



## *The Temple, the Home and the Village*

A Double Presentation on Bonpo Exorcism Rites in Mustang, Nepal

**Film** *Between the Lines: Exorcising the Old Year in a Himalayan Bonpo Village*

Charles Ramble and Kemi Tsewang

*Between the Lines* is about the Dögyab ceremony of Lubrak, a Bonpo settlement in Nepal's Mustang District. Founded in the 12th century by the famous Yangal clan, Lubrak is inhabited by hereditary priests (bla mchod), who perform rituals in the village temple throughout the course of the year. The general structure of the ritual will be recognisable to anyone familiar with Tibetan tantric ceremonial. But the Lubrak Dögyab has some strikingly distinctive features. The lamas are divided – by a roster system and by dice-throws – into “monastic” and “lay” components, in which the latter play the role of patrons and, in one episode, the autochthonous

genii loci who were subjugated by the founder lama. The interaction between the two groups oscillates between conflict – including a symbolic wrestling match – and integration, as in the requirement that the “patrons” join the ’cham dancers, brandishing their cooking utensils as sacred attributes (phyag mtshan). The dynamic is enriched by the prominent role of the women, in a complex triangular interaction where the currency consists of games, meta-rituals and songs. The commentary is provided by the Lubrakpas themselves, who explain to the viewer the significance of each of the episodes they are about to witness.

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**Illustrated talk** *The Decline of Vampire-Subjugation Rituals in Mustang*

Charles Ramble

The repertoire of apotropaic rituals performed by Tibetan tantric lamas of both the Buddhist and Bon traditions includes the rite of vampire-subjugation (sri mnan). As the culmination of the ceremony, an effigy of the vampire in question is sealed inside an animal-skull or a yak horn, depending on the particular class of predatory spirits to which it belongs, and buried in the earth. In spite of the fact that the demand for this ritual by the local lay population has remained constant, the past few decades have

seen a growing reluctance on the part of Bonpo tantrists to perform it on the grounds that it generates “sin” (sdig pa). The lamas’ explanations are unconvincing, not least because other rituals that entail the same destructive procedures are not regarded as sinful. The paper offers the tentative suggestion that an explanation for the lamas’ reticence may be found in a close examination of the myth of the vampire itself, seen in the light of recent social changes in the ethnically Tibetan enclave of Mustang.