

Editor's Column

With this special issue of *Oral Tradition*, "Authoritative Speech in the Himalayas," we offer a suite of essays under the joint editorship of Anne de Sales and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, whom we congratulate for bringing it to fruition. The co-editors' introductory essay, "Words of Truth: Authority and Agency in Ritual and Legal Speeches in the Himalayas," details empirical and theoretical aspects considered by these collected essays sited in the wealth of traditional verbal arts alive in the Himalayan region, as well as providing references for further reading in epic oral poetry and shamanic ritual chants.

The first of nine contributions, John Leavitt's "Authoritative Modes of Speech in a Central Himalayan Ritual," adopts Roman Jakobson's six linguistic functions for an analysis of two modes of speech found in Central Himalayan divine possession rituals that rely on both the speaker's social identity as well as the aesthetic power of the speech register. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine follows with "The Untouchable Bard as Author of his Royal Patron: A Social Approach of Oral Epic Poetry in Western Nepal," an exploration of inversion in caste hierarchy concurrent with the authorization to speak in the royal patron's name that a bardic performance confers on the untouchable bard. This portrayal of both bard and patron explores the traditional art form as well as a new one—an embryonic epic about the People's War waged by the Maoist party in Nepal between 1996 and 2006. With "The Sources of Authority for Shamanic Speech: Examples from the Kham-Magar of Nepal" Anne de Sales problematizes Pierre Bourdieu's theory of ritual techniques as forms of domination and considers elements of shamanic speech, pragmatic effects of the ritual language, and the performer in the warranting of ritual specialists in the Kham-Magar community to act as its spokespersons with invisible interlocutors, as well as to act as truth-tellers. Martin Gaenzle's "Meaning, Intention, and Responsibility in Rai Divinatory Discourse," confronts divergent treatments of speech act theory by schools of linguistic anthropology and language philosophy in a study of shamanic divination that queries responsibility, interpretation, and performance, and reveals complex agency. Franck Bernède's essay, "The House of Letters: Musical Apprenticeship among the Newar Farmers (Kathmandu Valley, Nepal)," explores principles of musical discourse as revealed through the teaching of the *dhimay* drum. Training of the apprentices depends upon the ritual master's authority, as expressed in the drum's language of mimetic syllables, and includes the acrobatic handling of bamboo poles. The essay discusses the nature of this traditional musical language as well as consequences on its transmission and performance practices wrought by various sociological changes that have taken place in contemporary Newar society.

Christian Jahoda's "Imparting and (Re-)Confirming Order to the World: Authoritative Speech Traditions and Socio-political Assemblies in Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Purang in the Past and Present" contextualizes and analyzes speech traditions and socio-political assemblies in these Tibetan-speaking areas in which three classes of authoritative speech—ancient dynastic, modern village political, and mythological or religious—have been documented. Further illustrations of authoritative speech are drawn from a wedding ceremony speech and an oracular soliloquy pronounced by a protective goddess through a trance-medium. Daniela Berti offers a

fascinating case study titled “The Authority of Law and the Production of Truth in India.” This essay examines how a court hearing in a District Court of Himachal Pradesh constructs evidentiary truth. Here the power of language derives from specific procedural rules that assign evidentiary value to a witness’ words. This procedural primacy gives the witness’ spoken words efficacy, regardless of their veracity. Barbara Berardi-Tadié’s “Engendering Minorities in Nepal: The Authority of Legal Discourse and the Production of Truth” explores how performative utterances pronounced before the the Supreme Court of Nepal shape social realities by establishing the “truth” about them. Lawyers enlisted the authority of legal discourse through judicial operations of codification, normalization, and institutionalization, and deployed it to introduce new gender and sexual categories, thus institutionalizing a “new” minority. Pustak Ghimire’s essay “Authority, Status, and Caste Markers in Everyday Village Conversations: The Example of Eastern Nepal” rounds out this nonet of studies in Central Himalayan authoritative speech. This essay delineates the complex use of terms of address and honorific pronouns in common Nepali by focusing on the language spoken by local headmen, notables, and politicians, and concludes that within a period of several generations the widespread leveling of distinctive linguistic features, as well as a shift in standard of authority from virile dominance to moderation and restraint, have been effected.

This issue of *Oral Tradition* appears in virtual space thanks to the combined efforts of the staff of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition—Mark Jarvis, Hannah Lenon, Lauren Anderson, Elise Broaddus, Katy Chenoweth, Chris Dobbs, Emily Horn, Kate Kelly, and Professor Sean Gurd. In addition, the fine anonymous colleagues who referee submissions to *Oral Tradition*, whose expertise and good sense guide their editorial treatment, deserve special recognition and *kudos*, we are deeply appreciative of having the benefit of your guidance. Your invaluable counsel enables us to continue aspiring to the standards of scholarly excellence established by the journal’s founder and editor, John Miles Foley. Professor Foley worked tirelessly to ensure there be scholarly dialogue about humanity’s verbal arts, and his initiative, *Oral Tradition*, has served as one such venue now for slightly more than three decades. This endeavor continues and is made possible by the generous support of the College of Arts & Sciences, for many years by decision of Dean Michael O’Brien, and now, Interim Dean Patricia Okker, of the University of Missouri.

We encourage you to continue the practice of dialogue and inquiry into humanity’s variegated oral traditions, and to that end, invite you to share your insights into the world’s traditional verbal arts with us and our readers. Evaluation of submissions is made by the double-blind review process: specialist and generalist referees report on the quality and aptness of submissions and their guidance is dispositive for the decision to accept, accept with revision, or decline a submission. Their decision is generally reported to prospective authors within a trimester of receipt. Published online and in open access format, *Oral Tradition* is seen by more than 20,000 readers in 200 countries and territories.

John Zemke
Editor, *Oral Tradition*