

Chronically unstable ontology: Ontological dynamics, radical alterity, and the 'otherwise within'

Jon Henrik Ziegler Remme, University of Oslo

Ontological closures

I will open this chapter with closures and close it with what I hope will become an opening. The closures I think of here are two. One is created by the alleged comparative dead end created by the ontological turn's focus on radical alterity (Vigh and Sausdal 2014, 57). The other is generated by the tendency of criticizers of the ontological turn to close off alternative ways of thinking about ontology and radical alterity, alternatives, that is, to the approaches of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (e.g. 1998, 2004, 2013) and Martin Holbraad (e.g. 2009, 2012). I think that in order to open the ontological turn's potential for rethinking the questions of the 'what' and 'how' of anthropology, as Bertelsen and Bendixsen phrase it in the introduction to this volume, we need to open up both of these closures. We need to open anthropology to thinking otherwise about ontology, alterity, and difference.ⁱ

I should admit already from the get go that I have been greatly stimulated by Viveiros de Castro's and Holbraad's takes on the ontological turn. Their experiments in thinking about anthropology's metaontology and their attempts at unsettling it by letting indigenous concepts work recursively to deform and subvert anthropology's conceptual apparatus (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 5; Holbraad 2012) is a project I strongly sympathize with.ⁱⁱ However, I also think some of the critique raised against parts of the ontological turn is warranted. Vigh and Sausdal, for instance, make a valid point when they claim that Holbraad's and Viveiros de Castro's tendencies to treat ontologies as "naturalized and essentialized, internally coherent

and bounded, as incommensurable worlds” (2014, 65) makes comparison difficult if not impossible. I also think Bessire and Bond make a succinct point when they claim that Viveiros de Castro tends to reify the binary between incommensurable modern and nonmodern worlds, and that this essentialized incommensurability obscures the historical and political process through which these worlds—entangled as they mostly are—have become construed as compartmentalized and through which notions like nature and culture have become “dispersed political technologies” today (2014; see also Turner 2009; Bessire 2014). Hence, taking in these critiques one could argue that the approaches to ontology most central to the ontological turn, at least as they are portrayed by these critiques, appear unnecessarily essentialistic and static as well as insufficiently de-politicized and de-historicized.ⁱⁱⁱ

As much as I agree with these interventions, I also think we could question whether these critiques of the ontological turn are based on a too narrow understanding of what an anthropology of ontologies might be and perhaps also of what—theoretically, analytically and critically—Viveiros de Castro and Holbraad’s project actually is about. Despite the common interest in reorienting anthropology to make it better able to deal with the problems we confront in the Anthropocene, the ontological turn is far from a coherent movement (Salmond 2014; Kohn 2015). Indeed, as Bertelsen and Bendixsen’s introduction (this volume) make evident, it is multiple and unstable. While much of the critique of the ontological turn (e.g. Bessire and Bond 2014; Vigh and Sausdal 2014; Graeber 2015) tends to focus on Viveiros de Castro and Holbraad, other voices that are more open to the historical, political, temporal and scalar complexities of ontological differences tend to be evaded. I think particularly of the works of Blaser (2009, 2010), Cadena (2010, 2014), and Scott (2007) who all have explored the ontological dimensions of historically situated political processes.

Perhaps more worryingly are the misapprehensions one can trace in these critiques regarding Viveiros de Castro’s and Holbraad’s analytical project. Their project is a recursive

one in which our interlocutors' concepts are allowed to transfigure our anthropological concepts. Hence, while conventional anthropology attempt to minimize the anthropologist's distortion of native concepts, the recursive approach cultivates the distortion of anthropological concepts by native ones. Rather than inhibit and close off comparison, then, the aim is to treat native terms and anthropological ones as "epistemically continuous" (Viveiros de Castro 2013, 475).^{iv} Despite their insistence on radical alterity, they actually also make a claim for comparison, but that is a comparison that is better seen as a translation that betrays its destination language (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 5) or as a transfiguration (Povinelli 2014). The recursive approach is thus, as Kohn argues, a form of "cosmic philosophical predation" (2015, 319).

In this chapter I draw on these other ways of thinking about ontological differences in order to develop an ontologically oriented approach that does not imply worlds separated by incommensurable differences, but which approaches ontology as a dynamic field in which the states of being of entities are chronically unstable and require particular relational practices to become momentarily stabilized.

By engaging ethnographic material from Ifugao, the Philippines, I work towards developing a notion of ontological dynamics that emphasizes transformability and which sees the eventual boundedness and radicality of ontological difference as an emergent effect of practices but which at the same time does not see these boundaries as intraversable. I will show how in Ifugao all beings have an inherent potential for becoming transformed into something different and will explore how encounters with such transformations—mainly in sacrificial rituals—are forms of mirroring encounters with what we could call a "difference within", that is the potential for becoming otherwise that always reside within one's own relational becoming. I propose a dynamic understanding of ontology in which ontological boundaries are effects rather than premises and are never stable but fluctuate between various

forms of partial permeability. Towards the end, I discuss how this ontological dynamic opens up for thinking “radical” as transformational and “alterity” as an “alterity within”.

Reversibility of the otherwise

In an article on the ontology of Yanomamö spiritism, Viveiros de Castro (2007) states that spirits do not denote a distinct class of beings, but intimate rather a region or moment of indiscernibility between the human and the nonhuman. He relates this ontological mode to a mythical past in which differences between species were still to be actualized. The myths record the actualization of the present state of things out of this virtual pre-cosmological condition, and the result of this actualization was a bifurcation into a relative invisibility (human souls and animal spirits) and a relative opacity (the human body and somatic animal clothing) that determines the make-up of all present-day beings. However, the pre-cosmological virtuality of the actualized entities is indestructible. Entities are therefore not self-identical, but carry with them a potential for reversibility, for becoming otherwise. They are what they are by not being what they are not. The actualization of an entity, then, always involves comparison with a yet unrealized otherwise. Comparison is thus inherent to Amerindian ontologies, but this is a comparison based on differences, on equivocation (see also Viveiros de Castro 2004, 7; 2014; Kohn 2015, 319).

Another inspiration for this chapter is Elizabeth Povinelli’s work towards an anthropology of the otherwise (e.g. 2011, 2014). In her approach, the existing is always more than one as it contains immanent within its existence “its own possible derangements and rearrangements” (Povinelli 2014). The otherwise is these immanent derangements and rearrangements (see also Serres 1987) which are forever there as a potential, threatening to emerge. Given this, it becomes an important analytical task to elicit how entities emerge, endure, and exhaust and how the otherwise is allowed to flourish or is kept at bay.^v

Although there are significant differences between Amazonian notions of spirits and those operative in Ifugao, the Philippines, these arguments about the reversibility of the actual state of becoming of entities also speak to the dynamics in Ifugao human-spirit relations. As I will show here, human becoming is a result of an ongoing “othering” of that which it is not, an activity that takes place on the background of the potential for becoming “otherwise”. But while this potential for becoming “otherwise” must be averted, Ifugao ideas about how life and reproduction are ensured by the proper enactment of human-spirit relations require that this potential must at times be engaged with directly. This requirement imbues human-spirit relations with a particular dynamic that moves spirits between potential and manifest states of being.

Ifugao ontological dynamics

The Ifugao villages in which I have done fieldwork for a total of nearly two years each consist of about 1000 inhabitants whose main occupation is wet rice cultivation in irrigated terraces and swidden horticulture in gardens located in the steep mountainsides.^{vi} Clusters of houses are spread around in the terrain; on top of mountain ridges, in the middle of the terraced fields, and hidden in the forest across the river gorge. The villagers share this landscape with an array of other-than-human beings known collectively as *bā'i*. These include ancestors (*nun'apuh*), place specific *pinādeng*, mythical characters and other *bā'i* associated with meteorological phenomena, illnesses, and forms of protection.

Humans and *bā'i* are similar in that all of them have *lennāwa* which can variously refer to a general life force, a form of soul, and consciousness. All living beings must have *lennāwa* in order to live, but the extent to which this also means that they are conscious beings, depends contextually. However, this common quality of *lennāwa* is contrasted by a differentiation between human and *bā'i* in terms of their different bodies, *odol*. It is the

lennāwa-odol relationship that defines what kind of life form the *lennāwa* inhabits. In any case, this relationship is far from stable. The *lennāwa* may leave the *odol*, and thereby engage in a shared world with other *lennāwa*, which occurs for instance when one dreams. One can then encounter the *lennāwa* of other living humans and *bā'i*, and one can engage in interaction with them. The shared quality of having *lennāwa* entails, then, that there is a potential for a shared social field between humans and *bā'i*.

However, this shared social field is rarely realized in its totality. In everyday life, humans and *bā'i* exist separately from each other, and the “total socialization of the world” (Pedersen 2001) that the sharedness of *lennāwa* makes possible, remains for the most part only a potential. This separateness has several dimensions, including spatial, temporal and perspectival differences.

Humans and *bā'i* inhabit the same cosmos, which is divided into five general parts: Earthworld, Underworld, Skyworld and the Upstream and Downstream worlds. Humans live in the Earthworld, while the *bā'i* inhabit all the regions of the cosmos. Despite the presence of *bā'i* in the part where humans live, the *bā'i* are acknowledged as living “somewhere else”. This is related to the two other dimensions that separate them, the temporal and the perspectival. In addition, then, to living somewhere else, the *bā'i* belong to a mythical and ancestral past. *Bā'i* are for the most part present to humans in their everyday life more as memory than as actual interaction partners. The fact that humans and *bā'i* have different bodies entails also that they have different perspectives. For instance, what are wild pigs and rats to humans, are for *bā'i* their domestic pigs and chickens. And *bā'i* may see humans as prey. In sum, the world of the *bā'i* is a different world that is superimposed upon that of humans.

In this respect, Ifugao human-*bā'i* relations appear to fit Descola’s ontological schema of animism quite neatly (see also Howell this volume). Descola (2013) defines animism as an

ontology in which there is continuity in the interiority of humans and nonhumans and discontinuity in their physicalities. As Kapferer (2014) points out, however, Descola's schema sets up this ontology as too static and disregards the relational processes through which they are stabilized or transformed. This is worth mentioning for Ifugao human-*bā'i* relations make it evident that ontological differences are far from fixed. They are rather chronically unstable (Vilaça 2005) and require effort in order to be both stabilized and transformed. Although *bā'i* exist in most everyday life as separate from humans, they can transform their own bodies into animal or human form. They can make their presence known in dreams and through inflicting illness and other problems to humans. And also humans may suddenly be cast into a different space-time, as happened to Duntugan who walked on a well-known forest path and suddenly lost his spatial orientation. As Mary, Gobler and several others of my informants related, dreaming of their ancestors or of future disasters put them in direct contact with these persons or events. Instances such as these—along with most other instances of illness—were occasioned by the *bā'i* who by appearing in their world, made their *lennawa* temporarily leave their *odol*. Such change in the *lennawa-odol* relation was considered dangerous and potentially lethal.

The emergence of a *ba'i* before the gaze of Duntugan, Mary and Gobler entailed a risk of becoming overpowered by the perspective of that *bā'i*, which could result in the loss of their own human perspective with the corollary effect of bodily transformation—drying out, getting ill and impotence. If they did not counter this perspectival shift in time, the transformation would become permanent. They would die and eventually become *nun'apuh*, ancestors. As humans, they were thus in a state of becoming that entailed the ever-present potential for transformation. To stabilize themselves as humans required them enact differences between them and the *bā'i*.

There were several ways in which this could be done. The main way was to maintain their rice terraces in proper condition, keep the burial caves where the bones of their ancestors were kept dry and clean, perform rituals at planting and harvesting; basically showing respect for their ancestors. They could also intervene by means of sensorial perceptions such as squeezing a piece of ginger or burning a piece of hair whenever they encountered what could be a *ba'i*. Ramon's old mother hung a protective plant over her ear in order to avoid hearing the voice of her deceased husband. All of these protected against sensing the *ba'i*.

Although these techniques stabilized the spatio-temporal and perspectival differentiation from the *bā'i*, they could not make this differentiation permanent or total. The ever-present risk of losing their humanness was accompanied by momentary lapses of differentiation in which lay the potential for fecundity and reproduction. The flow of life force between humans and *bā'i* produced successful rice yields and good health, and this flow could only be secured through rituals in which, as I will come back to soon, humans and *bā'i* were immanently co-present. Becoming and enduring as humans necessitated thus a dynamic fluctuation in the relations between humans and their other-than-human others. The separation between the world of Duntugan, Mary, Gbler and their co-villagers and the world of the *bā'i* had therefore to be de-stabilized every now and again.

The transformational character of these differentiations entails that the *bā'i* co-exist with humans not as completely separated "others" but as virtual potentials of humans' own momentarily stabilized becoming. The pastness and spatial distance of spirits relate thus to the presentness of humans *not* as a past that has passed and a space that is another place, but rather as a coexisting virtual dimension of the actualities of the human domain or as a potential alterity inherent in their own becoming. As we shall see, the virtual state of being of *bā'i* can transform into an actual state. *Bā'i* thus fluctuate between different ontological states,

and these differences have implications for how humans relate with them and how the boundaries between their worlds are experienced.

It is in sacrificial rituals that these ontological transformations primarily take place. When Bugan, a young woman got ill, her family consulted one of the ritual experts, the *mumba'i*, who reckoned that she had been secretly married to a *pinadeng* spirit who had brought her *lennawa* with him to his village inside a mountain. Consequently, Bugan was not feeling well. In order for Bugan to recover, her *lennawa* had to be returned to her *odol*, and this could be done by giving the *pinadeng* pigs. When her family had brewed rice wine and procured pigs for the offering, the *mumba'i* came to their house and started invoking the *bā'i*, telling them to come to the house of Bugan. As the *bā'i* arrived, they briefly possessed the *mumba'i* and were served rice wine. Myths were also chanted, and at this stage these were about how the rice terraces were once completely destroyed by an earthquake and how the *ba'i* of lightning was captured in a tree in the human world. These were stories about the collapse of the differentiations between humans and *ba'i*, and chanting these myths was held to bring about such a condition within the space-time of the ritual.

When all the *ba'i* had arrived at the house, the *mumba'i* opened a small wooden box called *pun'amhan* which contained a collection of small rice bundles smeared with blood from previous sacrifices and tiny age-old pieces of pork from sacrificed pigs. They killed chickens too and singed them in the hearth, producing thus a smell that is particularly attractive to *ba'i*. Moving to outside the house, the *mumba'i* invoked all the *ba'i* again. Also here the *ba'i* briefly possessed the *mumba'i* and received rice wine. The visitors who had gathered outside could then talk to the *ba'i* and see them dance.

Through these ritual practices, the differentiations between humans and *ba'i* were momentarily dissolved: The *ba'i* had been relocated to Bugan's house. In fact, parts of the invocations told the *ba'i* exactly which paths to take. This spatial re-configuration of the

human-*ba'i* differentiations occurred together with a temporal “present-ing” of them. *Ba'i* are normally of a “time otherwise”, but this temporal differentiation was dissolved by the actual appearance of the *ba'i* within the particular space-time of the ritual. This did not mean that the temporalities of the *ba'i* and humans were totally conjoined, but that the different temporalities converged to form a trans-temporal hinge (Nielsen 2011; Pedersen and Nielsen 2013).

The opening of the *pun'amhan* enabled a conjunction of past sacrifices with the present one. Feathers and blood from the sacrificed chickens were conjoined with the other items in it thus engendering a form of coexistence of past and present. With its miniature collection of the major components of Ifugao relational life—rice, blood, meat, and betel nuts—all from various pasts, the box was like a “world total in a box”. By opening it, they opened up for a direct engagement with time in its totality.

It was not the box alone that engendered this, however. The whole montage (Kapferer 2013) of coexisting temporalities, spatialities and perspectives that the *mumba'i* put together engendered a situation in which time was there in its total potentiality. This particular ritual coexistence of human and *ba'i* worlds created a form of indiscernibility of the past and the present and of the human world and its otherwise. It was as if the ritual dynamic itself set up a perspective all of its own, a view from everywhere (Pedersen and Willerslev 2007), a perspective which was identical neither to that of humans nor that of spirits, but rather an excess of perspectives or a perspective of or on all potential perspectives.

The very brief and partial possessions of the *mumba'i* were conducive to this perspectival excess. Possession constituted a co-existence within an *odol* of the *lennawa* of both the *mumba'i* and the *ba'i* and thereby evinced an excessiveness of perspectives, a co-existence of the “this-wise” and the “otherwise” in one and the same body at one and the same time (cf. Knauft 2014). Similarly, the ability to remember the long lists of names of spirits to

be invoked while being drunk engendered an excessiveness of agency. And the engulfment of participants in smoke and the smell of singed chicken feathers, with its olfactory ambiguity, also contributed to this co-existence of potential worlds.

Hence, by effectuating a convergence of spatial, temporal and perspectival differentiations, the ritual established an entrance point into a space-time-perspective in which the perspectives of both humans and *ba'i* co-existed alongside each other. For those of us present, this co-existence of indiscernible differentiations offered an image of the otherwise that was inherent within our own becoming. The co-existing perspectives reflected each other, but did so as in a “non-reflexive mirror”, that is one that returns to us an image (of ourselves) in which we do not recognize ourselves, but which shows us what we may become (Hage 2012, 297).

As much as this situation was a prerequisite for the continued flow of life force between humans and *ba'i* and for the retrieval of Bugan's *lennawa*, it was also highly dangerous. The co-presence of “perspectives otherwise” entailed for those present a risk of losing their human perspective and becoming by that transformed into that otherwise. The indiscernibility of the different perspectives required therefore that the participants balanced properly between these perspectives. To this effect, the ritual was replete with regulations regarding the spatial and temporal organization of activities, and the *mumba'i*, who engaged most intimately with the *ba'i*, had to observe these regulations particularly strictly. To further avert this risk, the ritual practices of the latter part of the ritual were geared towards re-establishing the spatial, temporal and perspectival differentiations between humans and *ba'i*.

This re-differentiation commenced already with the killing of the pigs, in which humans received the body of the animals and the *ba'i* their *lennawa*. Prior to the killing of the pigs, the *mumba'i* in their possessed state walked and danced back and forth between the *kolhoddan* and yard where the pigs lay, thus enacting a movement of the *ba'i* to the yard.

After the killing, this movement was reversed by calling them back to the *kolhoddan* again and from there back into the house. The chants they had chanted earlier about the destruction of the terraces and the entrapment of *ba'i* in the human world were now continued, but at this point they related the reconstruction of the terraces and the release of the *ba'i* of lightning from the tree, that is the rebuilding the world after its collapse and the re-differentiation of the human and the *ba'i* world. The *mumba'i* then entered the house again and brought the *ba'i* with them. The *ba'i* enjoyed a meal of fried pork there before the *mumba'i* told them to leave Bugar's house. Everyone else had to wait outside to eventually be served a common meal of boiled pork and rice. The latter part of the ritual thus consisted of a series of re-differentiations of the temporal, spatial and perspectival separations between humans and *ba'i*. In the days that followed, all of us who had participated in then ritual had to refrain from eating citrus fruits since these were held to smell the same as singed chicken feathers, the smell of par excellence of the ambiguous situation brought about in the ritual. This would ensure that the *ba'i* stayed away and that the vital differentiation between human and *ba'i* perspectives was maintained.

In sum, then, the ontological boundaries between humans and *ba'i* are slippery and shifting. The highly volatile and transformational character of both humans and *ba'i* warrants therefore an approach that acknowledges the ontological dynamics that the shifting state of being of these entities engenders. Both humans and *ba'i* fluctuate between various states of being, and these states of being are the effects of practices, what I referred to elsewhere as onto-praxis (Remme 2016). Entities are here in a constant state of becoming and transformation.

This ontological fluidity does not, however, inhibit the establishment of boundaries between worlds. In most everyday life, to uphold the boundary with the *ba'i* world is vital, but equally vital is the momentary dissolution of that boundary in sacrificial rituals. Ifugao

animism is thereby characterized by an ontological dynamic in which the states of being of entities are enacted differently in different contexts. In some instances entities and differentiations between entities are momentarily stable but in other instances the inherent instability is realized for therapeutic or life/reproduction securing effects. Moreover, the transformational character of entities entails that the boundaries that are set up are on the one hand against an alterity, but on the other hand that alterity is an alterity that exists as a potential in one's own becoming. The potential of encountering other perspectives is always present, and such encounters must be brought about from time to time in order to secure life, reproduction and fecundity. Human becoming thus emerges as a form of extraction from a multiperspectival potential, that is through a constant "othering" of one's potential for becoming otherwise. Any encounter with the perspective of the *ba'i* implies an encounter with that "otherwise within".

There is, then, in this ontological dynamic an ever-present potential for becoming transformed. What Povinelli calls "the otherwise" (2011) is never far away, neither in time or space, but is present as a potential for transformation in the relational becoming of humans. Although "the otherwise" is normally enacted as a form of excess in one's own actual becoming, it is "always on the verge of the actual" (Ingold 2006).

The above description of Ifugao ontological dynamics may at first glance appear as just another example of a bounded ontology, which may be considerably dynamic but which is so within its own confines, so to speak. I will emphasize, however, that I see these ontological dynamics as entangled with other social processes that undoubtedly have both given shape to these dynamics and been given shape by them. Ifugao ontological dynamics of today – the descriptions above are, I should perhaps stress, not a bygone tradition, but living practices – have been enmeshed in cosmo-political processes (Cadena 2010; Stengers 2010; Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014) for centuries and are so still. Since the mid-

1800s, Spanish Christian missionaries attempted to pacify the rebellious highland people, and the establishment of schools by the American colonizers challenged traditional Ifugao ways of living, causing in some cases great shame, humiliation, and a form of “cultural intimacy”^{vii} (Herzfeld 2005) regarding *ba'i* related practices, although often in conjunction with cultural self-pride and active resistance (see Scott 1974). These cosmo-political processes seem to have made a particular impact on the temporal dimensions of Ifugao human-*ba'i* relations. The *ba'i* have always belonged to a mythical past, but the temporal differentiation between humans and *ba'i* gained another dimension when ritual practices began to be associated with an “uncivilized” past. The otherwise of the *ba'i* world included thereby also “the otherwise we once were”.

Another “otherwise”

In recent years, the instability of Ifugao ontological dynamics has again taken on new forms. I think here of the introduction of Pentecostalism which started in the region about 30 years ago. While most of the villagers with whom I have worked combine the practice of human-*ba'i* relations with Catholicism, a slowly increasing part of the villagers are converting to Pentecostalism. Ifugao has not experienced any mass conversion as reported elsewhere (e.g. Knauff 2002; Robbins 2004), and most of the members of the congregation Christ is the Answer Church (CITAC), which came to be my “home church”, are struggling with conversion. “We’re trying to become Christians,” as sister Linda said, admitting that she was never quite certain if she actually made it. Conversion constitutes here not a radical break (cf. Robbins 2007), but is rather an ongoing relational action (Street 2010) which, when successful, enacts relations with God and makes him manifest. Praying privately is one way of doing that, but the Sunday services remain the prime venue for experiencing God’s presence. The methods for doing so are on the surface quite different from animist rituals; giving testimony, singing praise and worship songs, praying, preaching, and listening to the

Word of God. As in other Pentecostal churches, sensational forms (Meyer 2010)—particularly sound and tactility—are crucial in CITAC for bringing forth the encounter with God (Engelke 2007). But these differences combine with a similarity with animist rituals. Also here do the ritual practices effect a transformation of the state of being of an other-than-human being, that is a transformation of God from a transcendent state of being to becoming an actual person with whom they can engage in relations (see Luhrman 2012). And the purpose is clear: reciprocation by God, not so much in terms of eternal life but rather in the more immediate terms of well-being, healing, and prosperity here and now. For this to occur, God must be present, and it is through the ritual practices that this relationally generated presence is enacted. God is then transformed into some sort of bodily experiential form, for instance by speaking in tongues, which is quite rare, and more commonly through the ability to pray rapidly and fluently in a combination of English, Ilocano (the area’s lingua franca) and vernacular Ifugao. These ritual practices are at one and the same time manifestations of God’s presence and seen as gifts to God (Cannell 2006). Praying, singing and most explicitly “giving” testimony enact exchange relations with God, with clear expectations for reciprocation.

However, as much as these ritual practices may result in experiencing God, they too carry with them their own potential otherwise. The ongoing relational enactment of God which conversion entails, always comes accompanied with the risk of *backsliding*,^{viii} that is being drawn back into a way of life in which relations with God cannot be properly enacted. *Backsliding* may take various forms, like drinking too much or behaving immorally in one way or another. Even the ritual practices themselves inhere a potential for the emergence of Satan; by trying too hard to speak in tongues or playing praise and worship songs too well, for example. Such instances of *backsliding* are usually held to be caused by Satan or his *demons*, and should be countered by praying and recurrent enactments of relations with God.

Converting and “trying to” be Christians are thus no easy tasks. The Satanic otherwise lurks underneath, forever on the verge of emerging.

A central part of this enactment of relations with God is the avoidance of everything that is associated with the *bā'i*, particularly the rituals in which they are present. For the members of CITAC, the *bā'i* are *demons*, and having anything to do with them can result in becoming possessed by them. Staying away from venues where *demons* appear – as in sacrificial rituals – is thus one measure taken against this danger. But doing so entails other potential dangers that have to do with the exchange and consumption of pig meat at animist sacrificial rituals.

Part of the meat of the pigs that were killed in Bugan’s ritual was divided into pieces that Bugan’s family gave to their relatives. The relatives would reciprocate these pieces of pork whenever they arranged a ritual. It is through these exchanges of pork that their kin relations were enacted. By giving, consuming, and reciprocating pieces of pork they activate or sustain kin relations, and by not giving, they could de-actualize kin relations, relegating them into latent forms of kinship. When Pentecostals refuse to receive and eat meat from sacrificed pigs, they refuse not only to enact relations with *demons* but also, as a consequence, their relations with their kin. They can no longer participate in the ongoing relational practice that constitutes kin relations. This causes conflicts within families, partly because those who sacrifice pigs get offended when their relatives refuse to accept their share. The most immediate danger for the Pentecostals, however, is that when they no longer arrange sacrificial rituals themselves and consequently do not share meat with their relatives, they are prone to provoke feelings of envy among their kin, which easily turns into attacks of a form of witchcraft known as *paliw*, which if not counteracted, could result in death.^{ix}

The introduction of Pentecostalism has thus introduced another dimension to the ontological dynamics operative in Ifugao human-*ba'i* relations. Enacting relations with God

must be done continuously as that too operates upon the backdrop of the potential for the manifestation of the ‘otherwise’ of that world, namely Satan in his various disguises. But while human-*ba’i* relations among the non-Pentecostals were seen as both potentially fruitful and dangerous and necessitated an occasional engagement with one’s “difference within”, among the Pentecostals there was no such potential positive effects of engaging with that “otherwise”. The boundary towards that alterity had to be maintained and remain as strong as possible. But that of course requires strict work, relentless efforts at manifesting God through prayers and leading a life that avoids actualizing the ever-present potential of Satan’s manifestation.

Ontological openings

Let me close this chapter, then, with some thoughts on what openings (Cadena 2014) Ifugao ontological dynamics offer for thinking otherwise about ontological differences.

As mentioned above, Viveiros de Castro (e.g. 1998, 2012) and Holbraad (e.g. 2012) have been criticized for allegedly claiming that anthropological analysis must take place at the level of the cultural structures of ontological presuppositions (see also Bråten, this volume). As the critique goes, this easily leads to culturalizing ontology, essentializing both people and ontologies, establishing boundaries between ontologies, making them thus incommensurable with each other. They become worlds apart (Jensen 2014; Vigh and Sausdal 2014; Graeber 2015). As I will claim to have demonstrated here, however, speaking of ontological differences does not necessarily entail that these differences are static, incommensurable and deter comparison. If there is anything essential to Ifugao ontological dynamics it must be that they are intrinsically chronically unstable. There is an ever-present potential for transformation of both humans and other-than-human beings, a potential which is occasionally realized when humans are enticed into sharing the perspective of *ba’i*, when *ba’i* are made manifest in sacrificial rituals and when God become present in Pentecostal Sunday

services. The difference between humans and other-than-human beings is a difference that is thus an intrinsic part of becoming human. Human being contains its own potential otherwise, and encounters with such otherwises—as in dreams and sacrificial rituals—are comparative events. The inherent comparison is, however, not based on inducting similarities, but rather on difference, and it is by enacting these differences correctly that human becoming is restored or maintained.

Paying attention to the dynamic aspects of ontological differences—both those I have demonstrated here and those evinced in Viveiros de Castro’s discussion of Yanomamö spirits (2007, see also Course 2010)—provides a much more nuanced view of ontological differences than what tends to appear in the critiques of the ontological turn. This is an argument not only for seeing the dynamic aspects of the recursive approaches in the ontological turn, but also for including in that turn approaches that are less interested in ontological presuppositions, but rather in the emergence and formations of entities in assemblages that includes both human and nonhuman agents and actants. I think here of those theoretical developments coming out of STS and Actor-Network Theory (for instance Mol 2002; Latour 2007; Blaser 2010; Ishii 2012; Law and Lien 2013) that see ontological differences more as shifting effects of practices than as static, bounded and intraversable.

As others (for instance Jensen 2014, see also Bertelsen and Bendixsen this volume), I do not find these various approaches to ontology incommensurable but rather mutually enriching, and this chapter is evidently inspired by both the recursive anthropology of Viveiros de Castro and Holbraad, of the political ontology of Blaser and Cadena and of the attention to emergence and ontological effects of practices of Latour, Mol and Law. I approached entities such as humans and *ba’i* as effects of practices, that is, as ongoing enactments that are and need to be shifting, creating an ontological dynamics that is intrinsically unstable. These ontological differences are also subject to historical change and

“cosmo-political” struggles (Cadena 2010; Stengers 2010). By paying attention to how the ontological status of entities and the ontological presuppositions themselves are inherently unstable, I want to work towards an approach to ontology that does not require establishing incommensurable differences and boundaries around static ontological schemes. To the extent that such boundaries are made, they are so as an effect of practices, of boundary work or worlding (Tsing 2011), a work which can be and often is intrinsically cosmo-political.

This points towards another intervention regarding the ontological turn’s engagement with radical alterity. As mentioned earlier, I find the critique leveled against the turn’s tendency towards essentialization and focus on radical alterity to be partly warranted. However, perhaps some of this critique speaks more to the rhetorical and political pragmatism of the ontological turn than its actual analytical strategies. The radical alterity focused on by Viveiros de Castro and Martin Holbraad for instance, does not make comparison impossible but forces us rather to think differently about what comparison is, for instance ‘controlled equivocation’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004) and what comparison and anthropological analysis actually does, for instance transform or invent concepts (Holbraad 2009, 2012), two strategies that both, needless to say, build significantly on Marilyn Strathern (1988) and Roy Wagner’s (1981) work. The interesting point here is if the concept of “radical alterity” itself can be the subject of such a conceptual invention. Could for instance the Ifugao way of engaging closely with (the) alterity (of the *ba’i*) suggest different ways of thinking about and engaging with alterity also for anthropology? And what implications could this rethinking of alterity have for the notion “radical alterity” that occupies critics of the ontological turn so much? Perhaps we could think about radical not in terms of its original Latin sense, as having roots or being essential, but rather in terms of how it was used in surfer slang in the 1970s, namely as ‘at the limits of control’. Radical thus becomes a potential for transfiguration. And alterity needs not mean an alter that is totally separated from a self, but rather as a constituent part of embodied

existence itself (Bubandt 2014; Csordas 2004). When we combine such rethinking of radical with this ‘intimate alterity’ (Csordas 2004), radical alterity becomes a potential for becoming otherwise which is an inherent part of becoming. In Ifugao practices, one moves between avoiding and approaching this potential for becoming otherwise, and that movement is part of one’s existence as a human being. Human becoming thrives thus on the limits of control of one’s “otherwise within.”

Approaching ontology in this way, as more loose at the edges, as more shifting and transformational, as basically more open-ended fares well with an approach that emphasizes the political and historical situatedness of ontological processes. An approach to ontology that takes into account its fundamental dynamic character is particularly open to such analyses and is “open” in a particular sense, namely to the ever-present potentials for becoming otherwise. It calls us to account for the cosmo-political processes through which some and not others of the multiplicity of possibilities become enduringly actualized, transfigured, or extinguished.

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ⁱⁱ I should add here that I sympathize with this as an experiment in thinking and not as a normative program for all anthropological analyzes. I think Viveiros de Castro's use of a term like 'illegal move', for example in his critique of Graeber's analysis of fetishes (Viveiros de Castro 2015, 13; see also Graeber 2015), (quite paradoxically) inhibits rather than promotes the openness towards thinking otherwise that I want to retain from his approach.

ⁱⁱⁱ This critique is also highly relevant for the ontological cartography (Costa and Fausto 2010, 95) of Descola's *Beyond nature and culture* (2013) in which he outlines four ontological schemas: naturalism, animism, totemism and analogism. As Kapferer (2014) points out, Descola treats these schemas as unnecessarily static and bounded, pays insufficient attention to the historical forces involved in their stabilization and transformation and avoids attending to the potential for co-existence of different ontologies and the dynamics thus created.

^{iv} Whether they succeed is, however, debated. Salmond (2013, 2014) claims, for instance, that they actually privilege the role of interpreter for ethnographers, allocating anthropology's interlocutors the role of a muse (Salmond 2013, 25).

^v Povinelli (2014) argues that the immanence of the otherwise and its potential emergence is a fundamental political and ethical issue. The reproduction of arrangements of entities and the concomitant shadowing of immanent otherwises is a matter of power and that the opening up of conditions for the emergence of the otherwise is an ethical issue.

^{vi} The province of Ifugao is located in the Cordillera Mountains in Norther Luzon. I conducted fieldwork in various villages in the municipality of Banaue for a total of two years, in 2003-2004 and 2007-2008. Names of informants are anonymized.

^{vii} Hertzfeld describes "cultural intimacy" as those aspects of cultural identity that are considered an external embarrassment but which nevertheless provides insiders assurance of common sociality.

^{viii} I have italicized this and other Pentecostal terms to stress that I approach them here as they were used in the congregation I studied. Both the terms backsliding and demons are part of a globalized Pentecostal vocabulary that may take on different meanings and connotations as they are localized.

^{ix} While Pentecostalism's encouragement of self-discipline may have positive consequences in terms of financial expenditure and entrepreneurship (Smilde 2007), the financial advantages of converting must be understood as related to two forms of nonmarket exchange: offerings to God and the kin generating offerings to *ba'i* (see Haynes 2013).