one, feel lonely after the burial of the body and are in a state of what the Jēnu Kurumba call *bējaru* that is confusion, worryment, and being without orientation – in fact, they are separated from all social life. Deprived of sociality, the spirits of the dead or, as the Jēnu Kurumba say, the "beings of wind" (*gāli*) are homeless and roam about in the nearby forests. Accordingly, they long to reach the company of the ancestors in the underworld. It is in the course of the death ritual, that the living can help the dead to overcome that state and to reach the ancestors.

Not only the dead ones, but the living too are interested in that because they too are separated from the ancestors. The latter will, in fact, not communicate with the relatives of a dead any more and will not even permit them to enter their shrines, unless the living help the dead to reach the underworld. In this sense, the living are unprotected and in real danger. Should they not help the *gāli* to reach the ancestors in the death ritual, the latter will be angry and refuse further assistance (for instance, in a pending healing ritual).<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the living have a further interest that the dead reach the underworld. Once they have reached there, the Jēnu Kurumba say, the dead are able to help the living in their affairs with the ancestors. They can talk to them and act as mediators between the ancestors and the living. Accordingly, the relatives seek the well-meaning of the dead so that those will talk good about them and persuade the ancestors to help and support the living, as it is the case, for example, in the healing rituals.

Yet, a second aspect of the crisis brought about by death stands against that. This aspect concerns the relations between the living and the dead and has a moral dimension. For the Jēnu Kurumba, every death raises the question of the responsibility for the suffering brought about by death but also what or who caused the death of the person. In fact, the discourse between the living and the dead shows that the deceased are not only lonely and

16 For those aspects and the general ethnography, cf. Demmer 1996 and 1997.

17 "Spirit-mediumship" is a widespread mode of communication with ancestors, deities, or the dead in India (cf. Claus 1979).

18 The communication between the ancestors, the living, and the dead continues in the healing rituals. Cf. Demmer (forthcoming) for a description and analysis.

anxious, but that they also feel neglected. They are distrustful, potentially angry, and full of doubts about the moral integrity of their relatives.

The death rituals consist, apart from sequences of symbolic action, substantially of a series of verbal debates between the dead and the living. These dialogues are called the "speech (or: the words) of good and bad" (*olladu kettadu mātu*), and the themes discussed are, as it were, the "good and bad," namely the morality of the people and the history of their mutual social relationships. In these dialogues, the dead reproach the living of not behaving good towards them in the past, thus calling into question the sociality of their relatives.

This all the more, as with the death of humans there is always the suspicion that close relatives could have killed them, for example, by means of black magic.<sup>19</sup> Due to this distrust, the dead express their doubts to the fact that their relatives will really give their best in the ritual and that they will really help them to reach the ancestors. What is at stake in ritual discourse, then, is the positive image or "face" of the living, their trustworthiness, their reliability, and, finally, in the long run their very well-being.

Due to the rhetorical and argumentative structure of the dialogues, however, the living are able to reply to these reproaches. In fact, they argue against the bad images that the dead are going to draw. The living too raise the question of the past behaviour of the dead and in alternating processes of accusation and defence negotiate with them how to evaluate their common history. In the rhetorical process they seek to defend their reputation as good members of the community and persuade the dead that their reproaches and suspicions are unfounded. In other words, they try to convince the dead of their social self and good relationship.

The ritual participants, then, have to accomplish a double transformation. On the one hand, they have to accomplish a transformation in space and, literally, have to *move* the dead to reach the underworld and the ancestors. On the other hand, they also need to transform their respective positions in the moral space of the community. With good arguments they have to *move* one another towards

reconciliation and trust – towards the "common ground" of a good community.

### The Performance of the Death Ritual

After death the Jēnu Kurumba perform, separated in time, two rituals. The first one is conducted as soon as the person has died and is primarily concerned with the burial of the dead body, with social memory and public laments. The second one, called *pole*, is often performed much later. It is performed to help the dead person (*gāli*) to reach the underworld and the ancestors. In the present article I will focus exclusively on this second ritual, the *pole*. This *pole* is a complex performance that consists in alternating sequences of symbolic actions and verbal dialogues. Usually, there will be three main sequences of symbolic acts, whereas the dialogues are embedded in the course of these activities. Once the people are assembled, the *pole* starts with the first series of acts.

In this first sequence called "the cutting and bringing of leaves," the present male relatives of the dead walk in a line to a nearby river. There a ritual priest (*yajman*) selects a special tree, performs an offering to the dead and the ancestors, and then a shaman gets ready to be possessed by the dead. The offering is meant to invite the dead to come and it initiates the ritual as a rhetorical event. Due to this offering, the Jēnu Kurumba say, the dead feel a desire (*āse*) to come to its people and embody itself.<sup>20</sup> After that, the dead is for the first time present among his kindred as an active participant in the ritual.

In the meantime one of the younger members of the kindred has climbed the tree, has cut a bundle of leafy branches, and has thrown them down. They are then taken by the dead (resp. the shaman) and distributed among all males present. Thereafter, the whole group, cheerfully waving the branches, walks towards a clearing in the forest, where the branches will be used to build a small leaf-hut. The dead person, resp. the shaman, comes along with them and it is usually on this walk that a first exchange of arguments between the living and the dead takes place.

19 In all cases I know, the death of a member of the community was understood as an intended result of other people's actions. The Jēnu Kurumba assumed that the death was caused by another Jēnu Kurumba who employed black magic. A snake bite, for example, resulting in death was interpreted as the result of black magic that had caused the snake to bite this very person.

20 He will "climb on someone's back," as the Jēnu Kurumba say, more than once in the course of this ritual and indeed on several other medias' back too. There are several elderly males who become media for the spirits of the dead or for the deities. For them to act that way is not dependent on anything but their experience and their being males. Women never become media.

In the case presented here the dead (Mare) was a young, married woman, who died shortly after she gave birth to her third child. Her husband could perform a healing ritual, but it had no success. In this first dialogue she makes her relatives responsible for her death. She accuses them of not having helped her when she was sick, she argues that none of her relatives assisted her when she was going to die and that nobody took care of her. Indeed, she talks of a list (*kammaku*) she has in mind and where the bad deeds of the living are on record. And, finally, there is always the suspicion of black magic present. At first she is talking with her motherbrother, being one of her most important relatives.<sup>21</sup>

The motherbrother begins the talk and asks her to tell the people present, whom she makes responsible for her death, what kind of reproaches of wrong behaviour she makes and whom exactly she has in mind.

Motherbrother: Let us hear one word, one word, one word, tell! Who put the illness into your stomach?

In response the lonely and weak dead remembers only vaguely and refers to a whole list of bad deeds of her relatives.

Mare: There is a list of the bad acts. The bad deeds that were done, I do not like it.

Against that her motherbrother tries to disperse the suspicions. He requests the dead to conceal nothing but to disclose everything – however, he asks her also to remember the good deeds that he, the motherbrother, did in the past.

Motherbrother: Well, speak! Which deeds? Say, which mistakes (*tappu*) were made?

Speak! But we both, we were nevertheless always one. Didn't I give to you, whenever you called me?

The dead accepts this memory and she remembers, addressed to all relatives present, her good social relations with the motherbrother. But gradually she also reconstructs her life history with other relatives – and narrates a rather negative social history.

Mare: Yes, motherbrother, for you everything is good. I have no anger on you. Oh, my motherbrother, didn't he give me rice water? He gave me rice water. I got

half. And he the other half. As it is usual. We shared and were one. No, the motherbrother is not listed. But others. There were mistakes. In one hut there was no water. In one hut no rice for me. But – I do not have memory (*neppu*). I cannot say anything now.

But the motherbrother requests her to forget the bad past.

Motherbrother: Yes, let us forget the bad acts. We bring you to the protecting leaf-hut.

We do good to you.

The dead accepts the latter but she also reminds her audience of the fact that others of her family did bad. Therefore, she argues, she has no reason to think well of these people too, and she expresses her worries about the future of her children, left in care of such a bad company.

But here too the motherbrother objects. He assures her of the assistance of her relatives, and he calls into memory, how many of her relatives joined the present ritual in order to help her to reach the ancestors.

Motherbrother: That is nothing. We will look after your children. Don't be afraid. And how many of your relatives have met here?

To that the dead agrees, only, however, to continue with renewed reproaches, thus suggesting that she is not reconciled yet.

Mare: Well, but others ...

This first dialogue – with its alternation of good and bad stories, of accusations and replies, of doubt and reproaches of the dead and refutation of these doubts by the living – creates a field of tension, a dramatic framework for the entire following ritual. It persists, until finally the whole group reaches the clearing in the forest.

Now everybody puts his leafy branch on a small, prepared wooden frame, so that a tiny tentlike hut is constructed and then the whole group circumambulates (anti-clockwise) this hut three times. Thereafter, the medium sinks to the ground. This is the sign that for the time being the dead has left and returned back to the forest. After some hours of rest, the kindred continues with the ritual's second sequence, called "the bringing of water and the circumambulation of the protecting hut (*uđi-mane*)."

In this part the whole kindred walks to the river again. The women carry three water vessels, whereas the ritual priest (*yajman*) brings two small clay pots with him. After reaching the riverbank, he performs an offering addressed to the ancestor of the dead. This is meant to ask the ancestor to

21 The texts that follow below are by no means exhaustive. The actual dialogues are, in this case and in general, much longer and may last up to one hour each. Within the framework of this article it is impossible to cite them more extensively. Full transcripts and translations are provided in Demmer 2001.

ascend from the underworld and join the ritual. Then this small clay pot is filled with water and from now on the ancestor is said to reside in the pot. Later on the ancestor will be made to sit next to the dead, in the little leaf-hut and finally both of them, thus unified, will be brought into the underworld. First, however, the dead has to rejoin the living who are assembled at the riverbank. Accordingly, the relatives use persuasive strategies to convince the dead to come. They weep loudly and display their grief in order to demonstrate (as my interlocutors explained to me) how much they miss the dead, how nice it was when the dead was among them, and how confused (*bējaru*) they feel without the dead. Once this is achieved and the dead has embodied itself in the shaman, a second series of dialogues begins.

Firstly, the dead one tells her people that she still does not trust them. In the following dialogues she talks further of her doubts, of bad memories, and of reproaches, and again the living are engaged in refuting the dead with good arguments. They seek to hold onto the good memories that they, in turn, bring forth and try to convince the dead to forget her bad memories, pointing out their good deeds in the present.

This time it is the father of the deceased who acts as main interlocutor of the dead. He requests his deceased daughter to remember the good times in their history and not to be angry with him because, his argument goes, they are finally "one family." And in that family, even though one naturally also fights, this is not the main factor. Most important are the good relations that they had and maintained in the past. Those, the father argues, should be remembered and not the bad times they had.

Father: Break it open and tell! Speak good! Say "it was this and that." You must say a word. Why? Because you are one with father and mother. Break open what is locked inside of you and say, "There is nothing bad between us." Tell us the way [of life] you went. But do not reproach us that we [the living] argued and fought yesterday. You know that. That happens everyday. If we mutually accuse each other and fight among ourselves, it is not worth talking about it now. Rather tell us how you are. Even if you are annoyed by us and our fighting, say that you are not really angry with me. Do you still know? You called me and gave to me. Who gave water to me? Only you gave it to me. But now? I would not like to argue with you. That is not good.

Then the father requests his daughter not to accuse her husband either, but to remember his

good deeds in the past. In particular he reminds her that it was he, the husband, who organised a healing ritual before her death in order to save her.

Father: And don't forget. Your husband also was there when you were ill at that time, is that right?

But the deceased has still doubts, she distrusts the living and articulates primarily her negative though rather vague memories. Above all she recalls mainly the bad deeds of the father, though she slowly remembers also the good relations with their father.

Mare: But where am I here? Where is the hut of the elder sister? Where is the hut of the elder brother? This is not my settlement. Father, you wanted to organise a ritual for me and do good for me, no? And when I was still alive – you always gave me to eat and you nourished me. That was good for me and there is no anger with me. But nevertheless. Somehow, from someone, bad came on me. And you know, what the bad was, don't you? You know it.

But the father, whose bad behaviour in the past is suggested here, appeals to her, in view of the good deeds here in the ritual itself, to forget the bad.

Father: Leave that now. Leave that now. But, okay, okay, there was something bad, but now? Are we not all assembled, now? We all met with the grandfather [the ancestor], with you, and we all met; Is that bad?

But the dead continues with her reproaches. She remembers more of the bad events, specifically her marriage, in which the father had hardly engaged himself.

Mare: And after dresses and material and the flowers for my wedding were brought together by your son-in-law. And all looked at us. You were there, but you did not look [at us]. You did not tie the marriage chain for us.

To that the father must agree.

Father: Yes. You are right. Your marriage was not as it should have been.

The dead continues with the description of her negative social biography, but then she also suggests her readiness for reconciliation.

Mare: You, old woman, mother, and you, old man. You saw both of us, but you did not care for our marriage. You father thought, oh, it is good or bad anyhow. Nevertheless, otherwise you always did good to me and nourished me. I'm not angry with you. For you it is

good. – But, why is now an obstacle in the middle of the way to grandmother and to grandfather [the ancestors]? Why are people here who do bad?

Now, however, the father becomes impatient. He requests her not to be to “narrow-minded” but to take into account the good deeds that the living did, here in the ritual at least.

Father: But you know it nevertheless. People fight sometimes. And with each large enterprise one also makes mistakes. You know humans and their quarrels since your childhood. You better look at the good which we do here for you.

In this way the dialogue goes on. But finally the dead accepts the references to the good deeds of her relatives and gives in.

Mare: Like that it is! Were those words good words? Is it good for you, father? And for you, mother. Is it good? Is nothing bad between us?

Father: Yes, for us it is good. Our daughter came, that is good for us. Nobody of us is angry.

Mare: And you, father, today you thought of me, is that not true?

Father: Yes

Mare: You remembered mine and took me as a “being of wind” (*gāli*), and you will bring me into the protecting hut, is that not true? You did not kill me?

Father: No. I am not bad. And I will provide also for your man. I give him clothes and food. I tell you this here. I am honest.

As if to attest to the sincerity of these words, a cup of water is given to the dead for refreshment, who drinks it up with grateful remarks. Finally she turns abruptly to the father again.

Mare: I am not angry. And you? Are you angry?

Father: Why should anger be with us. There is no anger with us and nothing at all.

In this way the dialogue ends with the mutual agreement between the deceased daughter and her father on his moral integrity, their good common past, and their good relationship.

After this mutual agreement on their good social history, their good feelings, and their good relationship, the shaman resp. the dead fetches water with the big vessels and passes them on to the father of the dead, who distributes them to the women waiting at the riverbank. Then the whole group returns to the clearing in the forest. Amongst them the dead is walking and also two children who carry the two small clay pots. In one of these the ancestor has taken his seat, whereas in the other the dead (resp. her *gāli*) will be seated

once she has left her medium later on. Until then, however, the dialogues between the dead and her people continue all the way.

When the people reach the leaf-hut, they circumambulate the hut three times, screaming loud and joyfully in one rhythmic voice: “Hooo, hooo, hooo – Hooo, hooo, hooo.” Immediately after the circumambulation, the small clay pots are put to rest in the leaf-hut and lastly the *gāli* leaves her medium, this time, however, taking her seat in the second clay pot. Henceforth, until the next morning, the spirit of the dead and the ancestor are said to remain in their pots.

Then the ritual priest erects a wooden pole (*ranga kamba*, festival or dancing pole), adorned with leaves from the small hut, in the vicinity of the *uđi-mane* and performs an offering in front of it. Then, gradually, the people start to dance in circles around the *ranga kamba* and later on in the night they will have a communal meal. The ancestor and the *gāli*, of course, also get their share when the ritual priest offers them a small portion of the cooked food.

The next morning the final sequence called “joining the ancestors” takes place. In that part of the ritual the dead and the ancestor are ultimately brought into the underworld. Both still remaining in their small pots are carried in a kind of procession to a nearby tree. At the root of it the ritual priest erects a small stone and performs an offering to all ancestors in the underworld. Then he pours the water from both small pots onto this stone. Through the root both the dead and the ancestor reach, as the Jēnu Kuṛumba say, the underworld. This final performance by the ritual priest is seen by the people as their final act of helping the dead to reach the underworld. But nevertheless, this is usually not the end of their struggle and debate with the dead.

Before the dead finally leaves her relatives, she returns from the underworld and, embodied in a shaman, argues once more with the living. Again these dialogues focus on the wrong behaviour and the bad relationships of people in the past, but also on forgetting these mistakes and on reconciliation. This time her prime interlocutor is her husband. More intense than before she brings up for discussion the suspicion, that someone might have killed her, perhaps even her husband. The husband, however, argues often very emotional against those reproaches and requests her to clear this suspicion and relieve him. But again this requires the rhetorical construction of a good, common (hi-)story and once more the speakers are involved in the negotiation of their

remembrances – in fixing the good and forgetting the bad memories with the help of good arguments.

Impatiently the dead is received by the living. First her father requires her to tell, who killed her and who didn't.

Father: Tell, tell us, by whom you died. Whether one of our tribe [*jāni*], or whether other *gāli*, or what [killed you].

Others: Yes, she has to say the events. From where the bad came. From the back side, from the front, from the right, or from left side. She should tell us the good and the bad.

In the beginning, the dead answers reconciliatory, but soon she deplores the unfairness of her suffering and thus persists with her suspicion that close relatives (perhaps her husband) could have killed her by means of magic.

Mare: I'm not angry. I tell you who is on the list. No, I'm not angry. But, humans did it, humans did it. Why? I did nothing bad. I did not fight. Did I ask for water too often? Did I ask for rice too often?

Now her husband, strained by the switch of the talk towards renewed reproaches, interferes and requests her not to speak about her suffering and about unfairness but to remember his good behaviour, to take positive account of it and to clear him from suspicion.

Husband: No, you did not fight. But, don't talk of you. [Then furiously:] I was the best husband. Never drunk. Okay, now I am, but because of grief, as you know. Why don't you say that I was always good to you? I wanted to kill myself, after you died.

Whereupon the dead gives a rather negative response.

Mare: You were like one giving only instructions.

Husband (screaming): I was good to you. How did I struggle. I have helped you when you were ill. Don't you see that?

Mare: But nobody really helped me. Also neither the dead nor the ancestors [helped].

Nevertheless, I'm not angry with you. I'm concerned about you. But no anger.

But this remark left the question of his responsibility for her death unanswered and open. The husband, therefore, reminds her of his positive role in the healing ritual that he organised when she was sick last time. In addition he points out the responsibility of the ancestors and of other *gālis*, who promised in that healing ritual to help – but failed to do so.

Husband: Who made it, death? Only the *gāli* did it. Who called them in the healing ritual? I did it. And didn't they promise to heal you?

The dead agrees to this.

Mare: Yes, to talk like that is correct. But you, you also did not save our child and me. But, I don't have anger on you. Even if I don't know, who did it [the magic and death].

But the husband is still not satisfied with this response. He wants her to clear him publicly and explicitly of any suspicion.

Husband: But you must say it. They [other people] say, I have done it [death]. Don't you know that? If you don't speak now [but only later, at another occasion], I'm perhaps already killed then. Speak, or I kill myself right here.

Finally the dead gives in to this dramatic appeal – then, however, she quickly refers to the responsibility of his other close family members.

Mare: It is better to forget. You were good when we were a family. When we cared for our children. How can you do bad to me? But others, in your family.

But still, for the husband this is not explicit enough. In dramatic dialogues he recalls his good social deeds in the past.

Husband: If not I did it, [then] tell that the spirits of the dead (*gāli*) did it. Tell it straight. I never was angry with you. But you struck me. I was like a slave for you. You insulted me. But I, did I ever said something [bad] to you? Never did I struck you. Tell this now, here in front of all our people.

The dead agrees to that. At the same time, however, she is pushing him to his limits.

Mare: You should not speak in such a way to me and say big words. But, that is correct. You did not even strike me.

In order to weaken each further objection against himself, the husband finally mentions his good deeds in the present ritual itself.

Husband: And now? How did I struggle to bring the people together [for the ritual]! Only for you did I strain myself that much.

In this way the dialogue continues, but gradually the dead gives in to the arguments of her husband. Ultimately she acknowledges the good deeds that he and other relatives carried out for her in the present death ritual. At the same time she approves the responsibility of other *gāli*, which obviously deceived her in the healing ritual with

false promises of help. Finally both, the dead and her husband, acknowledge their reconciliation in a further exchange of speeches. With this renewed agreement on their good social biography and on the good deeds here in the ritual – on the good past and the good present – this emotional debate came to an end. The dead left her living relatives and the shaman sank to the ground. The dead, as my interlocutors explained to me, finally joined the ancestors and the other dead in the underworld.

### Patterns of Argumentation

As the above excerpts indicate, the dialogues between the shamans and the Jēnu Kurumba are organised as a discourse where the transformation of social relations is achieved through argumentation. In the beginning, the shamans put the “face” and reliability of the living participants in question. They narrate the social relationships of the living with the dead and recall the bad memories of the living, thus constructing the social history of the relatives and the dead as a negative story.

In the case presented here, Mare remembers her bad relationships in the dialogue with her motherbrother. She acknowledges the good relationships with the motherbrother himself, but her central argument is that she also remembers the bad behaviour of other relatives. Though she does not mention them by name, she recalls that in one hut there was no water given to her or that in another hut she was offered no rice. In the second dialogue with her father she remembers how badly he and her mother behaved when she married. They didn't take care, they didn't tie the marriage chain, etc. And in the third dialogue with her husband she reminds him of his bad behaviour; that he was someone “always giving instructions” and she recalls that he was not ready to organise the healing ritual for her when she was ill and going to die.

The living, in turn, likewise use narratives to argue against the reproaches and against the bad memories of the dead. In order to regain a positive moral face, lost confidence, and reliability, they articulate their own, positive memories of their common history with the dead. The living remind the dead of their good behaviour in the past, thus trying to reconstruct their common history with the dead as a positive “story.”

Thus Mare's motherbrother right from the start of the dialogue presses Mare to take his good behaviour into account that he was there when she needed something and that he shared with her his food and water. In the second dialogue the father

sometimes gives in to the reproaches and admits some mistakes. But at the time he narrates his own good behaviour, for example, how he cared for her when she was a child. The same pattern also emerges in the dialogues with her husband. The latter again and again defends himself and narrates his good behaviour in the past; for example, that he helped her when she was ill, that he never fought with her and never struck her.

In addition, not only remembrance but forgetting also plays an important role. The living indeed claim that their positive memories are more appropriate representations than those of the dead. Therefore, they ask the dead to accept their narratives as legitimate representations of the past. Based on these narrative arguments, they demand that the dead should not take into account but rather forget the negative events.

As these patterns disclose, the ritual is certainly not a mere arena for representation but rather an arena where representations are accounted for and mutually evaluated, i.e., rejected, criticised, or justified. Correspondingly the shamans are often not satisfied with the narrated representations of the past that the living offer as arguments for their moral integrity and, ultimately, for reconciliation. In fact, despite all arguments the shamans frequently persist in recalling their bad memories. Very often they refuse to accept the narratives of the living as legitimate claims for reconciliation. Moreover they often renew their doubts referring to the alleged bad performance of the living in the ongoing ritual itself.

Thus Mare argued against the positive narratives with the argument that no people came for the ritual today or that no one is helping her now. The living, in turn, must, if they do not want to disrupt the ritual process, respond to these demands for the justification of their narratives and legitimise their claims of moral identity. Apart from narrating positive memories of the past, they frequently do this by referring to their good deeds in the actual ritual itself. Mare's father reminds her of his struggle to organise the ritual, the motherbrother asks her to look around and to recognise the number of relatives attending the ritual and her husband too recalls his efforts to make the present performance a success.

The third important rhetorical tool is the emotions of the interlocutors. As the dialogues show, expressions of feelings are often used as moral arguments with a rhetorical force. The dead frequently articulate their sufferings to provoke appropriate responses, specifically to persuade the living to help them and to support them. They foreground their loneliness (*bējaru*), they point

out their missing strength (*bāla*), and they often express that they don't have proper orientation and bemoan their lost memories (*neppu kāne*) as well as their having no recognition of what is going on in the present situation (*liga kāne*).

But the dead are not only concerned about their own future. Apart from articulations of subjectivity that refer to their own personal feelings they express also a deep concern about the well-being of others. Above all the dead are anxious about the future of their close family members. In our present example Mare's worryment about the future of her father and her husband are quite typical in this respect. Moreover, the Jēnu Kurumba use explicitly in those contexts the term for concern "*arkul*."

The living reply to these appeals. They articulate their concern with the dead and they promise or insure them their assistance. They also support the dead with their deeds. Thus they point out to the dead the way to the "protecting hut" and often they support them physically, e.g., when they uphold the dead on the walk. At other times they even take the dead into their arms and occasionally they also weep and cry with them. In addition, the living answer to the dead's worries about others too. They promise that they will help the living relatives of the dead, that they will take care of children who are left, etc.

Moreover the emotional rhetoric is not a one-sided affair either. As much as the dead, the living use their feelings to move the dead towards support, cooperation, and ultimately reconciliation. They frequently express their own suffering. They often point out their distress and bemoan their moral weakness as well as their ignorance of the "right path" the "correct way of behaving." In this respect they talk of their physical suffering (e.g., *suri*, *sūdu*, "burning," "heat" that goes along with the use of black magic and with social misbehaviour (*tappu*, "mistakes"). At other moments in discourse the living stress that not only the dead but they too are threatened by loneliness and helplessness. This, they argue, would be the case, if the dead would not join them at the river, if they wouldn't walk with them towards the leaf-hut or finally, if the dead wouldn't reach the underworld. The ritual performances make clear that usually the dead can't resist giving appropriate replies to the feelings of their human relatives. They join them at the river, they walk to the leaf-hut, and they talk good with them, giving them promises of future help and care.

Apart from weakness and suffering, socially disruptive feelings like anger are also used. As

in many other cultures (cf. Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990) anger is a dangerous emotion. It poses a kind of threat to good social relations as well as to one's own well-being. This observation is also often explicitly stated in the ritual dialogues of the Jēnu Kurumba. Anger that is openly articulated, speakers say, actually represents a threat that can easily damage social relations. Correspondingly speakers use it to evoke fear of its consequences and move the recipient towards a positive reply. The message here is that to avoid danger, replicates better conform to the requests of the speakers.

However, it is typical of egalitarian societies that in conflict discourse bad emotions are neither willingly expressed nor admitted to exist (Brenneis and Myers 1984). Openly neither side wants those emotions and nobody admits having such bad emotions. Instead, everybody is rather concerned with denying those feelings. Three principal modes of "using anger" rhetorically can be identified in the ritual dialogues.

In one mode the speakers deny their anger but suggest its hidden presence with a relativizing clause that follows the statement, for example "I'm not angry, but . . . who did it to me?" With this last utterance the speaker says that she is not angry, but she also suggests that she might be a little bit angry because someone did black magic to her, hurt her, or even killed her. This kind of formulation evokes fear of the consequences if (!) the speaker is getting angry. They evoke a positive reply conforming to the expectations of the speakers.

A second procedure is that the interlocutors request one another not to become angry. The statement "Don't get angry," for example, suggests that the speaker, in case of a negative response, will get angry. It is an appeal to reply positively and behave in accordance with the speaker's request. In the third mode speakers mutually ensure one another that there is "no anger in our stomach." The phrase "I'm not angry, but are you angry?" and the reply "No, I'm not angry" is an example of this mode. The first statement plus question also has the persuasive effect of almost compelling a positive reply, namely the agreement to the good relations that were achieved in ritual.

These incidents show that the rhetorical effect of "moving" the hearer is achieved in either way, namely through the denial or the absence of angry feelings. In the first case the very insistence on its absence points to its still possible existence in the background. It thus underlines the power of the speaker as well as the social danger and disruption that goes with it. With its denial the speaker suggests, in fact, its possible presence and, in fear

of this, better to reply in the positive. In the second mode, on the other hand, this negative request suggests its easy emergence in case of a negative response and it also affords a positive reply. In the third mode speakers often use the denial of anger to confirm the good relations that they have established. At the end of most dialogues, speakers persuade one another that they really have no anger and that the ritual has achieved its principal aim, the resurrection, as it were, of social harmony, trust, and happiness; people did achieve "unity" (*ondume*), as the Jēnu Kuṛumba say. In those sequences of the ritual the overcoming of anger is a frequent focal topic. Moreover, interlocutors mutually confirm their good social relations, their happiness and the welfare that goes along with that. In this respect they talk of the "firm ground" (*nele*) that they achieved in the course of the ritual discourse. In sum, all emotions mentioned above have rhetorical functions as moral arguments. They are used to defend or to criticise moral positions. They are addressed as appeals to the moral responsibility of the involved and are thus able to evoke appropriate responses.

### Conclusion

What does the above analysis mean for the dynamics of ritual? A number of recent ritual studies point out that, contrary to a widely held notion, rituals not only consist in the enactment of repetitive, fixed, and stereotyped patterns of symbolic and/or linguistic acts. Instead, many are rather loosely patterned and often constitute arenas where moral norms, social relations, or core cultural values are not so much represented but actively negotiated and worked out.<sup>22</sup> That language and rhetoric plays a crucial role here is also widely recognised. Yet, Bauman and Briggs' call to examine more closely the ways that "enable verbal art to transform, not simply reflect, social life" (1990: 69) did not result in much clarity about linguistic processes of ritual transformation. The case of the Jēnu Kuṛumba death ritual suggests some of the ways rhetoric is employed therein.

As we have seen, the participants have to achieve a complex transformation. Most important, death puts the morality and relatedness of people into question, it leads to mistrust and a crisis of social relations. In ritual, in turn, the actors have to transform their bad relations, they have to *move*

one another towards reconciliation and trust. In short, transformation is accomplished rhetorically.

While some studies might tend to look at rhetoric in ritual as a form of monologic and epideictic discourse, the analysis shows that in the case presented here a dialogic notion of persuasion is appropriate. Whereas in the monologic epideictic genre the audience is regarded primarily as passive, mute, and unresponsive, in the Jēnu Kuṛumba death rituals it is explicitly responsive and an active partner in the discourse. Moreover, its rhetoric is not based on the recitation or correct performance of relative strictly formalised and fixed utterances, but draws, like forensic and judicial rhetoric, on formulaic speech, which is less formalised and allows for wider individual variations and person- as well as context-bound utterances. Finally, in the verbal interaction of ritual, persuasive effects are not merely achieved in the sense that a passive audience is rather impressed or even coerced into accepting the message then convinced by it. In contrast, it is a rather Sophistic notion of rhetorical discourse that is most significant here.

As Vickers has noted to "the Sophists' rhetoric was less an arsenal of verbal devices than a process of interaction in which the norms of justice and social order were worked out by those taking part" (1998: 123). Its aim need not be identified then, as for example a Platonic rhetoric does, "with the desire to gain power and benefit the self by the unrestrained indulgence of desire" (1998: 120). This concept rather regards people's "direct involvement with community decisions" (1998: 6) as vital, so that Cicero, for example, could hold that rhetoric is designed to make people aware "that they must work for the common good" (Vickers 1998: 8). To sum up, for the Sophists rhetoric meant indeed an "improvement of society through 'expression of conflict and yet contain it by an agreed political procedure'" (1998: 124). Its effectiveness derives from a two-sided process, with the development of pro- and contra-statements, with negotiation and the change of perspectives achieved (or not achieved). Rhetoric relies on mutual argumentation, on debate, and ultimately on the ability of the participants to reach jointly approved decisions and consent.

In Jēnu Kuṛumba death rituals, rhetorical transformation is brought about on this dialogic level of performance. In the beginning, the morality of the speakers and their good social relationship is put into question. But in the ritual process the actors seek to defend their reputation as good members of the community and try to persuade one another that the reproaches and suspicions are unfounded.

22 Cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990; Claus 1997; Howe 2000; Schieffelin 1996.

Yet it is crucial to see, that this is not a matter of mere representation and "make-believe." Instead narratives and memories are always subject to evaluation and criticism. Speakers use these devices as arguments to posit themselves and others in the moral space of the community. Yet, in doing so they are also provoking response and debate, so that all speakers are engaged in the evaluation, rejection, approval, or even in forgetting – and thus in the reworking of representations.

Indeed, the transformative process of ritual is based on this selective process. Positive memories, narratives, and emotions of the person are accepted as justified. Once approved they are counted as good arguments and as appropriate representations of the person in question. In addition, reports of the good deeds in the ritual itself legitimate the forgetting of the bad memories. It is only in that process of rejecting and approving the reminded and emotional episodes of their social history that the participants gradually succeeded to create a larger, more positive and convincing story, a social biography of their good social relation. Participants moved one another towards a consent on their common good history and on their proper relationships in the present too, thus reestablishing reconciliation and trust.

The ritual as a whole can be understood as a context of argumentation, where the alternating articulation of memories, narratives, and feelings enabled the speakers to transform their social relations and thus to regain the "common ground" of a good community.

This article is based on five years of fieldwork conducted among the Jënu Kurumba between 1987 and 1998. I am grateful to the Indian Government, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and the German Research Foundation (DFG) for their generous support. The argument and the ethnography of this article was presented as a paper in various contexts. I wish to thank specifically S. Tyler, I. Strecker, and P. Claus for their constructive criticism and suggestions.

## References Cited

**Atkinson, Jane Monnig**

1989 *The Art and Politics of Wana Shamanship*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**Bauman, Richard**

1986 *Story, Performance, and Event. Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs**

1990 *Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on*

*Language and Social Life. Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59–88.

**Bell, Catherine**

1992 *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Billig, M.**

1987 *Arguing and Thinking. A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Bloch, Maurice**

1974 *Symbols, Song, Dance, and Features of Articulation. Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority? Archives européennes de sociologie* 15: 55–81.

**Brenneis, Donald Lawrence, and Fred R. Myers (eds.)**

1984 *Dangerous Words. Language and Politics in the Pacific*. New York: New York University Press.

**Briggs, Charles L.**

1988 Introduction. In: C. Briggs (ed.), *Narrative Resources for the Creation and Mediation of Conflict. Anthropological Linguistics* 30/3–4: 271–277.

1996 The Meaning of Nonsense, the Poetics of Embodiment, and the Production of Power in Warao Healing. In: C. Laderman and M. Roseman (eds.); pp. 185–232.

**Claus, Peter J.**

1979 Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship from the Perspective of Tulu Oral Traditions. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 3: 29–52.

1997 Ritual Performances in India. In: S. D. Glazier (ed.), *Anthropology of Religion*; pp. 191–209. Westport: Greenwood Press.

**Connerton, Paul**

1989 *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Csordas, Thomas J.**

1996 Imaginal Performance and Memory in Ritual Healing. In: C. Laderman and M. Roseman (eds.); pp. 91–113.

**Demmer, Ulrich**

1996 *Verwandschaft und Sozialität bei den Jënu Kurumba. Vom Arbeiten, vom Teilen und von (Un)Gleichheit in einer südindischen Sammler- und Jägergesellschaft*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, 173)

1997 *Voices in the Forest. The Field of Gathering among the Jënu Kurumba*. In: P. Hockings (ed.), *Blue Mountains Revisited. Cultural Studies on the Nilgiri Hills*; pp. 164–191. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

1999 *How to Make the Spirit of the Dead Happy. The Rhetoric of Words and Deeds in a Jënu Kurumba Death Ritual*. In: E. Schönbucher and C. P. Zoller (eds.), *Ways of Dying. Death and Its Meaning in South Asia*; pp. 68–87. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

2001 *Niyāya mātu. Ritual, Rhetorik und Poetik bei den Jënu Kurumba (Südindien)*. [Unveröffentl. Habilitationsschrift, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München] forthcoming *Dialogues with the Ancestors. The Power of Rhetoric in Jënu Kurumba Healing Rituals*. In: U. Demmer and M. Gaenzle (eds.), *Language and Power in Ritual Performance*.

**Fernandez, James W.**

1986 *Persuasions and Performances. The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

**Finnegan, Ruth**

1969 *How to Do Things with Words. Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone. Man* 4: 537–552.

- Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio et al.**  
1992 Epilogue. In: M.-J. DelVecchio Good et al. (eds.), *Pain as Human Experience. An Anthropological Perspective*; pp. 199–207. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hertz, Robert**  
1960 *Death and the Right Hand*. (Translated by Rodney and Claudia Needham). London: Cohen & West. [First publ. in French in *L'Année Sociologique* 1907, and *Revue Philosophique* 1909]
- Hill, J.**  
1995 The Voices of Don Gabriel. Responsibility and Self in a Modern Mexicano Narrative. In: B. Mannheim and D. Tedlock (eds.), *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*; pp. 97–148. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Houseman, Michael, and Carlo Severi**  
1998 *Naven or the Other Self. A Relational Approach to Ritual Action*. (Translated from the French by M. Fineberg). Leiden: Brill. [1994]
- Howe, Leo**  
2000 Risk, Ritual, and Performance. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6: 63–79.
- Humphrey, Caroline, and James Laidlaw**  
1994 *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual. A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kapferer, Bruce**  
1977 First Class to Maradana. Secular Drama in Sinhalese Healing Rites. In: S.F. Moore and B.G. Myerhoff (eds.), *Secular Ritual*; pp. 91–123. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.  
1979 Emotion and Feeling in Sinhalese Healing Rites. *Social Analysis* 1: 153–176.
- Kennedy, G. A.**  
1998 *Comparative Rhetoric. An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kleinman, Arthur**  
1992 Pain and Resistance. The Delegitimation and Relegitimation of Local Worlds. In: M.-J. DelVecchio Good et al. (eds.), *Pain as Human Experience. An Anthropological Perspective*; pp. 169–197. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kuipers, Joel C.**  
1990 *Power in Performance. The Creation of Textual Authority in Weyewa Ritual Speech*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Laderman, Carol**  
1996 The Poetics of Healing in Malay Shamanistic Performances. In: C. Laderman and M. Roseman (eds.); pp. 115–141.
- Laderman, Carol, and Marina Roseman (eds.)**  
1996 *The Performance of Healing*. New York: Routledge.
- Lutz, Catherine A., and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.)**  
1990 *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lutz, Catherine, and Geoffrey M. White**  
1986 The Anthropology of Emotions. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15: 405–436.
- Paine, R.**  
1981 Introduction. In: R. Paine (ed.), *Politically Speaking. Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: ISHL.
- Perelman, Chaim and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca**  
1969 *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise in Argumentation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. [First publ. in French 1958]
- Ray, Benjamin**  
1973 "Performative Utterances" in African Rituals. *History of Religion* 13: 16–35.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z.**  
1980 *Knowledge and Passion. Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems, 4]  
1984 Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling. In: R. A. Shweder and R. A. Levine (eds.), *Culture Theory. Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*; pp. 137–157. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schieffelin, Edward L.**  
1985 Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality. *American Ethnologist* 12: 707–724.  
1996 On Failure and Performance. Throwing the Medium Out of the Seance. In: C. Laderman and M. Roseman (eds.); pp. 59–89.
- Sherzer, Joel**  
1982 The Interplay of Structure and Function in Kuna Narrative, or: How to Grab a Snake in the Darien. In: D. Tannen (ed.), *Analyzing Discourse. (Text and Talk, Georgetown University Roundtable Talk on Language and Linguistics 1981)*; pp. 306–322. Washington: Georgetown University Press.  
1983 *Kuna Ways of Speaking. An Ethnographic Perspective*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Sherzer, Joel, and Anthony C. Woodbury (eds.)**  
1987 *Native American Discourse. Poetics and Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strecker, Ivo**  
1988 *The Social Practice of Symbolization. An Anthropological Analysis*. London: The Athlone Press. (London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, 60)
- Tambiah, Stanley J.**  
1979 A Performative Approach to Ritual. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65: 113–166.
- Taylor, Ch.**  
1989 *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Toulmin, S. E.**  
1958 *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Turner, Victor W.**  
1969 *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Tyler, Stephen A.**  
1978 *The Said and the Unsaid. Mind, Meaning, and Culture*. New York: Academic Press.  
1987 *The Unspeakable. Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Van Emmeren, F. H., et al.**  
1997 Argumentation. In: T. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process*; pp. 208–229. London: Sage Publications.
- Vickers, B.**  
1998 *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Watson Gegeo, K. A., and Geoffrey M. White**  
1990 *Disentangling. Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- White, Geoffrey M.**  
1990 Moral Discourse and the Rhetoric of Emotions. In: C. A. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod (eds.); pp. 46–68.