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▶ **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Prévôt. The " Bison Horn " Muria: Making it " More Tribal " for a Folk Dance Competition in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. Asian Ethnology, 2014, 73 (1–2), pp.201-231. halshs-01273915

HAL Id: halshs-01273915
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01273915

Submitted on 14 Feb 2016

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The "Bison Horn" Muria

Making it "More Tribal" for a Folk Dance Competition in Bastar, Chhattisgarh

This article examines the tribal stereotypes used in Bastar (Chhattisgarh) by some local institutions in their different representations and mise-en-scène of the *ādivāsī*s, the local authorities organizing "tribal" dance competitions, some local NGOs setting up workshops and selling "tribal handicrafts," or the new government planning its tourism policy with perfectly arranged "tribal tours." More specifically, it analyzes the aesthetic transformations of a Gond ritual into a dance competition promoted by the government. While the manipulation of symbols hides political strategies from some influential groups to incorporate or dissolve tribal people into the main (Hindu) society and aspire to a shared indigeneity, *ādivāsī*s also build their own image by appropriating the stereotypes projected on them through their musical performances. However, they are torn between Hindu nationalists and Maoists and caught in the crossfire between the "security forces" and the guerrillas, overwhelmed by the huge industrial issues behind this gory crisis.

KEYWORDS: stereotypes—ritual—dance—competition—Gond—Chhattisgarh

Asian Ethnology Volume 73, Numbers 1–2 • 2014, 201–231
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Despite their central position, the state of Chhattisgarh and its southern districts of Bastar [1] and Dantewada are little known to Indian people except for their image of a backward tribal area highly affected by Naxalism (that is, the Maoist guerrillas). These districts are indeed inhabited by a majority of tribal people (ST, Scheduled Tribes) and local castes (SC, Scheduled Castes) that are considered "indigenous."[2] Yet, since the second half of the nineteenth century, numerous other groups have migrated from all over India to settle into this kingdom of wild jungle, mostly as merchants and civil servants encouraged by the British to administrate and "civilize" the country. Living in small towns that they developed and enlarged in a few generations, these higher castes still dominate the indigenous people economically, culturally, and politically despite the creation of the state of Chhattisgarh in 2000, which was supposed to ensure political autonomy for the indigenous population.

This article will examine the tribal stereotypes used in Bastar by some local institutions in their different representations and mise-en-scène of the *ādivāsī*s, like local NGOs running workshops and selling "tribal handicrafts" or the new government planning tourism policy to initiate perfectly arranged "tribal tours." This study deals more specifically with a folk dance competition called the *lok nṛtya pratiyogitā* that has been organized for at least fifteen years in the small town of Kondagaon. Even if its title is not explicit, this competition concerns dance groups representing different village dormitories (*ghoṭul*) of the region, characteristic of the Muria (*muriyā*) villages.[3]

The *ādivāsī*s of Bastar comprise the majority of the Gond (*gōnḍ*) in the north (including the subgroups Muria Gond and Maria [*māṛiyā*] Gond and Dhurwa in the south, plus other tribes like Halba and Bhatra). Tribal people are generally depreciated by the castes that settled in the region more recently. Sometimes perceived as dangerous, but more often depicted as innocent, they are as foreign and mysterious to the town dwellers as the very jungle in which they live. As one tourist pamphlet puts it, they "are the shyest of the tribal people" (Chhattisgarh Tourism Board 2002, 4). On the other hand, they represent an ideal of freedom, and they are an object of exotic fascination and erotic fantasy (Prévôt 2005).

Beyond these clichés, the promotion of "tribalness" in the local towns through the occasional organization of shows or the display of so-called tribal handicrafts at

home can be understood as symbols of pride for those born in Bastar who arrived last to live in this distinct tribal area. To some extent it might correspond to a will to identify with the *ādivāsī*s and thus to claim an authentic Bastari identity. But I would like to suggest in this article that these phenomena can also be interpreted as a manipulation of symbols by the media or by the state (or by some influential groups connected to it), hiding political strategies to incorporate or dissolve tribal people and identity into the Hindu majority. Thus, the state or some influential groups are hiding a yearning for a shared indigenousness. This manipulation appears even more obvious if one considers the political crisis endured in southern Chhattisgarh from 2005 onward, a time when fights between the Maoist guerrillas and local government forces (that is, police, paramilitary forces, and finally the army) intensified dramatically, leading to a war in which tribal people have been the main victims, caught in the crossfire and torn between these two camps. The government of Chhattisgarh thus shows a newfound interest in local tribal culture by highlighting an *ādivāsī* identity presented as "close to nature" through the media. This screen allows the state surreptitiously to support temporally lengthy industrial projects threatening the *ādivāsī* villages and their forest environment, while at the same time trying to both conceal the ongoing conflict with the guerrillas and hide innate prejudices against local people of tribal descent.

Whatever the case may be, we should keep in mind that *ādivāsī*s, or at least some of them, might also construct their own image of themselves as an indigenous group by appropriating the stereotypes projected on them because they find it to be of political or economic interest. Even though I was unable to take into account as much as I wanted regarding what the Muria who participate in the dance competition say about it, I intend to show what kinds of transformation (that is, from ritual to competition) this new form of performance implies, which performative elements have been transformed, and what the implications are for the Muria in these changes and in the use of stereotypes. In other words, I will show how Muria music and dance have been transformed both by the Muria themselves and by representatives of the state and members of local political parties, each for their own reasons.

The Muria and their *ghoṭul*

In the Gond language, *ghoṭul* defines both a building and an institution usually described in ethnographic terms as a "dormitory." Its gender mix makes it a remarkable case among dormitories found in different societies of South Asia, most of which usually separate boys and girls (Elwin 1947), thereby distinctly characterizing the social organization of the Muria, a sub-group of the Gond tribe.[4] Their neighbors, the Maria (another sub-group of the Gond tribe), also possess dormitories, but only males frequent them. Elwin explained this difference (1947, 54) by the fact that Maria villages were organized in exogamic clans established around a place of worship, whereas the Muria, having lost this social organization by accommodating several clans in the same village, did not bear the same risk of clan incest within the *ghoṭul*.[5]

Assuming the system stills works properly in some locations, the young Muria generally enter the dormitory between the approximate ages of six to ten; that is, as soon as they have found a symbolic partner of the opposite sex with whom they will spend their nights in the *ghoṭul* and with whom they will form a couple (*joṛ*). Until they marry, young people have to go there every night after spending the day with their respective families for different domestic and agricultural tasks. Inside the *ghoṭul*, whose entrance is closed and forbidden to the married villagers (which implies little interference from the adults), each member is to complete specific tasks and follow strict rules. The eldest or the most virtuous among them receive titles and are given roles to play in a system based on egalitarian values.

Each village has its own *ghoṭul* (larger villages have two or even three) from which drumming and singing echo almost every night. Collective music and dance are (or used to be) the main activity of the boys and girls. Their daily rehearsals are an offering to their gods. They also strive to serve the many rituals of the village and perform for large gatherings such as the *kokoreṇg* (to be discussed below), which allow *ghoṭul*s from different villages to make alliances. The *ghoṭul* owes certain services to the village on occasions of collective work, especially for the organization of certain ritual events for which it provides food and music for people, the gods, and the ancestors. As a symbol of alliance, the *ghoṭul* plays its most expected part for weddings, since it loses one of its members when the ritual is performed. As we shall see, in more recent years some shows and competitions have been at stake too, leading some villages to represent Gond culture in regional towns and even occasionally outside of Bastar (for example, Raipur, Delhi, or Mumbai).

Two theories radically oppose one another in the interpretation of this key institution of Muria society. Even if the dormitory is not a place for initiation in that it has no secret revealed nor rite of passage performed, Verrier Elwin (1947) and Simeran Gell (1992) both recognize its vocation for education in the transmission of social values. Gell evokes a micro society amid the unity represented by the village. But she opposes Elwin's harmonious and functionalist conception of the *ghoṭul* as a place of great sexual freedom. Apprehending the *ghoṭul* mainly through kinship, she shows forty years after him that its place in Muria society is on the contrary very problematic and contradictory. Whereas Elwin underlined the place of sexuality in the same dormitory, Gell supports the idea that if young people do express sexuality before their marriage, it is never practiced inside the *ghoṭul*. Moreover, she opposes Elwin's Rousseauist view by showing that sexual relationships are regulated by a set of precise and strict rules. Any member of the dormitory must find a partner as soon as she or he enters the *ghoṭul*. But this couple (*joṛ*), while reproducing the model of alliance, is not at all encouraged to engage in sexual intercourse, even if they must show reciprocal affection and respect. On the contrary the ones who are officially promised for marriage by their families are touched by a sexual taboo and must avoid each other. Indeed it is precisely and paradoxically the *joṛ* couple toward whom the interdiction of marriage at the end of the *ghoṭul* period is aimed. Nevertheless, the *ghoṭul* period is depicted in Muria songs as the happiest time of life.



FIGURE 1. *Ghoṭul* stilt dance at Balenga Para, 2000. All photographs courtesy of the author.

FROM *GHOṬUL* TO SCHOOL

For the last several decades, as the influence of the dominant culture was growing, many *ghoṭul*s have become schools. In some cases, the buildings now combine the two functions, being a dormitory at night and a school during the day, with a blackboard hanging on the wall. In many others, the arrival of the school provoked its loss and took its place, the mud construction being replaced by a concrete building. Conscientious teachers visit more or less regularly, depending on the accessibility of the village. The most zealous ones have sometimes felt entitled to the role of an activity leader of the local *ghoṭul*, trying paradoxically to maintain a tradition that they unwillingly had a hand in abolishing. If a few are Muria themselves or have learned a language used by them (for example, Gondi or Halbi), most of them belong to the latecomers and have a very limited knowledge about Muria culture. From their point of view, when *ghoṭul* is not a primitive and pernicious institution to eradicate, it represents precious folklore to be preserved, albeit reduced to a few choreographies in colorful costumes. Teachers have sometimes become mediators between the dormitory and the outsiders, a role I was sometimes unable to avoid in my encounters during fieldwork. Having Hindi as a common language, government officials or people coming from the town see these teachers as natural intermediaries between town and village. Whenever a delegation organizes an expedition to a village, the schoolteachers are their ideal guides.

In order to satisfy their guests (like the unwitting ethnographer), some of them know how to mobilize all the members of the *ghoṭul* for a dinner and show on the spot (with homemade brandy), entirely organized by well-disciplined pupils. Thus some villages like Balenga Para (see FIGURE 1) have become accustomed to receiving officials or people from the neighboring towns enchanted to discover the "tribal forest people in their natural habitat," an expression I took from a travel brochure published by the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board about Bastar (CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002, 13).

Tribal fantasies

Viewed from the town, the forest is the projection of all kinds of fantasies. For the "last inhabitants" of Bastar (as opposed to the "first inhabitants," *ādivāsī*), the surrounding jungle is associated with the image of bare breasted women. Moreover, the *ghoṭul* is in people's minds associated with a place for "free sex" (they use the English expression) and easy girls.[6] The annual village festivals are rituals combined with commercial fairs (*maṛāi* in Halbi, *melā* in Hindi) that attract traders from remote towns and include merry-go-rounds. In the *ghoṭul* area, they also comprise a ritualized meeting among *ghoṭul*s called *kokoreng*. Members of the *ghoṭul*s, sometimes a hundred or two hundred of them, sing and dance until dawn as a way of socializing and creating alliances. On this occasion, small groups of reckless men come from the town to enjoy the fair, hoping to spend an adventurous night with a Muria girl. Yet I never met any of them bragging about their conquests the day after, which suggests that such sexual encounters are more fantasy than reality. Even if the *ghoṭul* is not the licentious place that the town dwellers imagine, an image to which Elwin most likely contributed, this form of local tourism is a moral threat to the dormitories. Some of the *ghoṭul* around Kondagaon, for example, might even have turned into occasional brothels, though this rumor is very difficult to verify.

Elwin mentioned the shame of some villagers in the region of Durg, located southeast of Raipur, when evoking the memory of a system comparable to the *ghoṭul* (ELWIN 1947, 317). Since that time, this shame has progressively reached Bastar and the *ghoṭul* has become taboo. It now inevitably conveys sexual connotations. In some areas the word *ghoṭul* is not even evoked anymore, so when a lodge still exists it is now called *gyan guṛi* ("house of knowledge"). Note that the term *ghoṭul* does not appear in the Hindi term *lok nṛtya pratiyogitā*, the local folk dance competition held during the Kondagaon festival, even though the dance groups participating in it all belong to some dormitories or to what remains of them. Even the name Muria is tarnished, with the result that some Muria, like the ones near Pharasgaon, the region where I have been working, prefer to be called Gond in order to hide the fact that they had a *ghoṭul* in their village, where some still maintain the institution. Like everywhere else, the dominant urban culture has influenced Gond behavior. To use just a couple of examples, women have for a long time worn blouses under their saris; tattoos have also become very rare among the younger

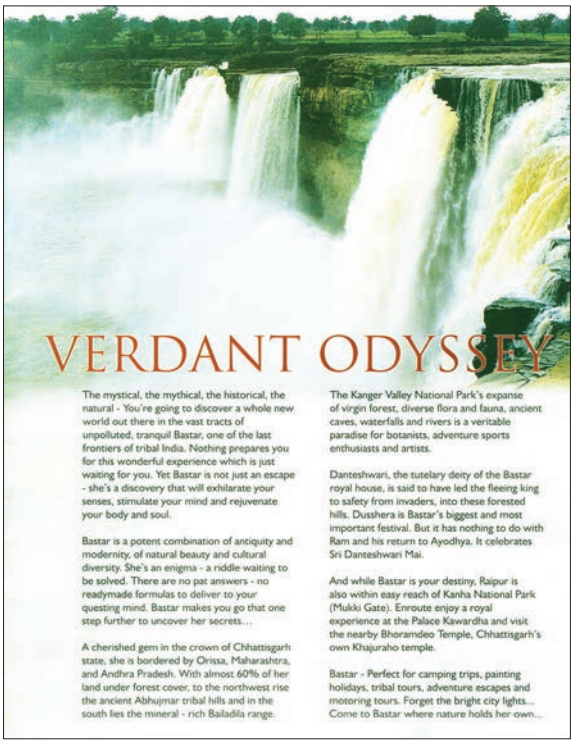


FIGURE 2. Pamphlet published by the CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002.

females.[7] While some jungle villages have somehow managed to preserve their *ghoṭul* as a vital and fundamental institution, others, surrounded by rice fields or in open country, maintain something that increasingly resembles a "dancing club."[8]

SELLING A TRIBAL IMAGE: TRIBAL TOURS

Before Bastar district joined the new state of Chhattisgarh in 2000, it was part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. It already carried the burden of the image of a backward tribal area highly affected by Naxalism. In spite of this situation, and probably thinking that it would improve, the government of the new state has been trying to change this reputation. The politicians, partly deploying the backward image of the region, seem to have bet on the stereotyped image of the innocent tribal associated with the still relatively wild nature of Bastar as a way to distract public attention away from the violent conflict with the insurgents. They also understood the exotic fascination *ādivāsī*s represent for the rest of India as well as the potential economic benefits it could generate. The establishment of a tourism development policy started at the beginning of this century, perhaps inspired by the neighboring state of Orissa, where tribal tourism has been developed over a longer period of time, but not without excesses.[9] A tourism board was created in 2002 at Jagdalpur, the Bastar district headquarters, and private tourism agencies have rapidly developed their activity in the same field, some of them working with the support of the government.[10] Tribal tours started to be organized for rich tourists from Delhi and Mumbai. The ones I met were all Indian. "Luxury tented camps"[11] were set up at the bottom of the Chitrakote falls, with police forces deployed all around as protection against Naxalite attacks. Ghoṭul Muria and Bison Horn Maria were brought to the spot for dance performances with this splendid natural site, with a background worthy of a film set (see FIGURE 2).



FIGURE 3. Pamphlet published by the CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002.

TRIBAL CRAFTS

In most villages of Bastar, craftsmen still answer the needs of villagers for ritual objects and for daily lives. For many years already, apart from a few initiatives led by "aboriginal artisans,"[12] traders and self-designated designers belonging to higher castes from the towns of Kondagaon, Naraynpur, and Jagdalpur have mined the seam of "tribal handicraft." Yet, even if their "art" is sold as "tribal," the local craftsmen they employ belong to local castes (SC and OBC) and not to the so-called Muria and Maria "tribes" (ST), although they live in the same villages and share the same cultural references. Among them are the *kumār* potters, the *lohrā* blacksmiths, and the *ghaṛwā* bell metal foundry workers. Under the patronage of higher caste traders and designers, their know-how is now diverted toward the large-scale market under the label "tribal." Exploiting craftsmen, often behind the veil of humanitarian NGOs, these traders have built an important business in collaboration with certain government emporiums and galleries in Mumbai and Delhi. They have even tried to open the trade up to a lucrative international market. *Ḍokra* art, bell metal objects melted with a lost wax casting process, is the most successful export item of them all. The heliport arranged by NGO Saathi Samaj Sevi Sanstha in front of its gate in Kondagaon suffices to illustrate this. On the same economic model, local emporiums and private shops are multiplying at Jagdalpur, and the Shabari government emporium opened recently in the new airport at Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh.

Like almost everywhere in the world, the two economic activities of tourism and handicrafts play a complementary role in the area under investigation, and

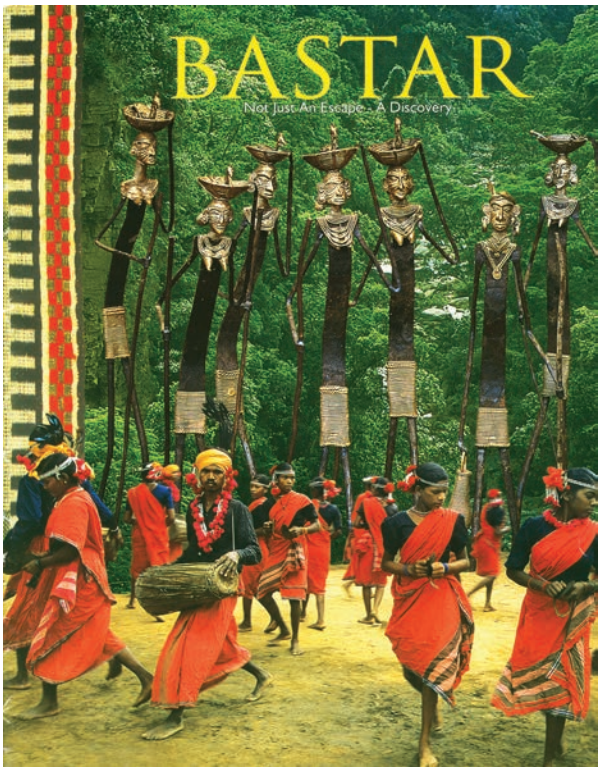


FIGURE 4. Pamphlet published by the CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002.

their instigators found a common ground for collaboration. The Tribal Habitat Museum (Museum of Mankind) in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, and the Craft Museum in Delhi are other links in this process to create a network for the dissemination and consumption of locally made goods. Groups of artisans, for example, regularly travel from all over Madhya Pradesh to Bhopal, or from all over India to Delhi, to demonstrate their know-how in workshops for a few weeks (see the documentary film by MOISSET 2010). In a similar manner, alternating with dancers from other regions, seven or eight boys and girls from a *ghoṭul* in Bastar (that is, Balenga Para) travel several times per year for short visits to Bhopal or Delhi, where they perform for visitors.[13] Obviously inspired by these institutions, the open-air museum or Purkhauti Muktangan was inaugurated a few years ago in Raipur, a city that competes with Bhopal to be a young and dynamic capital.

TRIBAL STEREOTYPES

"Chhattisgarh, the tribal planet," a four-part program launched by Discovery Channel for the Tourism Board,[14] is part of the tourism development program led by the Government of Chhattisgarh that concerns particularly the region of Bastar, where tourism has been almost absent and is still very limited. Apart from history and architecture, the program contains three main ingredients put forward by the tourism board: raw nature, tribal people, and handicrafts. These are bundled and sold in a package for tourist consumption. As the title of the series announces, the tribal aspect is particularly emphasized.

In the few travel brochures I collected from the tourist office at Jagdalpur as well as on most websites or blogs concerning Bastar or Chhattisgarh, stereotypes are the same mixture of tribalness and naturalness. Owing to photo montages



FIGURE 5. Bison Horn Maria during a collective hunt ritual, 2001.

such as FIGURE 4, tribal people are presented in harmony with nature, living in "untouched and unexplored sites," an image corresponding to what is considered by most people as their primitiveness. The Rousseauist image of the noble savage living half-clad in the forest prevails. As a pamphlet states, "those elegantly clad tribal people" live in these pristine places (CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002). Such romantic language, coupled with the *ghoṭul* dormitory, perpetuates the erotic tribal fantasy so popular among tourists. The words "natural" or "wildlife" often go along with "tribal"; that is, when the terms are not presented as raw potential they are strategically used to connect to a still visible past that can be viewed in the present (for Orissa, see ROUSSELEAU 2009). While the first episode of the Discovery Channel program is called "Chhattisgarh's Archeology and Tribal Life," one of the pamphlets intended for tourists is titled "Riddles of Antiquity" (CHHATTISGARH TOURISM BOARD 2002). These clichés allow the government and the dominant Hindu groups to sell the tribal image to the outside world, an image to paint Bastar as a mysterious and attractive place. They also maintain an ideology of hierarchy and the domination of the "civilized" (Hindu) castes on the "wild" tribes.[15] Even if the figure of the tribal existed much earlier, the British administrators, missionaries, and folklorists certainly contributed to build its image and to spread or reinforce such stereotypes in spite of their Christian egalitarian values.

In Bastar, the most emblematic of the stereotypes discussed above is perhaps the wearing of horns by Gond men. The Dandami Maria were named Bison Horn Maria by the British after this observation, which was made famous by GRIGSON's remarkable book (1991; originally published it in 1938). For some of their rituals, Dandami Maria do wear bison-horn headdresses topped with peacock feathers (for example,

for a collective hunt ritual that I by chance had the opportunity to witness in 2001; see FIGURE 5). Just like the Papua nose bone became a universal stereotype for the tribal savage during the colonial period, the Maria horns struck the first Western visitors to Bastar in a similar way, probably because they fit into the same universal imagery of the primitive as an attractive mixture of man and animal.

Maria tend to be perceived by town dwellers and by the Muria villagers too as the most primitive people of Bastar. Even if the Muria differentiate by considering themselves as "less backward" than the Maria, they are fairly conscious of belonging to the same cultural group, since they share the same language (despite some dialectal variations) and the same totemic clans.[16] Following the ethnocentric mechanism by which a group always finds a more primitive or a less civilized one than itself, the Muria present the Maria as their living ancestors, as Gond cousins from whom they originated. This is what GRIGSON (1991) also speculated in the 1930s. The Muria express some kind of romantic fascination, while simultaneously displaying a feeling of superiority, toward the Maria.

Applied as a universal symbol of tribalness to all the *ādivāsī*s of Bastar, these horns were first appropriated by local designers and spread out through bell metal mass-produced figurines. The same objects can now be found in the emporiums of Delhi and Mumbai and even abroad. But whereas small bell metal statues of deities (*mūrti*) have been ritually used for centuries in the village temples of Bastar, this was never the case for the now emblematic tribal couple sold everywhere as "tribal handicraft" for home decoration (see FIGURE 3, bottom left).[17] Yet in Bastar, the original buyers of these ornaments were not the rare tourists but rather the local middle-class families belonging to the non-tribal castes who display them on shelves at home among other "tribal" items, such as wooden axes,[18] wrought iron work, sculpted wooden beds, sofas, and so on. While town dwellers might therefore look like tourists in their own country, they may in fact be staking a claim to local belonging by buying tribal ornaments.

Anyone passing through the city of Raipur, capital of Chhattisgarh, or the town of Jagdalpur can only be struck by the frescoes displayed along the fences of some official buildings along the main avenues or by the tall terracotta statues raised at strategic crossroads (see FIGURE 6). Horns have become a symbol for Bastar and could even become a symbol for the whole state. The influence and the success of those tribal symbols are such that some Muria dance troupes have started to wear horned headdresses during their performances for non-tribal audiences, such as the competition described below, whereas, according to them, they would not wear horns among themselves for their own rituals. Even if their use is not systematic, it is very significant. These attributes are a quite recent borrowing from their neighbors the Maria, even though their headdresses are a bit different. Whereas the Maria display "bison" (wild buffalo) horns native to their region, Muria wear domestic cow horns (compare FIGURES 5 and 7) because they do not hunt anymore, for they live far from the buffalo hunting region.[19]

Even though it is difficult to produce evidence, it is probable that village teachers and other intermediaries coming from the towns initiated this trend along with



FIGURE 6. New monument at a crossroad in Jagdalpur, 2011.



FIGURE 7. Horn headdresses worn in recent years by *ghoṭul* Muria for their shows, 2002.

other changes, their status allowing them a strong influence on the tribal groups. As I was able to observe several times, some people have a political and economic interest in organizing tours for the *ghoṭul*. One can pocket substantial commissions or, simply with the promise of a trip, one can secure cheap labor for building a house or to ensure electoral success. An NGO member, for example, can extend his business from handicrafts to dance shows; an advocate specialized in land matters can reinforce and expand networks, and so on. Through different forms of client-patron relationships, such entrepreneurs thereby become agents and advisors who exert influence on aesthetic choices made by artisans. Keeping in mind that aesthetics and efficacy often work together, these culture brokers who are non-tribal citizens themselves develop an ability to predict what will please audiences living outside of the villages where the performers reside. Therefore, if the Muria are often preferred to the Maria for organizing cultural shows, it is probably because their music and dance are more varied and more impressive. Their stilt dance, for example, is a favorite, but adorning the dancers with horns borrowed from the Maria adds additional flavor to create a cultural mix adapted for an audience attracted by exoticism.

It is difficult to know how the Muria themselves perceive this kind of "tribalization" through the wearing of horns; this would deserve more work than that which was carried out for this contribution. But to think that they are merely stigmatized and manipulated by the non-tribal population would be simplifying an extremely complex phenomenon. We must therefore try to measure to what extent and with what degree of consciousness they also manipulate these symbols and apply these stereotypes to themselves.

In the towns like Kondagaon (approximately 27,000 inhabitants), Bastari choreographies learned at primary Hindi public schools[20] for performances given at the end of the year are another phenomenon to consider. The pupils who come from diverse castes, some of them belonging to the middle class, are coarsely dressed up as *celik*s and *motiari*s (Gond terms for the boys and girls of the *ghoṭul*). They are trained by their teachers to imitate tribal dance to the tunes of studio recorded music, presented as indigenous but played by non-tribal musicians in their own manner with their own "arrangements." This phenomenon can lead to strange situations where children belonging to urbanized Gond families are taught something supposed to represent the culture from which they originated. The urban caste appropriation of *ādivāsī* culture probably aroused an identification with the exotic tribal culture surrounding them, at least temporarily.[21] It implies an inevitable aesthetic distortion and a probable ideological manipulation, like the superimposition of Sanskrit values such as starting the tribal performances with *pūjā*s to the Hindu goddess Saraswati. Additional investigation would be needed to know if the teacher is the only mastermind behind such shows. One also wonders if he is guided by his own will and inspiration or if he follows a specific teaching program fixed to sanskritize the tribal communities in the area. I would initially agree with Berger, who considers these school shows as "made to 'mainstream' local life-

styles by eradicating unwanted aspects of local culture and, in this sense, unmaking indigenous indigeneity" (page 23 in this volume).[22]

The folk dance competition of kondagaon

Organized and sponsored by the District Governing Body (*janpad pañcāyat*), or sometimes by the Municipal Council (*nagar pālikā*), the Folk Dance Competition takes place every year in March on the occasion of the ritual fair (*maṛ āi*) held in the marketplace of Kondagaon. It is certainly not a coincidence that the competition is held during the most attended religious festival in the region, which primarily concerns the local tribes and castes from the surrounding villages but attracts all the town inhabitants too. The competition itself occurs at night, bringing together young Muria people belonging to the different *ghoṭul*s of the region. Only a few inhabitants of Kondagaon, however, take an interest in the show; most of them rather enjoy the fair and its merry-go-round, along with other attractions.

When I attended this event for the first time in 2000, the dance floor was informally delimited by the audience sitting in a circle on the dusty ground at the periphery of the market, mostly composed of the *ghoṭul* groups waiting for their turn. Ten years later, it was moved a distance from the fair to allow for larger crowds, and a whole square is now devoted to it. The National Cricket Corps place, as it is called, is situated in another central part of the town. The stage is now demarcated in a circle by a high yet light bamboo fence, around which the audience sits or stands.[23] A canopy is built for the members of the jury who now sit on a stage whereas they previously sat on chairs at the same level as the dancers. Under the canopy, between the jury and the dance floor, rows of chairs for the audience, made up of a few notables of the town and their families, are also carefully arranged. "Dance parties" (*nāc pāṭi*) are still performed one after the other in a competitive fashion, for each party has only three minutes or less to convince the jury that they should be awarded a prize. Like before, the performers' unamplified songs are drowned out by the saturated sound of loudspeakers, out of which voices repeatedly shouting out the name of the next village to compete can be heard. At the same time, an often drunken security agent "controls" the attending crowd with a more than threatening bamboo stick. The stick, similar to the *lāṭhī*s used by the police in India, allows the agent to point at the floor where the dancers are supposed to glide. He also uses it to signal the dancers to exit when the jury gives him a sign.

The competition is apparently not more than fifteen years old. If its beginning is hard to define precisely, it is probably because what was originally a ritual dance meeting, the *kokoreṅg*, taking place at night during the main religious ritual and fair, was progressively taken over and institutionalized by the local authorities until it took the form and the official name of a competition, with a jury, a prize attribution, a stage, an audience of non-ritualists, and even a small security staff (two agents). The small jury and the selected audience, mostly made up of members of the organization committee, are composed of non-tribal local notables, generally local representatives and politicians, such as the BJP mayor and intellectuals representing



FIGURE 8. *Mandir* drums ready for offerings before being played at a wedding at Kharsing, 2001.

the culture of Bastar.[24] Since none of them belong to Gond culture, the question of the criteria used to evaluate the performances arises. Their own cultural references necessarily determine or affect their judgment, which consequently influences the aesthetic choices of the performers themselves. A few years ago, a Gond teacher who was a lecturer at the high school was invited to join the organization, but he did not not belong to the jury. His knowledge of Hindi as well as the local languages and culture now allows him to comment on the show, which he does by addressing the various audiences with a microphone. For this special event a white turban wrapped in the tribal manner allows him to be recognized as the only *ādivāsī* representative among the organizers. Ironically, he does not normally wear the turban.

At the end of the competition, the three best groups are offered a certificate and sometimes a trophy with a certain amount of money that rarely corresponds to the original budget.[25] Such an award may also open the possibility to be chosen for a competition at the national level or for other events in towns throughout the region.

The money received by the winners is generally invested in buying raw material for making costumes. The prize can also be invested in buying some musical instruments. I was even told one year, but was unable to verify the claim, that the winners were offered a set of instruments composed of *ḍholak* drums and other manufactured instruments. There is no doubt that the young Muria were seduced by such instruments because they represent the town, its modernity, and prestige. But considering the variety of the instruments of the *ghoṭul*, with their finer quality due to being handmade during elaborate rituals as well as their god-like status mak-

ing them worthy of worship (see FIGURE 8),[26] one can only question the intention of the organizers in awarding these instruments. Some groups, influencing each other, have started to perform using these kinds of instruments and might progressively lose their know-how for making their own. The competition, supposed to promote and preserve Bastar folk culture, seems to be a deliberate attempt to cut off the *ghoṭul* dances from their ritual contexts, thereby removing their religious roles and meanings in order to reduce them to just entertainment. After all, tribal music and dance are commonly seen from outside as mere entertainment or as an expression of joy for a population perceived as innocent and childish.[27] By placing dance and music on "stage" and out of their socio-ritual context, one can suspect the promoters of the competition of trying to weaken the *ghoṭul* or at least to veer it off its course and to get it on the Hindu straight and narrow path of reform.

In 2011, only fourteen different dance troupes went to Kondagaon instead of the ninety registered and expected. This is a significant reduction when compared to the eighty that had come the year before in 2010. I was given two different explanations for this amazing lack of participation. First, the organizers are supposed to provide means of transportation (that is, trucks to haul the instruments) from the villages to the town, but they did not do this. Nevertheless, corruption is nothing new, so the villagers are used to managing on their own. The second reason, as convincing as the first one, is that, according to some villagers who whispered the information to me, *the dādāmān* ("elder brothers," that is, Naxalites), probably conscious of what was at stake in that competition, had boycotted the event and discouraged or forbidden the dance troupes to go there. Yet this fact did not disturb the competition except that it did not end very late.

The event had been announced for 8 p.m. but the official guests arrived slowly, coming only after 10 p.m. Nothing started before they had all arrived. After having been called repeatedly, with their names pronounced several times on the microphone (their strategy, I was told), they arrived one by one, often accompanied by their families, blowing horns from their four-wheelers decorated with electric garlands. Since they were unable to see anything because of the crowd surrounding the dance floor behind the fence, their chairs were moved by others inside the circle and the entrance was kept by a security agent to prevent the crowd of villagers from sitting inside the makeshift arena. Except for the dancers, it seems that the only condition for the privilege of sitting in chairs or taking photos and shooting videos was to look like a middle-class urban resident, not like a villager. As I observed on two occasions, when some drunken men from Kondagaon joined the row of dancers to imitate them in a rude manner, nobody prevented them from doing so. It seems that it did not disturb anyone except perhaps the dancers themselves, who nevertheless kept on dancing without showing any sign of irritation.

Even if no program is imposed on the dance troupes, the dancers are likely to be influenced by the intermediaries and advisors I mentioned earlier or simply by having understood, consciously or not, which expected stereotypes they should provide the non-tribal jury. The performers, or their advisors, thus participate in reinforcing the image of the innocent tribal even if it involves exaggerating or

caricaturing some aesthetic features in order to make them more spectacular or more tribal. Whatever the intention of the organizers and of the participants, tribal stereotypes work to maintain the Muria in their depreciated status.

From *ghoṭul* to dancing clubs, and from ritual to competition

As we saw above, apart from this competition, Muria music and dance are still linked to some particular rituals and to the dormitories where in some villages they are still rehearsed and practiced, despite the noose tightening around them. The following striking points reveal the transformation and the adaptation of a Muria ritual performance into an institutionalized competition.

First, and most obvious, is the staged performance of ritual music and dance. It is, rather, a demarcated earthen floor for the moment, but in an ever-increasing delimited space to accommodate growing audiences, and excluding others. As soon as real stages begin to appear, one can imagine that the circle will open into a line in order to face the audience, a well-known feature of folklorization, at least in terms of making the transition from ground to stage (Rice 1994; Desroches et al. 2011; Tarabout 2003). Just before I reached Kondagaon to attend the competition, I came across some images of the "Mela of Chitrakote" reported on television that showed folkloric groups of Bastar performing on a large stage displayed in front of the spectacular waterfalls of Chitrakote, the main tourist attraction situated in the south of Chhattisgarh (Dantewada distrcit). The circle had opened into a line. There is no doubt that the folklorization or "spectacularization" of tribal cultural events occurs much faster than I would have imagined. And as it is frequently the case for this kind of TV program about folk culture, the original sound track had been replaced by the music taken from a CD like the ones used for school tribal shows, which are recorded in a studio, played by non-tribal musicians who reproduce tribal music with pan-Indian instruments (for example, *bāṅsurī* [bamboo flute], *śahnāī* [double reed woodwind], harmonium, and so on) in a style resulting from various influences such as Indian classical music, *bhajan* (devotional song) repertoire, or Bollywood songs.

Second, this change of space goes along with a de-ritualization or secularization of the performance. The intention of the participants is no longer to search for ritual efficacy, but to produce satisfaction among the audience members, which is to say, the jury. It is another kind of efficacy though it no longer functions primarily to please the gods. By moving the competition from the marketplace, the traditional place for rituals, to the NCC ground, the organizers clearly participate and hasten the process of transforming the event from a sacred one into a secular one.

Third, it is accompanied with the progressive introduction of new musical instruments leading to the slow disappearance of deity-instruments[28] normally kept, worshipped, and played inside the *ghoṭul*. The sacred ones tend to be replaced by secular manufactured instruments, as I implied above. Some villages adopted the new ones in what remains of their *ghoṭul*s. Rattle-stilts are very much appreciated at the competition for the acrobatic choreographies they allow (see FIGURE 1), yet



FIGURE 9. Piles of stilts at the outskirts of a village, 2002.

these choreographies were already being performed ritually in the villages.[29] However, as deity-instruments, the rattle-stilts used to be built exclusively at the beginning of the monsoon and had to be ritually broken at the end of the monsoon on the stone of Goronḍi Deo (lit. the "stilt deity") to whom offerings and sacrifice were made by the *ghoṭul* members (ELWIN 1947; PRÉVÔT 2005). This is still the case in many villages (see FIGURE 9). However, the status of the performance and the instrument have already changed. The competition, among other influences, therefore has a direct impact on village ritual practices.

Fourth, in order to offer a program for the competition, for which no form is imposed, a selection is chosen based on a reduction of the different genres per-

formed in the villages. Priority is, of course, given to spectacular elements that would attract a large audience. I already mentioned the tribal stereotypes of the horns or the acrobatic stilts as recurrent elements. I should also underline that genres accompanied with drums are considered more impressive. They are thus always preferred to genres included in the repertoires of local tribal folk. They are thus always preferred to others genres of the tribal repertoires. For example, only once did I see a drumless *kokoreng* performed at the competition.[30]

Fifth, I would even argue that the development of competition has resulted in giving precedence to dance over music. In other words, competition emphasizes visual elements over sonic elements, something that is necessary for audience-oriented events. Indeed the music, continuously voiced over by speech conveyed by a microphone, can hardly be heard at all except for the drums. Similarly, on TV programs, tribal music is almost always muted by any kind of popular music. This preeminence of the visual elements is corroborated by an emphasis on dance movements, sometimes clearly exaggerated by some of the male dancers in particular, since they tend to display acrobatic virtuosity.[31]

Sixth, the transition from a ritual to a cultural exhibition brings about a fragmentation and an intensification of the performance. GUILLEBAUD (2010) observed a comparable phenomenon on the occasion of the first performance on stage of ritual musicians from Kerala. This dynamic might be even more obvious for a competition. The pieces are shortened and concentrated in one "accelerated" performance, mixing genres taken out of their ritual context and originally never performed together. The main reason for this is, of course, the three-minute performance limit imposed by the format of the competition. The Koyapad Bastar Band, a dance company founded in 2008 by a non-tribal theater personality from Raipur, puts together tribal and non-tribal musicians and dancers in a much more folkloric manner, seeming to prefigure what the competition could become in addition to the line choreography they already adopted.[32]

Seventh, the competition seems to imply a process of synchronization. Whereas the aesthetics of *ghoṭul* music and dance are characterized by the rhythmical non-coincidence of drums and singing, it seems to be evolving toward synchronization.[33] This is not to say that the Muria repertoire lacks synchronization originally, but *ghoṭul* boys dancing and beating drums along with girls dancing while singing and clapping small cymbals seem to try to play out of phase constantly, even though a common time unit can be felt underlying it. It sounds very much as if they intentionally resisted the temptation of playing together on the same pulse, known as playing in phase, as if they avoided the attraction of "anchor points," an expression I borrow from WOLF (2006).[34] For Wolf, the "relative flexibility and independence among elements of a performance" might even characterize tribal music all over India, for instance, in the "slightly offbeat or out of phase quality between the melody and drum rhythm" (WOLF 2000, 17), also described in other terms by Babiracki about Munda [tribal] music (BABIRACKI 1991). On the contrary, during the competition, some of the competing Muria groups sound completely in phase; in other words, boys' drumming and girls' singing tend now







FIGURE 10. Newly built or transformed temples in the marketplace at Kondagaon, 2011.

to synchronize. The hypothesis of a generalized transformation of Muria music toward synchronization remains to be confirmed with time, but Babiracki notices a similar process in Munda stage performances, for folklorization is often characterized by smoothening out aesthetic features.

Finally, the shift from a ritual performance to a public show gives way not only to a change of function (that is, the performance has become entertainment for the audience), it also provides an introduction of new significations. The folklorized repertoire is emptied of its original meaning and is likely refilled with new significations. The way the commentator of the competition linked the "relo" Muria songs to "Rama" is only one clear and striking example where outsiders belonging to the dominant population manipulate their representations through this competition. According to him the sound *relo*, which are the meaningless syllables so characteristic of Muria songs, is etymologically related to the name of the Hindu God Rama whose exile, according to the epic *Ramayana*, occurred in a place that he locates in the forests of Bastar.[35]

The competition is not the only ground for Sanskritization. In the marketplace of Kondagaon, the main ritual is insidiously but deeply influenced and transformed. Situated all around the marketplace where the annual ritual *maṛāi* is held, most of the different places of the deities were very simple little shrines or were only materialized by a wooden pole or a stone. During the last five years, much bigger and more colorful concrete temples have been built instead (see FIGURE 10). These buildings are often sponsored by networks of Hindu local traders linked to the Hindutva movement like the RSS and Bajrang Dal. They are thus indirectly linked to the BJP government of the state. The local deities have been progressively associated with pan-Indian gods like Shiva and Durga who are likely to replace them rapidly, an easy transition in a region where *śakti* (feminine force) is deeply rooted in ritual practices.[36] All along the roadsides crossing Bastar from north to south, many of the small local shrines have been replaced in the same manner, with newly built Rama and Hanuman temples that seem to be mushrooming everywhere at present. The cult to these two deities is specifically promoted by the Hindutva movement that has intensified in the region (NARAYAN 2009).[37]

Dancing in the crossfire

The folk dance competition of Kondagaon existed before Chhattisgarh became an independent state. But its evolution according to political changes should be considered, like the probable influence of the state government on its organization. Previously attached to Madhya Pradesh, the state of Chhattisgarh was created in 2000 after the people of the region claimed their autonomy on the basis of their demographic specificity.[38] Scheduled Tribes comprised an important part of the Chhattisgarhi population.[39] The first chief minister elected was Ajit Jogi, a representative of the Marwahi tribe (ST) and member of the Indian National Congress. He was defeated in 2003 by Raman Singh, a member of the

BJP, who was reelected in 2008 and 2013. As one could have expected, *ādivāsī*s have so far not gained power themselves.

Nevertheless, there is an obvious turn in the behavior of the dominant caste culture of Chhattisgarh regarding tribal identity. Local governmental forces have at least made an attempt to shape a tribal identity for the whole state and to make an alliance with the tribal communities, a large proportion of who support the Naxalite insurgents. One could recognize in Chhattisgarh what Berger observed in Orissa. As he states in this volume, "representation of 'coloful' tribalness at state-sponsored Tribal Fairs (Adivasi Mela), [which] mainly aspire to turn tribal communities into folklore and feed facile tribal symbolism into the notion of statehood" (page 23 in this volume).

Behind the bright façade that may be thought as purposely presented by the state government to the outer world—on Discovery Channel for example—Bastar and the adjacent Dantewada districts have become in recent years the central terrain of the confrontation between the army and paramilitary troops (that is, so-called "security forces") on one side and the Maoist guerrilla forces (Naxalites) on the other side, making thousands of victims among whom are a large majority of so-called "tribals." In November 2005, the movement Salwa Judum, sometimes translated from Gondi as "purification hunt," sometimes as "campaign for peace," began. It was presented by the government and the media as a spontaneous "people's movement" against the CPI (Maoist), as a peaceful tribal rebellion against the Naxalites. Professor Nandini Sundar, accompanied by a team from the National Human Rights Watch Commission, was able to collect many forms of evidence to prove that everything was in fact orchestrated by the central and state governments: young, often minor, unemployed town dwellers or villagers who were in vulnerable situations were armed to fight against the Naxalites, some of whom were given the title of SPO ("Special Police Officer"; see *Independent Citizens' Initiative* listed in note 40). But their short training was, of course, not sufficient to confront the guerrillas directly. Instead, they attacked villagers at the edge of the forest, accusing them of supporting the Maoists and burning hundreds of villages, killing hundreds of people, and raping tens of women.[40]

The national and state governments allied with some private multinationals obviously shared common interests in "clearing the ground," ground with soil that is extremely rich in minerals. Several colossal industrial projects have been authorized on tribal territory. In November 2009, instead of putting an end to the paramilitary atrocities it was supporting, the government declared an official war against the Naxalites and launched Operation Green Hunt, sending military troops to Bastar and Dantewada. The war still going on is naturally the main obstacle for the development of tourism undertaken by governmental agencies. Moreover, it tarnishes the image of a state where wildness and savagery have finally become a reality; however, the main victims are mainly people who identify as tribal and local castes.[41]

*Ādivāsī*s are caught in an ideological vice and stuck in the crossfire of Operation Green Hunt. The *ghoṭul* has thus become a highly sensitive subject in a highly sensi-

tive area. This fundamental village institution had been somehow preserved in the deep forest of Bastar, precisely where the Maoist guerrillas have hidden and operated since the early 1980s. Naxalites used to fight for the rights of the tribal population on their land (and still do in a way), even enrolling a number of them, which has indirectly helped preserve Muria culture; now, in the heated context of war, their behavior is not so clear anymore. Beyond their propaganda, they might become a new threat for Muria culture and for the *ghoṭul* in particular. In fact, a rumor is growing that they have started to close the dormitories because of the mobility they allow to the youth and because of their fear of losing control of them.

Indeed, in this context of an acute crisis, the Folk Dance Competition of Kondagaon appears like a means for the state government, or its political representatives at a local level, to cater to the *ādivāsī*s in order to move them away from the hands of the Maoists. Christian missionaries are another competitor, yet Bastar has been much less evangelized than neighboring Orissa. Ignored and despised for so long, *ādivāsī*s and their culture now seem to be officially rehabilitated. However, what appears to be the acceptance and recognition of their culture on the surface can obviously not go without some transformation and manipulation, not only of the cultural representations but also of their meanings and the values they carry. As I suggested above, the competition could be part of a government policy for the integration of *ādivāsī*s into mainstream Hindu society (no need to recall the link between the BJP and the Hindutva movement).[42] The *ādivāsī* activist Ram Dayal Munda from Jharkhand did not think differently when, "at a Mangalore conference in 2010 on 'Spirituality of Primal Religions,' he decried the marginal accommodation of *ādivāsī* within the umbrella of Hinduism as a cynical move to add numbers to 'Hindus' as a political grouping with the ulterior motive of promoting cultural nationalism."[43]

On the one hand there is obviously the will of the state to acknowledge indigenous culture and enhance "tribalness," albeit through stigmatization, in order to build a state identity, but on the other hand there is also an attempt to weaken social and ritual functions and to empty tribal practices and representations of their content in order to refill them with new meanings and thus incorporate or rather dissolve tribal culture into a national Hindu society.[44] Whether by superimposing recorded music onto their songs when they appear on TV or by superimposing a continuously ideological discourse over a microphone during their performances at competitions, the *ādivāsī*s of Bastar are exposed to values other than their own. Despite appearances, the Muria are not expressing themselves through official performances. They are visible but inaudible.

Music, or only the idea of music, since it can hardly be heard, as well as dance and stereotyped visual elements like the horns, are nevertheless an efficient means to promote tribal culture, or perhaps only the idea of tribal culture.[45] If dance and music seem like governmental vehicles to manipulate the *ādivāsī*s, they are also used by Maoists for their own propaganda.[46] Indeed, the Naxalites have created "cultural brigades" in charge of offering shows to the villagers. Dressed in red saris and lungis (unstitched male cloths worn wrapped around the waist) tied in the

Gond way, they use Gond choreographic and musical elements (the same "relo relo" songs for example) in order to spread their own ideological message (see the video by Dougnac, Muntaner, and Logan 2010, 12:15–13:40.

Considering the concurrence between the official authorities and the Naxalites in their instrumentalization of Gond culture, the boycott of the Folk Dance Competition by the Naxalites is easy to understand. In spite of the presence of the cultural association Gondawana Samaj seeking the unity of the Gond people, *ādivāsī* in Chhattisgarh are still very little consciously involved in politics. Unlike in Andhra Pradesh or Jharkhand where civil society is very active with politically organized *ādivāsī*s and Dalits (Shah 2010), Chhattisgarh society presents a gap between a middle class mostly made of outsiders and *ādivāsī*s. However, Muria Gond have understood that they could benefit from displaying a stereotyped image of themselves. They have started to organize expeditions on their own to Kondagaon or even to the capital Raipur on occasions of big Hindu festivals like Deepavali (*diari, divālī*) where they parade in the streets trying to collect a bit of money and enjoying the city. Thus, some of them, at least, adapt and provide the non-tribals with the stereotypes they expect. They might willingly let people caricature them. They might even appropriate these stereotypes and use them in order to become visible in a society where they are often ignored. Such appropriation allows them to assert their tribal identity, even if this means contributing to, and being trapped in, stereotypes. As Herzfeld stated, it is "a way of considering social relationships in which actors appropriate the stereotypes of a dominant discourse and display them in order to serve their own interests" (Herzfeld 1992, 72 [my translation]).[47] The reflexive use of stereotypes in reference to Herzfeld could be qualified here as a kind of "practical tribalism" or "practical primitivism."[48]

Beyond these identity issues, shows and competitions have become a way to continue dancing in spite of the disappearance of the *ghoṭul* as a social institution. The mere pleasure of dancing together, the gratification to introduce aesthetic innovations, should not be underestimated for understanding the implications and motivations of the young Muria. The pride felt by the participants when they represent their villages, the prestige gained from a competitions, and even the feeling of being an integral part of modernity are probably real motivations for the actors discussed above.

However, it is clear that the state of Chhattisgarh has been appropriating and using tribal stereotypes in order to achieve its goals. One of the last scenes of a recent documentary film by Lamour (2013, 00:50) shows the tight smiling Maharaja (in fact the scion of Bastar's royal family) "crowning" the chief minister with horns at the end of the yearly ritual festival Dushera in 2012 in Jagdalpur in front of many journalists. The the highly publicized use of this symbol of this symbol, the reach of which I have shown in this article, should be here understood as a ritual manipulation of the government to reinforce its grip on the *ādivāsī*s. A few months later the young Maharaja, wooed by political parties for assembly elections, eventually joined the bjp, thus consecrating the reconciliation and the alli-

ance between the state of Chhattisgarh and the aristocracy of Bastar for common electoral, economic, and ideological purposes.

Notes

* I am very grateful to Harihar Vaishnav, Mohan Nayak, and Tejendra Tamrakar for their help in Chhattisgarh, and to Chris Gregory and Richard K. Wolf for their precious remarks about this article, whose imperfections remain totally mine.

1. Bastar is a southern district in the state of Chhattisgarh. For this article, I prefer to use the term Bastar alone, thus referring to the ancient kingdom that still has a ritual meaning today. It used to be a much larger district (when it belonged to the state of Madhya Pradesh) before it was divided into three smaller districts—Dantewada, Bastar, and Keskal—at the creation of the Chhattisgarh state in 2002.

2. I will not discuss here the term "tribe" on anthropological grounds; it was brought by the British and remained after Independence so that it appears in the constitution and is used by the Census of India. What still appears in common discussion is a constant opposition between castes (Hindu for the majority) and tribes (often considered as non-Hindu). The Gond people, who are the focus of this article, are officially registered by the Census of India as a Scheduled Tribe (ST).

3. The following data are based on occasional observations that have been made from the year 2000 while conducting different fieldwork in the same region, and a four-week field trip conducted during February-March 2011 (the competition took place that year, on 16 March), as well as an analysis of different websites and tourism pamphlets.

4. These names are ethnonyms given by others; among themselves, they use the Gond word *koitor*.

5. These are mixed clan villages (contrary to the Gadabas of South Bastar and of the neighboring Orissa; see Berger in this volume, 19–37).

6. In 1982, the anthropologist Simeran Gell (see Gell 1992) was seized with her material and expelled from Indian territory after she had come back to Bastar for a documentary film project about the *ghoṭul* with a BBC team. In spite of the trust of the villagers, a rumor had grown from the town about the shooting of an erotic film in a *ghoṭul* (Christopher Gregory, personal communication).

7. See Gell (1986) for a description and analysis of the changes in Muria ways of dressing.

8. Whereas this English expression had already intuitively crossed my mind several years ago, I heard it pronounced in 2011 by a Gond teacher who regretted the good times had at the *ghoṭul*. Paradoxically, this same man was also involved as the only representative of the Gond community in the organization of the Kondagaon competition that marks the era of the dancing clubs.

9. See Berger in this volume, 19–37, in particular about the tribal *melā* in Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

10. For example, the Great India Tour Company (GITC) in partnership with the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board.

11. "Luxury tented camps" are described as "traditional Swiss cottage tents, fully furnished with attached bathrooms"; see Chhattisgarh Tourism Board (2002).

12. This is the expression used by one of them in a pamphlet entitled "Tribal art of Bastar," Paramparik Bastar Shilpi Pariwar, circa 2000, sponsored by Development Commissioner (Handicraft), Government of India.

13. When I visited the Craft Museum in 2011 hoping to meet some *ghoṭul* dancers, the only person from Bastar there at that moment was a blacksmith from Kondagaon who told me

that he came for three weeks from time to time to hold workshops. We were very happy to get to know each other and to be able to speak Halbi, which sounded like a secret language in a Hindi world. He told me that he felt very lonely, bored, and homesick, yet kept coming in spite of the very low salary (he was paid 80 INR per day and his assistants 65), and the lack of comfort (an empty room where they had to cook for themselves) because anyway he earned even less money in Bastar and knew that if he refused once, he would never be given a chance again. He confirmed that seven or eight young people from the *ghoṭul* (the one from Balenga Para already mentioned) were coming regularly like him.

14. See the videos on YouTube: "'National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana' in all the theatres of Chhattisgarh" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjoyM5G_6W8; accessed 22 May 2014), and especially "Chhattisgarh, the tribal planet" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YRKjzOyAXg; accessed 22 May 2014; see ads 2, 3 and 4).

15. As Herzfeld observed about the state's devaluation of marginal communities, "obvious parallels [with the situation in Greece] include dismissive treatments of African Americans as 'musical' or state discourses that elevate the 'peasant' or the 'good wife' to an honored but isolating pedestal.… These are devices of marginalization: they relegate their subjects as ancestral or prototypical, closer to nature, and constrained from speaking with their own voices" (Herzfeld 2005, 159). It is even more striking and meaningful in our case where the "marginal community" (if tribal people can be presented as a community) represents the majority.

16. In some areas of Bastar the distinction between the two "tribes" is far from being clear and some groups use the two ethnonyms according to the situation and to the person they talk to. Gond people primarily name themselves *koitor* ("men"). However, the fact that in North Bastar the priests for the Mother Earth always belong to the Gond tribe (even in the villages founded by other castes) shows the indigeneity acknowledged to them on that territory (an "undisputed indigeneity" for Berger; see page 23 of this volume).

17. Catherine Hacker, a specialist in the crafts of Bastar, confirmed this in a personal communication. However, this kind of representation might have been inspired from the drawings found on Maria cenotaphs.

18. These wooden axes imitate the iron axes commonly carried by male villagers on their shoulders. Like the bow and arrows in other places like Jharkhand, the axe has become another symbol for tribalness in Bastar.

19. The so-called bison are wild buffaloes (*gaur)* that are still found in some forests of South Bastar.

20. The same kind of show may also exist in government Hindi schools and public English schools. Though I did not investigate them, they probably result from different motivations, mobilize different values, and operate different transformations—that is, one could probably observe in these shows different ways of transforming dance and music according to the kind of school concerned (English or Hindi, public or private).

21. This could be compared with the fascination for the Gypsies in Western society. In Europe, the time of a masked ball sometimes gives way to some kind of identification with the stereotyped figure of the Gypsy lady, representing the image of a fantasized freedom.

22. Comparatively, though at a different level, and entirely devoted to the performing and visual arts, Khairagarh (state) University (Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya), situated in Durg district, Chhattisgarh, has a department of folk music and art where "tribal music and dance" (from Bastar among other regions) are taught mostly to non-tribal students by non-tribal professors.

23. I do not know if the aim of this change of place intends to give more importance to the competition or to divert the *ādivāsī*s from the ritual place where it used to take place. However, we will see below that the latter is being transformed and obviously sanskritized through the building of concrete temples.

24. The Bharata Janata Party (BJP) is the Hindu nationalist party that rules the state of Chhattisgarh.

25. In 2010, the first three groups received 3051 INR, 2051 INR, and 1051 INR respectively (51 is an auspicious number; round numbers are generally avoided for gifts in India). Whereas I was told by one of the members of the committee in 2011 that it would be the same that year, only the first place received 1,000 INR (this time, no matter if it was a round number), nothing for the others.

26. Some of the instruments, like the double-headed *mandir* drum and the hollow wooden *kotorkā* drum, are actually worshipped like gods prior to a performance; see ELWIN (1947); DOURNON (1980).

27. For example, see *Tribal Heritage of Orissa*, a travel brochure published by Orissa Tourism, Government of India Tourist Office, 5 Jaydev Nagar, Bhubaneswar–2, circa 2000: "For the Tribals the dance is an expression of joy, a display of grace and vigour."

28. A deity-instrument is an instrument that is also a deity. This expression is stronger than the expression "sacred instrument" and emphasizes the fact that it is considered as a god and is worshipped as such.

29. The footholds, which are made of a hollow wooden box containing grains, play the role of rattles.

30. This is in comparison to *kokoreng*, that is ritually performed aside from the competition, sometimes at a distance, with nobody paying attention to it apart from Muria themselves.

31. Comparatively, Monique Desroches recently wrote the following about the island of Martinique:

> Among the expressive changes brought by the professionalization of dance, there is a sophistication, sometimes exaggerated gestures that often give a superficial appearance—what is called in the West Indies a "doudouisante" gait, which aims at charming the tourists and local people.… It [the process of singular signature recalling the phenomenon of "artialisation"] implies among other features an amplification of certain gestures, the presence of colorful costumes, the learning and rehearsal of choreographed gestures. (DESROCHES et al. 2011, 71, my translation from the French)

In the same volume, Elina Djebarri notes about Mali:

> This model [the National Ballet], as a reference artistic form, is reused, reinterpreted as a real source of artistic creation with its own vocabulary: facing the audience, synchronization of collective movements, streamlined distribution of space on stage between men and women, collective movements in geometric lines, and so on.
> (DESROCHES et al. 2011, 206)

32. Several videos are available at http://explore-chhattisgarh.blogspot.fr/2010/11/koyapad-bastar-band_27.html (accessed 30 October 2014).

33. This feature was first described by DOURNON (1980) on an LP as "the superimposition of different rhythmic systems which do not depend on a shared time unit." Knight also noticed a lag even though he considered it as synchronized: "All elements are synchronized rhythmically but they are out of phase with each other in different ways" (taken from an LP; KNIGHT 1983).

34. This musical feature is different from what is generally referred to as "heterophony" for which the out-of-phase quality leads to a more or less regular texture, resulting from the effort of the different musicians to avoid unison and to distinguish themselves. Here male (drums) and female (singing and cymbals) play very different parts and their musical relationship sounds extensible, falling closer or further from a common pulse. This musical feature raises important anthropological questions, which I leave unanswered here.

35. See the video excerpt "competition 2011" (no. 1: 3'20–4'00) in the *Asian Ethnology* Audio-Visual Materials section (follow link on journal webpage); see also the Chhattisgarh

tourism pamphlet collected in 2011 at the Tourism Board of Jagdalpur, "Baster is in Dandakarnya, where Rāma is believed to have spent the 14 years of his exile. Yet the Dushera has nothing to do with Rāma or the Ramayana, as in most parts of the world" (Bastar Dusehra (Hindi/English), Chhattisgarh Tourism Board pamphlet, 7).

36. Baṛe Dev, a widespread village deity in Bastar, is often said to be a form of Shiva and Danteshwari, the tutelary goddess of Bastar kingdom, currently presented as a form of Durga.

37. As Narayan states:

> As I have shown in the various chapters of the book, the BJP is now culling out the local heroes of various castes, particularly the Dalit castes living in different regions of the country, and adding them to the meta-narrative of Hindutva. Local myths and legends are being recreated and reinterpreted, and the past of that region is being re-narrated to fit into the overall political ideology of the party. Depending on the nature of the local myths, at some places local heroes are being given warring identities and projected as saviors who fought against Muslim foreign invaders who tried to despoil Hindu or, synonymously, Indian religion and culture, while at other places they are being reinterpreted and reinvented as Hindu mythological figures in order to link them with the story of Lord Rama in the *Ramayana*. (Narayan, 2009, 178)

38. Jharkhand, Uttaranchal Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh gained their autonomy the same year.

39. For example, 31.8 percent in Chhattisgarh state, 66.3 percent in Bastar district, and up to 78.54 percent in Dantewada district according to the Census of India, 2001.

40. In 2005–2006, more than 500 people were killed, 100 women raped, 650 villages were burnt, and 100,000 people displaced with almost the half of them placed into refugee camps, of which several still exist (see *Independent Citizens' Initiative, War in the Heart of India: An Enquiry into the Ground Situation in Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh*. New Delhi, Independent Citizen's Initiative, 2006; available at http://cpjc.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/ici-warintheheartofindia.pdf; accessed 30 October 2014). A case against the state of Chhattisgarh was filed in the Supreme Court in 2007 by a sociologist named N. Sundar, Former Secretary E. A. S. Sharma, and the well-known historian Ramachandra Guha. Consequently, the Salwa Judum was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in July 2011 and its disbanding was ordered, which was an unprecedented verdict in India.

41. On 25 May 2013, Mahendra Karma, who was the founder of Salwa Judum and became a powerful tribal leader of the congress from south Chhattisgarh, was killed with at least eighteen party workers in an ambush by the Naxalites against a convoy on the way back from the party's rally at Shukma.

42. In 2004, all the girls of a Muria dance party were wearing advertisements tied to their hair: one could read the Hindi words *yuddh kā elan!* ("challenge of war!") in very large print below the very visible drawing of a gun. Written above the drawing in fine print was *bartanoṅ meiṅ ne camak lakhani kī śān* ("It's Lakhani's pleasure to make the plates shine"). On the other side of the same notice was written *tid/dhulāy kā naye raṅg* ("Tid/new color for washing"). This was obviously a shoe brand launching an advertising campaign for its shoe detergent, unless it was a double message cleverly slipped in for some political campaign. I was unable to find any clues about whether they found it nice looking, or if it was a sponsorship or some commercial or political instrument. A female dancer of another dance group was wearing a headband with the orange lotus, the symbol of the BJP (the Hindu nationalist party). I cannot say if she was conscious of what she was sporting (see the video "competition 2004_3" in the *Asian Ethnology* Audio-Visual Materials section (follow link on journal webpage).

43. See Frank F. Conlon, 2011: http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Asia&month=1110&week=a&msg=lcIq8%2BPnhF69bVsQaPDCkQ (accessed 30 October 2014).

44. For example, it becomes difficult to understand the position and behavior (that is, instrumentalized or instrumentalizing) of a high school teacher who was commenting on the competition at the microphone, evoking the link between Rāma and "relo" while wearing for the occasion a local turban that as a middle class, urbanized *ādivāsī* he would usually never wear.

45. There is obviously an attempt from some Hindu nationalists to attract urban *ādivāsī*, as evidenced by the Akhil Bhartiy Gondwana Mahasabha held in Kanker (north of Bastar) in December 2012. Dance and music played a major role in trying to unite individuals (see the video on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Va4tQ79HIMY (accessed 30 October 2014).

46. This process occurs both locally and trans-locally when, for example, local authorities stage tribal folklore in a town or when the dominant Hindu population consumes tribal music and dance on the national level via a variety of media such as CDs and DVDs.

47. The original reads: "C'est là une approche des relations sociales où l'acteur s'approprie les stéréotypes d'un discours dominant et les déploie pour servir ses propres intérêts" (Herzfeld 1992, 72).

48. See Herzfeld (2005, 241). His tactics displayed a sort of "practical romanticism," very much like the "practical orientalism" whereby Rethemnos shopkeepers encourage foreign tourists to bargain and so lure them into paying outrageous prices. It is an approach to social relations whereby the actor adopts the stereotypes of a dominant discourse and deploys them in the pursuit of personal interests.

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