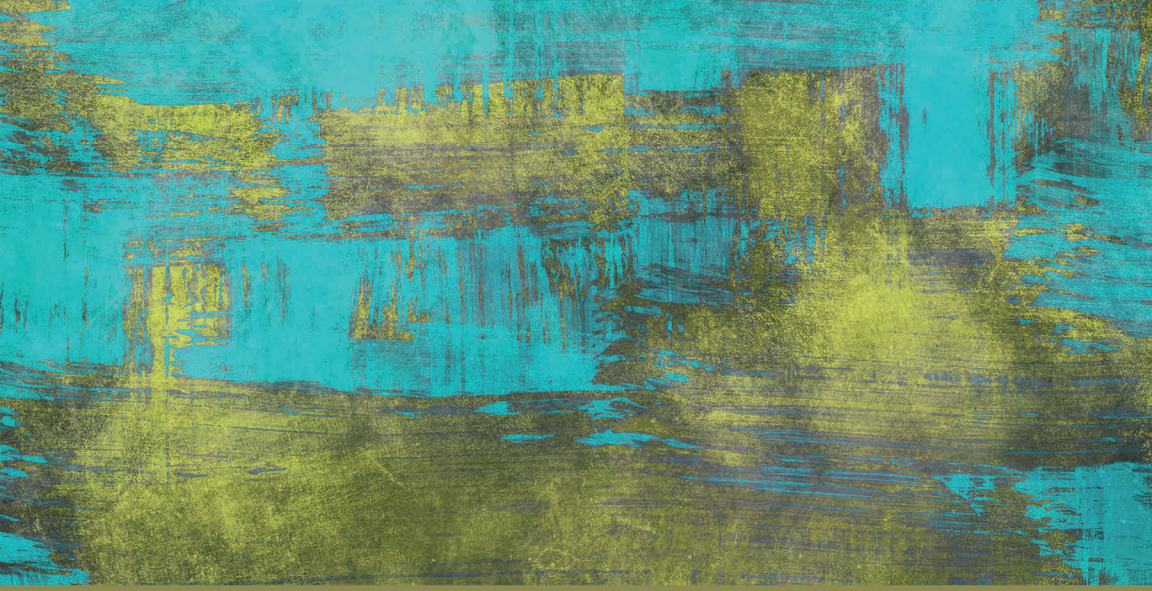


Vitality of Indigenous Religions

THE SHAMANESS IN ASIA

GENDER, RELIGIONS AND THE STATE

Edited by
Davide Torri and Sophie Roche



The Shamaness in Asia

This book concentrates on female shamanisms in Asia and their relationship with the state and other religions, offering a perspective on gender and shamanism that has often been neglected in previous accounts.

An international range of contributors cover a broad geographical scope, ranging from Siberia to South Asia and Iran to Japan. Several key themes are considered, including the role of bureaucratic established religions in integrating, challenging, and fighting shamanic practices; the position of women within shamanic complexes; and perceptions of the body. Beginning with a chapter that places the shamaness at the centre of the discussion, chapters then approach these issues in a variety of ways, from historically informed accounts to presenting the findings of extensive ethnographic research by the authors themselves.

Offering an important counterbalance to male-dominated accounts of shamanism, this book will be of great interest to scholars of indigenous peoples across religious studies, anthropology, Asian studies, and gender studies.

Davide Torri is currently a researcher at the Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, and Performing Arts at Sapienza University of Rome. In addition, he is an associate member of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (Germany) and of the Centre d'Etudes Himalayennes of the CNRS (France). He is also secretary of the ISARS (International Society for the Academic Research on Shamanism). His main areas of research includes Himalayan religions, shamanism, and indigenous minorities. Among his publications, we find *Landscape, Ritual and Identity among the Hyolmo of Nepal* (2020) and (as co-editor) *Shamanism and Violence: Power, Repression and Suffering in Indigenous Religious Conflicts* (2013).

Sophie Roche is a research associate and lecturer at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies and Social Anthropology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Her main research interests include conflict and disaster studies as well as migration in Central Asia, Iran and Germany. She is the author of the monographs *Domesticating Youth* (2014) and *The Faceless Terrorist: A Study of Critical Events in Tajikistan* (2019).

Vitality of Indigenous Religions
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The Shamaness in Asia

Gender, Religions and the State

Edited by Davide Torri and Sophie Roche

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Biographical notes

Maryam Abbasi
University of Heidelberg (Heidelberg, Germany)

Maryam Abbasi graduated from Tehran University in the field of social anthropology. She pursued her master studies at the same institute and wrote an ethnography on Laks, a group of people mainly living in the western part of Iran.

In 2010, she started to do field work with a private anthropological institute focusing on south Iran, which later became her field of study for her PhD. Within the project of this institute, she worked on traditional medicine and the *zār* ritual as a way to treat people who are believed to be possessed. Since then, she has continued to study various other aspects of the *zār* ritual. She is particularly interested in social aspects that motivate participants to participate in this ritual and the way this ritual is connected to gender identity.

Currently she is a PhD student at the Institute of Anthropology at the Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg.

Her fields of interest are ritual, gender and sexuality, ethnography, visual anthropology, religion, and social empowerment.

Roberte Hamayon
École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris, France)

Roberte Hamayon is honorary professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. An anthropologist, she has conducted fieldwork in Mongolia, Buryatia, and Inner Mongolia (China) since the late 1960s. Her main publications concern shamanism, epics, ritual, and the notion of playing.

Clément Jacquemoud
EHESS-Césor (Paris, France)

Clément Jacquemoud is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Césor (LabEx HASTEC, EHESS, Paris). His research compares the seasonal rituals

that recently appeared in the Altay Republic and focuses on the contemporary religious roles of Altaian women, especially the way they are involved in these rituals. He has a PhD in religious anthropology from the EPHE (Paris, 2017). His thesis, entitled "Religious Diversity in the Altay Republic: Rivalries and Convergences. A Study of Religious Revival among the Altaians of the Altay Republic (Russian Federation)", analyses the religious transformations that occurred in South Siberia since the fall of the USSR and the way the choice of a national religion could serve as a basis for the construction of a distinctive Altaian identity.

During more than three years of fieldwork among indigenous people of the Altay Republic, Clément Jacquemoud observed the way the Altaians reconnect with practices considered traditional (shamanism, Burkhanism) while exploring a more or less exogenous religious plurality (Buddhism, different branches of Orthodox and evangelical Christianity, New Age movements). He focused on the political dimensions that intersect with these different rearticulations of belief and on the particular understanding of the territory that each of these movements conveys. He took part in seasonal rituals organized by the followers of neo-shamanism and neo-Burkhanism and observed the way epic poetry emerges as a catalyst in this identity construction process. In 2015, he published a monograph about the Altaian people both in English and French.

Laurel Kendall
American Museum of Natural History (New York, USA)

As an anthropologist of Korea, Laurel Kendall has been working with and writing about Korean shamans for more than forty years. In the early 1970s, as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Korea, she became interested in the relationship between this largely female tradition and the operation of gender in Korean popular religion. A subsequent project examined how changes in the shamans' world keep pace with the social and economic transformation of South Korean society with respect to questions of space and place, ritual consumption, national identity, and market anxieties. Her most recent work is a comparative project exploring magical images in four different contemporary contexts: statues used by spirit mediums in Vietnam and Myanmar, god pictures in Korean shamans' shrines, and temple masks in Bali, Indonesia. Dr. Kendall is Curator of Asian Ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History and Chair of the Division of Anthropology at the Museum.

Pi-chen Liu
Academia Sinica (Taipei, Taiwan)

LIU, Pi-chen is a tenured associate research fellow at Academia Sinica's Institute of Ethnology in Taiwan. She is co-organizer (with Hu Tai-li) of the

research group Shamans and Ritual Performances in Contemporary Contexts in Taiwan. She has published a book and articles on the shamanic rituals of two Taiwan indigenous peoples (the Kavalan and Amis/Pangcah). She also edited two books on the diverse faces of contemporary shamanic culture in Asia. The Kavalan and Amis/Pangcah were headhunters before 1920 and matrilineal and matrilocal societies until 1970. She is interested in studying the continuing dialectical relationship between construction of social gender, divination and shamanism in these societies.

Laetitia Merli
Independent scholar (Paris, France)

Laetitia Merli is a social anthropologist (Phd at EHESS-Paris) and a documentary filmmaker (MA in visual anthropology at Granada Center in Manchester). She is a specialist in shamanism in Mongolia, Siberia and Europe. Her research concerns circulation of shamanic practices in a New Age context and the intercultural shamanic initiation processes. She was a lecturer at Manchester University, associated researcher at Cambridge University and then at Centre Norbert Elias (CNRS Marseille-Vieille Charité). Very engaged in visual anthropology, she collaborated many years at the International Jean Rouch Festival at Musée de l'Homme-Paris and founded the Festival Mondes en Images (Worlds in Images) in South of France. She produced several documentary films on shamans and is currently preparing a film on trance and therapy.

Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka
Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań, Poland)

Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka works as associate professor at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology, Adam Mickiewicz University, in Poznań, Poland. She received her PhD and Dr. Habil. degrees in ethnology and cultural anthropology at the same university. She specializes in medical anthropology and Central Asian studies; her interests focus on contemporary medical pluralism, shamanism, and Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. She conducted longitudinal anthropological research in Kazakhstan between 1995 and 2000 and in Kyrgyzstan between 2011 and 2013. Among her publications are books on transformations of traditional medicine in Afghanistan and complementary medicine in Kazakhstan, as well as edited volumes on medical anthropology. Her articles appeared, among others, in *Central Asian Survey*, *Anthropology & Medicine*, and *Curare*.

Diana Riboli
Panteion University (Athens, Greece)

Diana Riboli, PhD, is associate professor at the Department of Social Anthropology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece.

Since 2015, she has been president of the International Society for Academic Research on Shamanism (ISARS), formerly known as the International Society for Shamanistic Studies (ISSR). She has been carrying out ethnographic research in Nepal among the Chepang and in Peninsular Malaysia among the Batek and Jahai ethnic groups.

Her published works include *Tunsuriban. Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central Nepal* (Mandala Book Point, 2000); *Shamanism and Violence. Power, Repression and Suffering in Indigenous Religious Conflicts* (edited with Davide Torri) (Ashgate, 2013); and *Consciousness and Indigenous Healing Systems: Between Indigenous Perceptions and Neuroscience* (Nova Publishers, 2014). She is the author and co-author of more than thirty articles and essays on shamanism, indigenous concepts of health and illnesses, altered states of consciousness, and strategies for survival of indigenous cultures.

Sophie Roche
HCTS, University of Heidelberg (Heidelberg, Germany)

The social anthropologist Dr. Sophie Roche works on conflicts and environmental disasters in Central Asia, Iran and Germany. She is specialized in the social and political history and ethnography of Central Asia. She received her PhD from the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg and her habilitation degree at the Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg. She has been at several research centres in Germany including the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, the Heidelberg Cluster for Transcultural Studies as well as at the Goethe University of Frankfurt. Conflicts and disasters interest her because they bring to the forefront the fragility of societies and lay open society's social structure as well as the practical solutions that people find to disruptive experiences. She authored two monographs *Domesticating Youth* (2014) and *The Faceless Terrorist: A Study of Critical Events in Tajikistan* (2019), several edited volumes and more than forty articles and book chapters.

Razia Sultanova
Cambridge University (Cambridge, United Kingdom)

Dr Razia Sultanova is a musicologist and cultural anthropologist. Born in Russia and having grown up in Uzbekistan, she studied and consequently worked at both the Uzbek and Moscow State Conservatories. After moving to the United Kingdom – specifically to the University of London; Goldsmiths College and SOAS – she has since moved to Cambridge University and worked there since 2008. Her primary areas of research are Central Asian and Middle Eastern culture, which includes studies on Islam and music, and gender and music. Razia Sultanova has been awarded a number of international scholarships, including but not limited to those in Germany (DFG

in 1993, the Ministry of Culture of the Land Brandenburg 1994, 1997), in France (L'Institut Français d'Etudes sur l'Asie Centrale in 1996, 1997), and in the United Kingdom (1999 onwards). She has edited several volumes.

Typically her work has centred on ethnomusicology and anthropology; however, recently she has taken an interest in producing an ethnographic account of Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia, particularly in terms of religious culture and gender issues. In 2015, Razia Sultanova was elected vice president of the International Council for Traditional Music.

Galina B. Sychenko
"M. I. Glinka" State Conservatory (Novosibirsk, Russia).

Galina B. Sychenko studied in the Novosibirsk State Conservatoire. In 1998, she obtained a PhD degree (dissertation "Traditional Song Culture of Altaians").

She worked in the Department of Ethnomusicology as an associated professor, as a head of the Archive of Traditional Music of the Conservatoire, and as a part-time researcher of the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science. Now she lives in Rome and occupies the Archive "Eurasia" named after Romano Mastromattei.

She gave courses and seminars ("Russian Music of XX Century", "Buddhism and Music", "Field Research in Ethnomusicology", "Practice of Notation of Traditional Music", "Musical Culture of Nepal", and others), organized and participated in about fifty expeditions (Siberia: Altai, Khakassia, Tuva, Gornaya Shoria, Buriatia, Khanty-Mansi Region, Evenkia, Sakhalin; Mongolia; Nepal), participated in many research projects (thirteen of them as a leader), and organized several conferences and exhibitions in Novosibirsk and Rome.

She has about 200 published and unpublished works, among them four volumes of the series "Monuments of Folklore of Peoples of Siberia and Far East" (musical part); collective monographs and textbooks; articles for *Historian Encyclopedia of Siberia*, *Big Russian Encyclopedia*, and MGG-on-line. She is one of the developers of the site "Musical Culture of Siberia".

Davide Torri
SARAS, Sapienza University of Rome (Rome, Italy)

Davide Torri is currently researcher at the Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, and Performing Arts at Sapienza University of Rome (Italy). In addition, he is an associate member of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (Germany) and of the Centre d'Etudes Himalayennes of the CNRS (France). He is also secretary of the ISARS. His main areas of research include Himalayan religions, shamanism, and indigenous minorities. Among his publications, we find *Landscape, Ritual and Identity among the Hyolmo of Nepal* (2020) and (as co-editor) *Shamanism and Violence: Power, Repression and Suffering in Indigenous Religious Conflicts* (2013).

Section 1

The conceptual debate

The role of gender and religion in shamanic studies


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1 The shamaness at the threshold
Gender, religions and the state in Asia

Sophie Roche and Davide Torri

Introduction

The conflicts between forms of shamanism and bureaucratically integrated religious practice seem to be almost a constant of historical encounters. This is especially true if we take into consideration so-called world religions during phases of state formation or colonial expansions. Controlling beliefs and practices of a population over which empires and nation states expand was, and still is, considered a crucial part of state-building processes and a feature of modernization,[1] where regimes of signs have to be checked and sanitized for the smooth functioning of the state machinery. Shamanic beliefs and practices were often considered signs of superstition and backwardness and shamans nothing more than demonic worshippers or charlatans. In the framework of this seemingly recurring pattern, we also find important differentiations in the scale and degree of these dynamical encounters. While the full spectrum of possibilities and outcomes may include almost everything from total eradication to full incorporation, the results invariably offer us a clear view of the resilience of shamanic configurations. More often than not, we may argue, shamanic religious specialists managed to survive and to adapt, albeit in a marginal position, within various and diversified regimes of economies of the sacred (Torri 2014). While this basic notion may well constitute the backbone of this book, we also want to incorporate an additional layer to it: the issue of gender as a fundamental element of these dynamics.

This book originates in a series of lectures, which took place at the Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context (University of Heidelberg), titled *The Shamaness on the Threshold. Religious Encounters, Repression and Resistance in Asia*. During the winter semester (2015/16), and with the involvement of several specialists from different areas as guest lecturers, we explored several cases of entanglement between world religions and local expressions of religiosity centred on trance/possession complex, with a special focus on gender. The materials, talks, data and comments gathered weekly over the semester constitute the raw elements from which this volume emerged.

The core ideas of the course revolved around the idea of asymmetrical religious encounters, with hegemonic religious establishments on one side

and religions of the subaltern on the other. Soon, we also had to incorporate the state into the picture: imperial projects often entail soteriological themes underpinning military conquests, even when proclaiming themselves as the harbingers of rationality, scientific thought and atheism. It would be too simplistic to posit a purely antagonistic relation between organized religions and folk expressions of religiosity or between "new" religions acquiring hegemonic positions versus relics of the previous configurations. Equally unfruitful would be to consider these dynamics along a binary system involving regulated exchanges between great and little traditions or other similar dichotomies, for example, written culture vs. orality. For one thing is certain: every encounter engenders multiple dynamics that are often non-linear and in any case non-unidirectional. Elements are appropriated, recombined, redeployed or subverted by all the agents involved (Hamayon 2000, 7). Moreover, it would be a mistake to consider each configuration as a stable, homogeneous and organic field across time, devoid of any inner tension and inherent contradiction. The topic of gender introduces an additional area of friction, forcing us to reconsider and reassess previous historical and ethnographical accounts of religious dynamics.

We choose to consider shamanism as the *other* of the established religions. In doing this, we are very well aware of the critical debate surrounding the term. Nonetheless, we think the umbrella term will be useful to describe several of those systems or configurations which were denied legitimacy by the hegemonic agents, who roughly identified animism as demonolatry, superstition and witchcraft in older sources and animism during the second half of the 19th century. The history of the concept of shamanism itself is paradigmatic: from superstition in the 17th century to psychiatric disorder in the 19th century, from indigenous psychiatry (the wounded healer) of the mid-20th century to the neo-animism at the turn of the millennium, to conclude with the eco-spiritual environmentalist ideology of the indigenous revivals of the 21st century.

We are aware that, by using the notion of shamanism to interpret and describe religious configurations of Asia only, we are very close to that old cliché of northern Asia as the *locus classicus* of shamanism. It is not our intention to abide by that reductive definition. We choose to focus on Asia because of our own and our guest lecturers' field of expertise we invited, and we want to present the results from that class. Similar dynamics, we are certain, also appear in other contexts, and the reader will find in the following chapters several mentions of issues and dynamics pertaining to other areas of the world beyond Asia.

Integration and exclusion of religions into state bureaucracy

The first colonial expansion of Europe was driven by men and envisioned as a manly endeavour, whether these were military actions, economic expeditions or missionaries who went to Africa, South America or Asia. Among

others, missionaries were at the front exploring, converting and recruiting among the most different populations. The spiritual mission of the clergy paired well, and perfectly matched, with the "civilizational" aims of the colonial states. Gender concepts travelled along with those missionaries, and colonial communities were often centred on clear-cut assumptions regarding gender roles, in which wives were responsible "for sustaining exemplary families" (Grimshaw 2011, 9). Failing to do so was considered exposing the flank to heathenism, inviting sin or overtly witchcraft. Even if the boundaries could not be maintained as imagined in their concepts, gender division from Christian churches heavily impacted local communities. Many centuries before, Islam had equally had its expansionist period exporting, together with its main religious tenets, its gender concept to various regions in northern Africa and Asia. The Ottoman Empire was one of the colonial powers that along with its expansion introduced religious legal codes and shaped gender concepts (Zilfi 1997). Perhaps less militant, but equally gendered, was the expansion of Buddhism through networks of monastic institutions, traders and royal courts throughout Asia (Meinert 2016). Whether part of a colonial enterprise or slowly encroaching over diverse terrains, in these new locations, those religions joined hands with feudal or colonial regimes, becoming part and parcel of the establishment. We are certainly aware of the complexities involved in these processes and of the inherent tension between diverse, and diversified, agents acting into and through religio-political networks. For the purpose of this book, we define some religious networks as establishment and as hegemonic in a given context. By that we mean primarily normative across a range of social fields including, but not limited to, ethics, law and behaviour. Across the *longue durée*, the friction between diverse actors engendered transformative social processes. Of these processes, we will take into account the integration of local belief systems and practices into the wider framework of their own religious hierarchies and its entanglements with the sphere of gender. The fall of empires and the end of colonialism in the 20th century paved the way for the emergence of a paradigmatic secular agenda, either in its democratic, communist, post-colonial or neo-liberal versions.

While secularism indeed became the official credo for post-colonial nation states in Central Asia as much as for India or the Magreb countries, the importance of religion as an identity marker – often in opposition to the former colonial power – increased. The bureaucratic control of religion became an issue in probably all post-colonial states inheriting colonial structures. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide a concise overview to these different forms of bureaucratic processes. Suffice it to say that religion became a strategic domain for negotiating power. It comes as no surprise that, with few exceptions, male-dominated institutions were established along with the post-colonial regimes, sometimes after a short period of revolutionary gender liberation and religious freedom (Woollacott 2006; Northrop 2004). In many instances, we find examples of an oscillation

between the social fluidity of revolutionary movements during the agitation phase, followed by more conservative steps towards the stable forms of the pre-revolutionary times. A clear example of it is the role and participation of women in armed national liberation struggles, followed by a quick and sober return to the less threatening – for the establishment – role of the nurturing, caregiving mothers (Goldman 1993; Gilmartin 1995; Linhard 2005: Werner 2009)

It has been stated before that empires imposed their own gendered hierarchies. Angela Woollacott (2006) argued that women who revolted against slavery and exploitation in British India were submitted to the same hierarchy that the colonizers followed. Racialized notions of masculinity had developed from Victorian imperial culture, shaping the way women were situated within the colonies. Similarly, Ann Laura Stoler (2002) has analyzed the politics of "race and gender" in Dutch colonies that constantly redefined sexuality and hierarchies. Anti-colonial struggles, in contrast, were identified as liberating, albeit temporary, moments regarding gender orders. Anti-colonial movements, in fact, included women on such a scale that, according to Woollacott (2006) it becomes impossible to think about nationalism without its feminist component after the decline, and the demise, of the British Empire. A similar argument was developed by Gregory Massell (1974), arguing that at the eve of the Bolshevik revolution, women were accorded a key function for transforming the empire's outer borders into socialist republics (see also McClintock 1995; Northrop 2004). In the absence of a proletariat that would lead the revolution, women became the "surrogate proletariat" of Central Asia. The liberation of women from "harmful tradition" became an important step on the way to socialism (Bushkov and Mikul'skii 1996, 16; Polyakov 1992, 62; Northrop 2004, 60–61; Penkala-Gawęcka 2013, 2014, 2016).

In Soviet Central Asia, for example, the focus of state campaigns was mainly to gain control of if not to eradicate Islam altogether. Local religious identities were to be replaced by communist ideology and a pan-Soviet notion of citizenship. Women active as healers, shamans and fortunetellers somehow managed to remain under the radar and successfully maintained religious networks (Sultanova 2011). While gender issues in religion have been discussed primarily in relation to "save women" from domination (e.g., Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006), Muslim Central Asian women active as healers, shamans and fortunetellers were not directly included and targeted in these political campaigns. Instead, they were seen as victims of the old regime, of religious oppression and a male-dominated society.

This was slightly different in Siberia, where, beside Buddhist monks, shamans were also persecuted in the 1930s in order to "modernize" society and liberate at once peasants from exploitation, indigenous people from ignorance and women from oppression. The same situation unfolded, in the same years, in Mongolia, where cycles of persecutions hit individuals and classes considered counter-revolutionary (Buyandelger 2013, 74).

Shamans became a relic of the past and a class of exploiters of gullible villagers according to secularized social scientists and historians who deconstructed religious practices and interpreted them according to a strict evolutionary perspective, trying to identify their shamanic, pre-Islamic/pre-Buddhist and Islamic/Buddhist parts.

The development was different in India, where Hindus make up the majority of the population but where Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains have been legally recognized as religious minorities since 1992. While, according to some scholars, the processes of sanskritization entailed marginalization of several groups and oppression of women (Berreman 1993), popular cults centred on goddesses always had strong support, and, in addition, at the fringes of orthodoxy, there was space for experimentations with bodies and genders, for example in the cases of the possession rituals of the Khamakya temple in Assam, where male mediums impersonate female benevolent and wrathful deities (Burley 2019). Another example is the case of the religious practices of the *hijras* (intersex, transsexual people), who, being considered neither male nor female, can perform rituals for males and females as well and whose religion is centred around the cult of Bahuchara Mata, whose mythology revolves around a transgender sexual thematic. At the grassroots level, a plethora of religious practices flourishes in and around the intertwined dimensions of *shaktism*, possession and healing rituals (Wadley 1977). The same applies among many *adivasi* (indigenous) groups, where we find several cases of female religious specialists taking up the role of shamans, healers or both, as in the case, for example, of the Saora (Vitebsky 1993). Quite interestingly, coming back to fieldwork in the same villages after two decades, Vitebsky found a totally different situation, with the shamanesses marginalized at the expense of the double pressure exerted on them by Baptist missionaries and Hindu fundamentalists (Vitebsky 2017). Yet, despite more or less organized attempts at eradication or sanitization of religious practices of the subaltern (whether low caste, adivasi or outcaste) groups, in South Asia we find many expressions of at least some traits of these religious complexes, which, while certainly marginalized, still manage to adapt to changing historical and political contexts.

Similar processes, on a smaller scale but substantially similar, can be seen at work in Nepal, where a state-enforced politics of Hinduization was supported throughout the monarchy rule (1768–2008). When the kings of Gorkha expanded their dominions through military campaigns eastward and westward, subjugating and annexing rival kingdoms and tribal confederations, they imagined a Hindu kingdom subsumed under the tenets of the caste system. In the project of national unity envisioned by the Shah dynasty, Hinduism was one of the main ideological pillars sustaining the whole state apparatus. With Hinduism in a central and hegemonic position, all other religious expressions were somehow subordinated to it: while Buddhism and the indigenous (shamanic) religions were tolerated, proselytism and

conversion to Christianity and Islam were forbidden. Yet, even if marginalized, other religious expressions managed to survive, too, only to reemerge in more virulent forms at the end of the civil war (1996–2006) and in connection with the so-called ethnic revival of Nepal minorities. As in India, in Nepal too we find several religious expressions revolving around the figures of charismatic women involved in healing practices or in the worship through possession or incarnation of female deities, a phenomenon unsurprisingly on the rise, especially during the time of the civil war (Ghimire 2016). Equally relevant is the presence of female shamans among several Nepalese *adivasi* groups. In one brilliant essay, Anne de Sales highlights substantial changes affecting Kham Magar shamanism, especially in relation to the topic of female shamanism, with a new generation of shamanesses bending and accommodating the rituals to fit into the new needs deriving from contextual transformations (Sales 2015).

To date, and with limited exceptions related to Tibetan female religious specialists (Diemberger 2007; Schrempf 2015; Schrempf and Schneider 2015), the studies on Nepalese shamanisms have mostly eluded the issue of gender, and no in-depth study has been produced yet. With the revival of ethnic minorities, their previously marginalized indigenous shamanic traditions have gained momentum as elementary components of specific cultures. As such, indigenous shamans now take part in the political and social life of their communities not only as religious specialists but also as keepers and custodians of intangible heritage. It remains to be seen what kind of effects these processes will have on gender. It is already interesting, nonetheless, to see that, if previously marginalized, shamanic practices now have come under scrutiny by the government in the new democratic republican Nepal. In order to curb the feuds and killings related to witchcraft accusations steps are taken to ensure the arrest of those shamans who expose mainly women to the wrath and violence of their fellow villagers by identifying them as witches (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014).

A study by Anna Balikci (2008) demonstrates the slow process of orthodox Buddhist lamas gaining influence in a village in Sikkim. Buddhism and shamanism exist alongside each other, whereas the former slowly took over ritual practices without, however, completely replacing the shamanic worldview. Whereas gender is not discussed as driving force in this process, it was the Buddhist male lama who was linked to politics and integrated into India as legal religious authority in 1975. As Anne de Sales (2015, 85) suggests, the study of the "relationship that the great religions maintain with local religious practices constitutes a privileged area of research in anthropology for good reasons: it is indeed necessary to take into account historical, economic, sociological and political data in addition to religious considerations." For a long time, studies on Buddhism have remained focused on written sources for so long instead of paying attention to the practical adaptations and domestication processes in various parts of Asia. A substantial turn in this direction was fostered by the works of Gregory Schopen (1997, 2014)

and others (DeCaroli 2004; Ruegg 2008; etc.). The relations between Buddhism and vernacular religions were also already addressed, in the context of Southeast Asia, by Melford Spiro (1967) and Stanley J. Tambiah (1970) in deeply influential and ground-breaking works exploring the entanglements between literary traditions and popular practices (see subsequently).

In more northern areas, Buddhism spread through the originally shamanic, but by then multi-faith, empire of the Mongols starting from the 13th century, integrating shamanic elements as much as shamanism adapting to the new religion. Soon Buddhism came to hold political power over other belief systems, which were hierarchically submitted. When Mongolia turned into a socialist republic, monks were persecuted and eliminated, whereas shamans, lacking officially established structures, had a greater chance of survival by retreating from the public sphere. As in other parts of the Soviet Union, religious practices survived through women who conducted a limited range of rituals, which were more difficult to detect and attracted less political attention. Since the end of the Soviet intermezzo, Buddhism and especially shamanism have experienced a new revival fuelled by the interest of foreigners. If Vladimir Basilov (1970, 1996, 1997) and other Soviet scientists had still seen shamans as pathological phenomenon, in the new era they became post-Soviet resistance fighters who would reestablish the balance between society and their environments and making up for the collapsing medical system.

The secularism that we witness in many post-imperial and post-socialist nation states refers to a way of domesticizing religion through bureaucratic regimes and legal procedures. In these regimes, practitioners or shamans more specifically became the new "primitive" for the officially recognized religious authorities. We can speak of an act of mimicry in the sense of Homi Bhabha (2004): the imitation of colonial hierarchies with new actors. The shaman became the lowest in the echelon of religious hierarchies, at least in several of the cases discussed in this book. Gender theories have taught us that positions that enjoy respect and power tend to be occupied by men, whereas positions in which women dominate are less prestigious. This, we argue, also applies to religious pluralism in post-colonial nations in which different religious movements cohabit and interact. This has apparently led to a feminization of shamanism (and of various healing practices) in Soviet Central Asia and in recent years to a growing tension between the followers of these practices and the different religious and political authorities who support each other. As noted by various scholars, where the prestige associated with a given practice has declined, women have stepped in. Evidence for this is also shown in the reversal of this process: in Siberia, the revival of shamanic practices has gone along with the new age movement and hence attracted considerable prestige and power. Here men are pushing women out of the job, although they have been the primary actors and keepers of alternative healing practices and shamanic rituals, allowing them to survive the Soviet period. As it seems, the revival of shamanism in Mongolia is also

increasingly focusing on Tengrism, the cult of the Blue Sky, the mythology of the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan and a marked appreciation of manly warrior-like features. As such, it is closely linked with nationalistic ideologies and political parties. The relative presence or absence of shamanesses hence is an indicator of the political influence on religious hierarchies, power balance and imbalance among different religious actors and can be considered economic indices.

The picture becomes even more complex if we add the many reformist movements inside Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Reform movements in Islam (Ahl al-Hadith, salafi, etc.) have searched for its other in non-qur'anic practices and vehemently attacked shamanic practices. While those reform movements considered the shamans their non-religious *other*, a deeper analysis of the encounters between dominant religions and various popular religious specialists highlights that both develop in relation to one another. If in earlier times travelling religious authorities from Christianity, Islam or Buddhism adapted, modified and integrated various non-orthodox practices, today they hold political power to directly attack such practitioners. In contrast to Islam, Christianity and Buddhism and their universal claim and soteriology-oriented theology, shamanism was mainly pragmatic and apotropaic.

Islam came to Central Asia in the 8th century and was established quickly and with little military resistance of the local population. While the dominating Zoroastrian religion lost its infrastructure and priesthood, other practices that needed neither worship places nor were linked to political powers adapted and transformed over centuries. European travellers and expeditions reported shamanic (although they defined it in terms of demonolatry) practices occasionally from the Middle Ages onwards (e.g., Marco Polo, John de Piano Carpini, William of Rubruk), but most politically motivated adventurists of the 19th century were primarily interested in political structures and hence in dominant religious authorities.

What early Soviet approaches to shamanic practices in Central Asia have in common is that, first, they describe them with limited interest in gender issues and, second, that they are described as independent of Islam and hence do not consider shamans religious actors. Following approaches considering shamans a psychopathological problem (i.e., arctic hysteria), early researchers like Vladimir Basilov (1990, 3–5) encounter shamans in Central Asia in a similar way. Thus, before shamans were considered social actors, they were perceived as a threat to society and part of superstitious traditions.

The categorization of shamans as healers emphasized one of the many social roles shamans held within their respective communities. The acknowledgement of the social and medical roles of various practitioners in Central Asia came much later, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, through a careful analysis of mainly ethnographic-based research (Hoppál 1994; Diószegi and Hoppál 1996; Kleinmichel 2000; Krämer 2002; Hohmann 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Penkala-Gawęcka 2013, 2014, 2016; Sultanova 2011; Roche 2015).

The establishment of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) in 1943 invited orthodox Muslim scholars to call for a more purified form of Islam and condemned many local practices of worship (of holy places and saints) as not properly Islamic (Babajanov and Kamilov 2001; Babadjanov 2004). Benningsen and Wimbush even note that "the concept of women Sufis has been condemned specifically in a *fetwa* of the Muslim Spiritual Board of the North Caucasus" (Benningsen and Wimbush 1985, 68). Before the Russian Revolution, the authors assume, Sufi brotherhoods were limited to men alone. Despite similar practices, women in Sufi circles do not seem to be recognized in this literature as full members of Sufi brotherhood. Research on women's participation in Sufi brotherhoods remain to be studied in Central Asia. In later Soviet sources, religious authorities appeared as enemies to women's practices of healing. Despite this negative approach, scholars have long discussed selected practices in and outside Sufism as a form of "islamized shamanism". The term "islamized shamanism" was used to describe a wide array of prophetic and healing practices with regard to Islam (Basilov 1970, 1997; Sultanova 2011). Syncretic processes are dealt with in Sovietological studies just as in Buddhist studies, namely as the persistence of distinct pre-Islamic elements or "perezhitki" (survival of the past).

Razia Sultanova's (2011) monograph is the most complete study on the relationship between shamanism and Sufism regarding gender practices. She moves between notions of healing, art, music, worldview and religion and uncovers the solid social grounding and vulnerable public position of those practitioners in society as well as the large variation of practices. Women continued to practice healing rituals and fortunetelling in the shadow of male Sufis, independent of any Islamic authority or as part of life cycle rituals. Women never formed a category of religious personnel even where certain professions were dominated by them like *Mushkil kusho* or *Bibi seshanbe* in the Central Asian context (Krämer 2002). They existed at the margins of religious structure but at the centre of local communities, criticized for not conforming to orthodox Islam. What we call shamans were healers and religious specialists most popular among Turkic groups using a large variety of practices that most practitioners consider Islamic. While the Turks called the shaman *kam*, among Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and even among Persian-speaking Tajiks, they are known as *bakhshi, parikhon, folbin, tabib* or *kinachi* (and its dialectical variations). Whereas the bakhshi, folbin and parikhon is today said to use magic practices to curse or free a person from a curse and maintain direct contact with spirits like the *jinn*, the kinachi uses one specific practice (kina) to free the body from the bad eye that strikes the body and causes pain. Other scholars like Bruce Privratsky (2001, 227) doubt that shamans still exist in Kazakh society since islamization has made it impossible to identify pre-Islamic practices. Soviet classification of belief practices continues to impact academic writings. Since the turn of the century, ethnographic literature has included descriptions of spiritual healing

within the realm of "everyday Islam" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; Louw 2007; Privratsky 2001, 2004; Bellér-Hann 2004; Rasanayagam 2006). The notion of shamanism nowadays is hardly used by scholars, people or politicians to describe the many different practices. Instead, the presence of diversified practices has become an expression of the plurality of Islamic life in the region.

Instead of judging how real, archaic or modern the practices of shamans or healers are, we suggest using the term loosely and in order to capture the large variety of practices – which remains open to change and creativity – that lack any general terminological denomination (but often have an emic terminology forged by their opponents). We hence use shaman in this latter way in this book in order to compare similar phenomena and relationships without claiming any of the practitioners to be more or less "real shamans".

All Buddhist societies experienced coexistence, in different levels and degrees, of the *dharma* and shamanic practices. Though intrinsically diverse, shamanic practices seem to characterize religious experiences over a vast area stretching from the southern edge of the Himalayas up to Siberia, across the Tibetan plateau and the Mongolian steppe, while oracular and spirit-mediumistic practices seem diffused across Southeast Asia and Southern China. Korea and Japan complete the picture with the attested, and prominent, presence of female religious specialists.

Scholars often considered shamanism and Buddhism analytically as in a relationship based on complementarity and opposition (Dotson 2008). For a long time, methodological approaches to the study of Asian religions privileged written texts over popular practices. The first steps towards a general inclusion of the non-written aspects of religious life informed the scholarship of the already mentioned Spiro (1967), Tambiah (1970) and Carmen Blacker (1975), to name just a few scholars, engaging in the study of the trace-less practices of shamanic religious specialists. Notable exceptions were those scholars who decided to engage directly, and through fieldwork, with shamanic practices (Hamayon 1996; Humphrey and Onon 1996; Humphrey 1999) and whose research privileged the oral dimensions of rituals in areas where, as it happens, it was literacy that was marginal. In the context of Buddhist studies, the works of Gregory Schopen (1997, 2014) and Charles Ramble (2007) were also decisive.

A paper by David Gellner (1990), "What Is the Anthropology of Buddhism About?", criticizes the strong focus on textual and iconographic dimensions of Buddhism, whereas non-scriptural practices are only included more recently. A different dimension of Buddhism is presented in those new studies, as they include pre-Buddhist practices but fail to explain dynamics according to which they are positioned into hegemonic religions. The majority of the studies do not take a look at syncretic moments but limit themselves – similarly to scholarly approaches in Central Asia – to identifying pre-Buddhist elements or considering them merely expressions of the plurality of Buddhist practices.

In contrast, with few notable exceptions, studies on shamanism have failed to pay attention to the developments of religions that have been incorporated into state structures. In this context, definitions of the body are central, as they serve as the basis for political gender orders. However, various studies on shamanism have shown that on their journey, shamans may experience changes in gender and bodily features or have more flexible and even fluid notions of gender. The chapter by Davide Torri in this volume will discuss the bodily transgression of gender regimes in societies influenced by the strong interaction between shamanic practices and other normative ideologies.

In the 1970s, the people of Kavalan in Taiwan began to convert to Christianity, as Pi-chen Liu outlines in her chapter. This move went along with processes of integration into mainstream society, with advantages in educational attainments and access to the job market. People moved away and rejected local practices before becoming aware again of their heritage. Along with Christianity came biomedical beliefs and ideas of development and success that went counter to local practices. Only with the political change recognizing indigenous religions did the non-converted Kavalan reorder the different illnesses and carved out spaces of treatment for the converted part of their population. With this, the local shamans became recognized and able to treat again. Within the tension between Christian beliefs that preach against the worship of ancestors in Taiwan and local belief systems, shamans have currently negotiated their position anew. "This whole process from consulting to healing is actually the expression of a psychological struggle and atonement following conversion to Christianity" (see the chapter of Liu in this volume). With Christianity, changes in gender order were introduced as well.

The hierarchies among shamans (with or without costume, with or without drum etc.) seem to have been a response not only to gender divide but also to notions of power in relation to alternative religions such as Christianity. Roberte Hamayon in her chapter discusses the privileges that Christianity kept for men in Siberia, whereas shamanic exercises offered women a way to express themselves publicly (Hamayon, this volume). Whereas in Taiwan, Liu identifies the tensions that arise from conversion in fear about the power of ancestors, in Siberia, notions of pollution became influenced by Christianity. Along with this newly established Christian belief system went a change in the value of spirits among Siberian shamans that again affected the social order of gender and shamanism, as stated by Jacquemoud (this volume):

> It generally displays three worlds: the Upper world, with spirits considered benevolent (clanic deities as Ülgen or supreme divinities as Kudai, Üch-Kurbustan or Burkhan); the Lower world, ruled by the "harmful" divinity Erlik; the Middle world, where humans live together with a lot of different spirits (as "master of places" *eezi* or harmful wandering

souls of dead people *körmös*). This worldview is obviously affected by Christianity, as in the past no spirit was considered only positive or harmful.

It is true, in fact, that generally, the non-human agents with whom shamans engage are essentially ambiguous and ambivalent entities. Actually, the whole conceptual system could be defined as relational, and the actions of every actor in the system contribute to shaping the actions of the others.

On a more political level, Potapov (1991) observes that in the 1920s, when the Orthodox Church was increasingly put under pressure by Soviet authorities, shamanism enjoyed a brief flourishing period. While these studies have not exhausted the subject, they have opened the field for the study of complex interrelations between Christianity, state religious bureaucracy in different political periods, conversion and shamanistic practices.

What we define as shamanism, therefore, is often a religion without a name, defined neither internally (emically) nor externally (by the state or other authorities) of traditional societies nor defined by its opponents. In other cases, where such a definition existed it was suppressed or the voices of its followers simply silenced and erased. Shamanism out of this perspective becomes the non-religious other to bureaucratically integrated religions. With this use, we expand the term beyond its popular meaning and apply it to discuss a fundamental relationship, which shaped and still shapes the belief system of populations from Siberia to Southeast Asia. We are aware that using the term in this way may be contested and problematic. However, for the sake of comparing cases, we risk using the term without however reducing the many practices that we sum up under the label to a few markers. Our interest hereby is to understand the role of female practitioners, healers, fortunetellers, mediums, masters of spirits and so on in nation states that have integrated Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism into their bureaucratic regime and political orders. We focus on a selection of nation states in Asia, although the issue raised in this book is of course not limited to those countries. We hope that it will launch further studies into the subject beyond the limited scope of examples that we were able to include in this book.

Shamanism – as an analytical category

Until the 18th century, external Western observers looked at shamanism as demonolatry. This applies, for instance, to travellers, merchants and missionaries travelling through central Asia, such as Marco Polo, John de Piano Carpini and William of Rubruk, who reported how "some among them conjure demons whenever they want to know something".[2] Or the infamous argument of de Oviedo about tobacco-smokers as devil-worshippers in the "West Indies" (Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo 1851 [1535]). A slippery term across many academic disciplines, shamanism is also a historiographical

problem for the scholars of religion: since its first appearance it has been amply popularized, used and at times even misused.

A paradigmatic shift happened in the modern era, with the rise of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, when shamans became at once a genuine expression of the *bon sauvage*s or of the roguish charlatan exploiting the credulous folk, in both cases to be brought under the folder of the enlightened regime of the *raison*. In the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert (1765), we find shamans defined as "imposteurs, qui chez eux font les fonctions de prêtres, de jongleurs, de sorciers & de médecins".[3] It is also well known that shamans were an item of amusement for the court of Catherine the Great. In Siberia, deported scholars engaged with shamans out of scholarly interest, producing rich and relevant ethnographic materials (Znamenski 2007).

At the beginning of the 20th century, mental conditions of shamans became an object of psychopathological interest. Shamans were interesting psychiatric cases with mental diseases to be explained. A new paradigm emerged, linking long dark winters in the Arctic north to the visionary fits and spasms of the shamans with the affirmation of the idea of arctic hysteria, or *pibloktoq*, as documented from 1892.

New trends emerged after WWII with Claude Lévi-Strauss and his works on ritual efficacy (1949) and Mircea Eliade's (1951) comprehensive monograph, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, the first work to give a broad, and comparative, overview of shamanism in the early 1950s. From the 1960s onwards, shamanism has become a hotly debated topic in many ways. The rise of a generation of psychedelic ethnographers engaging with psychoactive substances has led to conflicts and exploitations within indigenous contexts. In the United States, indigenous movements strongly rejected the imposition of the term "shaman" itself upon their practices as a form of cultural appropriation, while in post-Soviet republics, a revival of several once-forbidden practices unfolded as a genuine revival movement and reconstruction of local identities. The climate change, and related processes, have brought indigenous movements to the forefront of the global stage in many respects, and shamanism is again gaining some currency in academic discourses. Uses, misuses and abuses of this concept in academic, new age or pop-culture circles ensure us that shamanism, as a discursive formation, is here to stay.

The scholarly history of shamanism demonstrates that much of its perception, rejection, critique and admiration derive from the pen of scholars; whether a pathological problem, a *bon sauvage* or mediator between humans and their non-human environment, shamanism is primarily a scholarly category. As such, it is not surprising that gender has been secondary to the analysis, as it was treated as a domain of research rather than an empirical question. In this book, we take this scholarly approach and focus on women as one aspect within this scholarship. The confusion between ethnographic observation and scholarly categories is discussed in Pi-chen Liu's chapter,

where she shows that scholarly produced classification determines the tolerance, elimination and re-emerging of shamans as cultural heritage. This can safely be applied to other cases in which the category "shaman" served more the purpose of scholarly interest than the description of empirical practices, such as during the Soviet period. We do not wish to reconcile concept and practice for the simple reason that the very term "shaman" remains a collective term for different practices and phenomena and hence a concept and abstraction. Rather our interest is to use the category to debate the role of shamaness in religious hierarchies.

Gender order in politico-religious hierarchies

Much of the analysis or interpretation of shamanism focused on the physiological or bodily aspects (somatic, body techniques, trance). In almost every work on shamanism, the body performance occupied centre stage. In colonial vocabulary, the shaman was often described in opposition to culture, reason, rationality and self-control (Taussig 1987). Strangely enough, this body has no gender in itself but is appearing just as a biomedical body.

The question of gender has been generally neglected in the study of shamanism. Whereas there were studies engaging with women shamans, male or genderless shamans seem to have been the norm in the academic literature. Among the most important studies on shamanesses, we find the works of Laurel Kendall (1988), Barbara Tedlock (2005 [2000]) and Ana Mariella Bacigalupo (2004, 2016). While these studies provided timely and concerned ethnographies with a particular attention to the roles and activities of female shamans, the question of gender in society and religious hierarchies was less in focus. Kendall's chapter in this volume is particularly relevant, as she gives the larger picture of how epistemologies conditioned the way empirical material was analyzed. Thanks to her incredible experience in this field, she reminds us that the structuralism that dominated ethnographic approaches in the second half of the 20th century predefined gender as oppositions and women at the marginal side of the spectrum. However, there are other ways to contextualize the shamaness if the social field of ritual – the theatre, as Victor Turner has termed it – is taken into consideration. It is exactly this that we invited the contributors to do in their chapters. The larger social, political and religious context necessarily turns the gender debate in shaman studies (and its many derivatives) into a more complex issue.

We suggest that within the gendered hierarchies of empires, shamans, we could say, came to represent and embody, to the eyes of the colonizer, the "irrational" or the psychologically ill. They were submitted within a racist and gender regime that the empires established along with the established religions that were brought, for instance, by the British Empire or Tsarist Empire (Woollacott 2006). While Iran is not a colonial empire, the revolution catapulted Islam into state structures. Women in this regime system are strictly monitored, as they are considered easily diverted from the religious

path. The *zār* ritual, which Maryam Abbasi describes in her chapter, has been a way to transform transgression of Islamic gender norms by women into ritual healing. The struggle to negotiate gender norms that many of the post-colonial states impose, often in tandem with powerful religious authorities, has been worked out carefully in Abbasi's chapter and with a focus on the Soviet take by Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka and Clément Jacquemoud.

The socialist empire, that is, the USSR, revived the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly that Catherine the Great had initiated in 1788 in order to domesticate Islam and submit it to the same institutional logic as Christianity. Its Soviet version, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was established in 1943 under Stalin's watchful eye. The SADUM trained, formed and controlled a selected and limited number of male authorities (Ro'i 2000). Women were not included in this institution. However, they were those who continued to keep religious practices alive in private homes and visited the shrines of holy people, called *mazar* (the majority men), almost without interruption throughout the Soviet period. Some of the rituals they kept practicing have been classified as shamanic by some authors (see subsequently).

Since independence, freedom of religion has developed to the disadvantage of women's religious practices in Tajikistan, whether these are visits to healers or shrines, but less so in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the search for an ethno-religious identity has promoted the invention of Tengrism and Manas-rituals, the latter a secret society reserved for men. Shamanism here has mushroomed as a healing practice. Not only has the medical system integrated various alternatives to biomedicine (Penkala-Gawęcka in this volume), but also, while searching for new spiritual orientations, people have invented and revived shamanic practices (Aitpaeva 2009). This opening to alternative practices has brought along a new discussion about gender.

Things are different in Siberia among the Buriats, who in pre-Soviet times did everything to hinder women to become shamanesses out of fear that they might divert the spirits to their husband's homes. Roberte Hamayon outlines in her chapter the relationship between shamanism, authority and modes of heritage. Under the Soviet regime, shamans, particularly male shamans, were persecuted and scientifically eradicated. As in Central Asia, women in Siberia were, however, able to continue a limited scope of practices outside state control, as the chapter of Clément Jacquemoud shows. The short window of liberalization in the 1990s provided women with the momentum to enter the scene, until men took over the lead again starting at the turn of the 21st century. The main challenge for gender in post-Soviet Russia comes less from the Orthodox Church than from the government, which has elevated the Orthodox Church to the main Russian religion. Religious hierarchies are well integrated into the current regime, promoting a clear-cut gender order, which does not tolerate any breaching of the "tradition", like transsexual behaviour or women acting as religious authorities.

Woollacott assumed that nation states would be feminized because of the strong influence of women in the decolonization process. This seemed true for a short period in Russia, which later turned into a "masculine nation state" and where religion and politics have reordered their relationship to the disadvantage of other belief systems. The mimicry of imperial and Soviet hierarchies has made the revival of shamanistic practices visible, discussed and open to power struggle. Wherever shamans could increase their influence in society, powerful positions seem to be appropriated by men. The gender of shamans seems to directly depend on the marginalization strategies and power hierarchy of nation states.

Book outline

The volume includes a selection of studies on female shamans in Asia. While shamanesses are by far not restricted to this region, we suggest that the number of chapters provides a good scope of variety. The goal was not to cover a region or the full topic but to raise questions on gender and religion in societies that have been known to scholars for their "shamanic tradition". The topic of gender prevails in most chapters, whereas the influence of religions that profit from state support and a bureaucratic structure are featured less. One reason may be that most studies are still micro-studies that look at shamanistic rituals and individual practitioners independently of larger social and political contexts. Questions of ritual practice, paraphernalia and descent are taken as the ethnographic core of the writings.

The chapters in this volume have been structured into three sections. The first section deals with conceptual debates that discuss the role of gender and religion in shamanic studies (Torri, Hamayon, Kendall, Riboli). The second section engages with the role of sociopolitical contexts that shape the way women participate or become marginalized or even excluded from ritual practices (Penkala-Gawęcka, Jacquemoud, Galina B. Sychenko, Sultanova). The third section contains a selection of chapters that focus on ethnographic examples in which the tensions and syncretic processes between shamanism and bureaucratically established religions come out (Roche, Abbasi, Liu, Merli). The frame of this tension is set by the politics of who defines the religious, the realm of health and medication, as well as the economic frame to exploit cultural practices. This order of chapters does not exclude the authors also making use of discussions that relate to other sections.

This volume differs from classic shamanism studies, as it contains a great deal of chapters from scholars with decades of experience in this field of academia. These scholars' critical reflection on studies in shamanism provides a key to understanding the importance of changing social and political contexts as well as the power of academic paradigms in shamanism research. Laurel Kendall, for instance, contextualizes structuralism that served to organize ethnographic knowledge into male-dominated spheres where women became the opposition to men, the inside dimension and the private

sphere while excluding history. This academic paradigm has overshadowed more subtle nuances that would include the household and women without having to conceptualize them as subaltern. Similarly, Diana Riboli reflects on her ethnographic education that pushed her to consider men the real shamans on the base of Mircea Eliade, who considered female shamans a "decadent" form of shamanism. He had shaped the view of shamanism as male-dominated world, contributing to a decade-long ignorance and downplaying of women's shamanistic activities. Upon a closer look, this bias, Riboli discovers, dissolves, opening the discussion for an interesting undefined gender space, in which women not only work as shamans but also adopt practices closely linked to men, such as the transformation of the body into a tiger.

This argument is picked up by Davide Torri, who draws attention to earlier descriptions that described the shaman as a "third sex". Just as the human world is gendered, the spiritual is as well, allowing for marital relations across worlds. Moments of crisis are crucial to the becoming of a shaman, and hence the social type of crisis defines whether women or men become shamans. Torri's tour de force provides a summary of descriptions of shamanesses around the world and the contexts in which they act. What they have in common is that shamanic bodies and persons are qualified to resist personal crisis, ancestors, illnesses and social changes, and, most importantly, they resist strict identification.

Another discussion that remains within a structuralist frame of analysis is the one of kinship and descent. In patriarchal kinship systems of hunter societies, men are responsible for hunting and hence men shamans play a crucial role in negotiating between the social group and the environment. This well-established claim about shamans is used as standard from which the Soviet period introduced changes. Roberte Hamayon connects this change with the influence of Russian colonialization and Christianity in the 19th century and even claims that women started to outnumber men as shamans. The role of Christian bureaucracy and a gendered Russian society forced communities to adapt to the new sociopolitical circumstances. Clément Jacquemoud observes that Christian belief moved into the world order of shamans by introducing lower, upper and middle worlds, as well as oppositions of good and bad which are applied to the spirits.

Communities in Russia order their cultural history along the (colonial) narrative, that is, Russia's history, to identify breaks, suppression and revival of tradition. Thus, the Soviet period is seen as a period of suppression followed by cultural revivals since the 1990s. This historical periodization as the main order to analyze shamanism in local communities can be found in the chapter of Galina B. Sychenko, for instance. Accepting the frame of analysis that Soviet ethnography provides, she discovers that against the expectation of communist politicians, shamanism did not disappear but reconstituted, to the degree that kinship rules that predefined how the ability to shamanize was inherited changed. In her chapter, she demonstrates what Hamayon has

theoretically outlined, namely the highly flexible system that has made shamanistic practices able to adapt to any sociopolitical change that happened in Russia by changing ritual practices, kinship rules of inheriting the right to shamanize and even gender rules. The result is an increase in female shamans during the Soviet period as the status of shamans decreased and an increase in male shamans since the end of the Soviet period that goes along with an increase of the status of shamans in society and in tourism (see chapters by Jacquemoud and Merli).

As described previously, the Soviet period is considered in different scholarly approaches as the century of women, whether these are (socialist) liberation narratives, the taking over of otherwise male ritual practices (religious tradition within the safe home) or in educational attainments (entering public spaces as professionals). The chapter of Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka provides an in-depth view of these discussions of women's cultural practices in Central Asia under Soviet dominance. Consequently, the post-Soviet period appears as a contested period, in which religious specialists push women out of their position, usually declaring their practices as not in line with religion, such as the example of the qalandar khona women described by Sophie Roche or in movements such as Burkhanism in which women are given lower positions as Jacquemoud describes (women mediums become "indigenous missionaries"). Also, in Kyrgyzstan, only some of the healing rituals are maintained by women, whereas the invention of Manas-rituals and secret societies are exclusively reserved to men.

The chapter by Laetitia Merli gives a detailed insight into the way women navigate the marketplace of shamanism in Mongolia. It demonstrates the enormous adaptability of practices and positions that allow women to install themselves in a period in which men re-appropriate religious practices in post-Soviet societies.

Maryam Abbasi takes the reader into the world of *zār* in Iran. Her ethnographic work looks at the *zār* as a space of transforming dissent behaviour into a power position. Women engage in the *zār* to justify choices in life that are opposed to the gender norms in society.

The chapter by Liu outlines the way Christianity has influenced the treatment of illnesses and sprits in Sinshe, Eastern Taiwan. She suggests that illness is a way to seek different forms of spirituality and overcome theological oppositions or exclusions. Such syncretic processes are crucial to the way religions are established in contexts in which various belief systems exist. The ethnographic example focuses on the way illness becomes the core for syncretism.

This volume will concentrate on female shamans not only because they have been substantially overlooked for so long in theoretical debates (less so in ethnographic methodology) but also because of the centrality of gender in the making of nation states and the bureaucratizing of religions. Lewis's (1971) famous proposition claims that the power of female shamans or

ecstatic/possessed specialists within their family or community compensates for women's peripheral social status. Women become shamans only where state bureaucracy and doctrinal religions have discredited shamanic practice from the central position it had before the advent of the modern state and its ideological systems, with religion as part of it. This sociological observation is worth a closer look with regard to the role of systems that developed under colonial or state settings, such as priesthood and medical systems. However, as the chapters demonstrate, to classify women healers or shamanesses as marginal per se ignores the complexity of society and gender negotiations in post-colonial or post-socialist states. Instead of discussing shamanic practices in their typologies and specific features, we are interested in the relationships and dynamics that have driven women to take up or resign from performing rituals of healing and fortunetelling in selected countries of Asia. As we will see, we need a more fine-tuned debate in order to capture these processes and relationships, which often do not fit into clear oppositions or categories.

Notes

1 Casanova (1994) suggests reviewing the idea that nation states are secular in essence; rather, they domesticate religion (compare Asad 1993).
2 "Aliqui etiam ex eis invocant demones, et convocant illos qui volunt habere responsa a demone de nocte ad domum suam, et carnem coctam ponum in medio domus. Et ill chan qui invocat incipit dicere carmina sua, et habens timpanum percutit illud fortiter ad terra." (Michel and Wright 1839, 171)
3 "Schamans, s. m. pl. (hist. mod.): c'est le nom que les habitans de Sibérie donnent à des imposteurs, qui chez eux font les fonctions de prêtres, de jongleurs, de sorciers & de médecins. Ces schamans prétendent avoir du crédit sur le diable, qu'ils consultent pour savoir l'avenir, pour la guérison des maladies, & pour faire des tours qui paroissent surnaturels à un peuple ignorant & superstitieu." (Diderot et al. 1751–1765, 759)

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2 The shamaness' new clothes
On the qualities of resisting bodies

Davide Torri

Introduction (with a preamble)

An ethnographic vignette as a preamble: a shaman(ess) is not contained by her body (Mongolia, March 21, 2019).

Somewhere in the steppe, we were gathering wood for the fire. "When the elders will arrive, you'll have to knee in front of the shaman – said J. – to pay homage to them. They are travelling from the sky, from very far. Be ready to sing, too, since if the grandmother arrives, she will ask you to sing a song for her". In the end, the grandmother did not arrive. But grandfather did, a warrior-shaman of the 12th century, who loves to smoke tobacco in a long pipe. He was roaring, and brandishing a sword, while administering advice to the people or drumming a fierce rhythm on the war-drum" (Ethnographic vignette, from my field notes. Mongolia 2019).

When the elders come, they settle into the body of the shaman, displacing his consciousness. This simple fact, as reported, highlights the fact that shamanic bodies have peculiar qualities. To begin with, they can host multiple persons. These persons can be human and non-human, male or female. The anatomical gender of the body is not relevant, not anymore. Being a shaman is grounded in the body, to the extent that some scholars see it as a body technique following Marcel Mauss (1936), but shamanism itself can be considered the opening and the multiplication of that very body in ways unimagined, towards the construction of a super-person, or an extended person. The shaman(ess) has a multi-body: the process of ritual dressing represents exactly the creation, the construction or the assembling of a multiplicity of bodies weaved into one. Feathers, leaves, branches, coloured ribbons, metal and stone, teeth and claws all concur with the conjuring of this multi-body, the one the shaman wears and fuses onto his or her own during the ritual. The creation of a multiple, amplified body mirrors the possibility, or the presence, of a multiplied consciousness, which, in my opinion, corresponds to the concept of *complex locutor* employed by Carlo Severi (2007). During the rituals, it is not uncommon to see the audience trying to decipher voices, noises and gestures of the shaman in order to ascertain what is going on: Who is speaking now? An ancestor? A deity? A demon? A ghost? A tiger? A boar? If the shaman(ess)

escapes narrow identification during the ritual, it is exactly because the body enables the co-presence not only of the *other* but of a multiplicity of actors. This multiplicity has important repercussions on the topic of gender. While shamans have genders in their daily life, during rituals, they show a fluidity overcoming gender boundaries. Overcoming boundaries can be defined as the shamanic activity *par excellance*. No wonder, then, that also gender is involved. In this chapter, I will take into account some example from diverse ethnographies in order to highlight not only this process of overcoming gender boundaries but also some examples of contesting them, taking the body as a point of departure.

Shamanism and the third gender

It is certainly not a mystery that a great part of ethnographic or more generally academic literature dealing with shamanism focused mainly on its male declinations. Reasons for it were surely derived from the simple historical fact that the first explorers, merchants, missionaries and ethnographers describing it were preponderantly, if not exclusively, males, and they probably had better access to male shamans. But there were also, and equally obviously, ideological reasons: the Mircea Eliade's archetype of the celestial or heavenly shaman-hero (Eliade 1951) is markedly a male-incarnated ideal. The palaeolithic shaman-hunter of the mega-fauna is also envisioned "naturally" as a male, despite long-dismissed evidence that seems to consistently prove the contrary. It is only with the 20th century that the role of gender in studies of shamanism starts to be taken into account, initially with the first generations of women anthropologists engaging with contexts that were elusive, hidden or even invisible to their male counterparts and then, as the century progressed, with the rise of feminist and gender studies inside and outside the discipline of anthropology. Gendered shamanism was there all the time, with its critical aspects, but it took some time before it started to emerge with full force into the discourse.

A first step in this direction was taken by Maria A. Czaplicka, who, already in 1914, devoted a full chapter of her work *Aboriginal Siberia. A Study in Social Anthropology* to the relations between shamanism and sex. Drawing from her predecessors on the field (Krasheninnikov 1755; Bogoras 1907; Jochelson 1900 and others), she highlights the fact that while diverse groups and societies across Siberia have diverse and specific names for the male shaman, the words indicating the female one seem to stem from a common root, thus possibly denoting a common, and hence older, origin. Then, despite following Jochelson's assumption that shamanism probably developed as a family religion, she acknowledges the role of women in it, but in the end she dismisses any theory about a presumed evolution of male shamanism from female one, stating that there is simply not enough evidence to support such a claim:

> there are visible traces that family shamanism preceded the individual, or professional, kind; and although woman plays an important role in

> both, there is no sufficient reason to suppose that in former times she alone could shamanize.
>
> (Czaplicka 1914, 25–26)

While she challenges many of the statements of the previous ethnographers who proposed this theory, she nonetheless manages also to compound a detailed and gendered image of Siberian shamanism in the times between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century which is extremely relevant to our present discussion. Could it be that several of these ethnographers were also ideological in their statements? As we know, in fact, the majority of them came to Siberia at first as political prisoners sent into exile, having been involved in socialist and anarchist revolutionary activities and conspiracy against the Czarist state. As such, they were probably also imbued, or at least familiar, with anti-hegemonic, non-hierarchical ideas which also included strong views against the patriarchal system. As a matter of fact, even if the statements about a pristine female shamanism were unsupported by evidence,[1] what all these ethnographers witnessed was equally important: at the time they observed the phenomenon, women shamans were extremely relevant in almost every Siberian society, and in many cases they were considered superior to their male counterparts. Czaplicka's work, which can be considered a pre-fieldwork compilation of earlier sources since she managed to visit Siberia only after its publication in 1914, reflected the main tenets and ideas, together with the limitations, of her times (Kubica-Heller 2014). Quite interestingly, she writes, among some groups, the Kamchadal for example, women and men dressed as women (called *koekchuch*) are believed to have the power to explain dreams, and "every old woman could shamanize" (Czaplicka 1914, 171). It seems also, she writes, that among the Chukchee, women can shamanize in young age or when they are old, while when they bear children their powers are limited (Czaplicka 1914, 245; Bogoras 1907, 413).

Czaplicka devotes particular attention to the shamanic so-called change of sex, which she prefers to define, following James G. Frazer (1907), 'change of dress' since it does not affect the individual physiology (Czaplicka 1914, 248). Nonetheless, as documented by Bogoras among the Chukchee, a shaman belonging to this class is sometimes called 'soft-man-being' (Bogoras 1907, 451). After being chosen by the spirits, a 'soft-man' started to dress and behave like a person of the opposite sex and sometimes got married to another man, although this was not always necessary, since it was believed that he had a spirit-husband from the *kele* world (Czaplicka 1914, 249–250; Bogoras 1907, 451–452). The opposite cases were also documented: Bogoras once met an old widowed woman who was a transformed shamaness, dressing like a man and hunting with the rifle, married with a young girl (Bogoras 1907, 455). After reviewing several cases, Czaplicka concludes that:

> Socially, the shaman does not belong to the class of males or to the class of females, but to a third class, that of shamans. Sexually, he may be

> sexless, or ascetic, or have inclinations of homosexualistic characters, but he may also be quite normal. And so, forming a special class, shamans have special taboos comprising both male and female characters. The same may be said of their costumes, which combines features peculiar to the dress of both sexes.
>
> (Czaplicka 1914, 253)

The attribution of a 'third sex' to shamans was surely an important point, among those raised by Czaplicka, and it did not go unnoticed among scholars of her time, starting with Robert R. Marett in his introduction to her work (Marett 1914, vii). For us, it testifies to one of the first examples of the acknowledgment of that fluidity of boundaries characterizing shamanic praxis and theories of personhood and the importance of gender issues in shamanic complexes (see also Saladin d'Anglure 2012). A remarkable case was analysed by Ana Mariella Bacigalupo (2004) among the Chilean Mapuche. Following the death of a patient after drinking a herbal remedy, the *machi* Marta was arrested and prosecuted. What caused a clamour, more than the death of the patient, was the fact that *machi* Marta was in fact a man, whose image was then reframed in the media as a "homosexual transvestite man, a criminal, and a witch" (Bacigalupo 2004, 441). Her process of transgendering happened at the time of her possession at the ends of her female *machi* ancestor Flora and was confirmed by the Virgin Mary in a vision blending Mapuche indigenous beliefs and Catholic motives. While many male *machi* take up female traits and dress as women during rituals, in daily life, they enhance their masculinity to conform to general assumptions about gender and to "dispel homophobic national images of male machi as effeminate homosexuals" (Bacigalupo 2004, 443). Yet, in her community, her change of sex, despite being discussed and at times frowned upon, was largely accepted due to her ritual role, to the point that, as Bacigalupo reports, she had been *more uxorio* in three relationships with men who "participated in her gender fiction, read her gender as that of a heterosexual woman, and legitimated her gender as wife and mother" (Bacigalupo 2004, 446). On the one hand, her gender is a matter of individual choice and imposition at the hand of ancestors, and it rests on ritual performances as well as everyday life. On the other, it is negotiated on a multiplicity of levels, with her partners, clients, neighbourhood community and public opinion at large, as testified during the hardships of her trial and time in prison. The "change of dress" envisioned by Czaplicka (1914, 248) goes beyond the idea of a simple performance, but it shows an inherent tension or even conflict with the physical body. As remembered by Judith Butler, gender is not a role, but an act (Butler 1988, 528). In the construction of her identity, *machi* Marta does not want to challenge Catholicism, patriarchy and macho chauvinism in Peruvian culture, but she is simply acting to try to give voice to her inner self (Bacigalupo 2004, 451). A shaman is always a conflictual figure. Despite all the suffering, *machi* Marta, in her own narrative, has to follow the urge to be a woman, imposed on her by her feminine spiritual helpers.

Bodies speak, often in rebellion

While bodies are inherently gendered, possession and trance dynamics contribute to enlarge the possibilities of being, challenging even the fundamental notion of a personal identity. In his book on ecstatic religions, Ioan M. Lewis proposes a famous social theory of possession as a strategic move to cope with societal, structural inequalities (Lewis 1971). What he defines as *peripheral possession* (Lewis 2003, 27) is, in fact, an oblique attack to the establishment, expressed through ways shielding the protestor from immediate retaliation. While possessed or in trance, people with a socially inferior status have access to a temporary power, enabling them to express their grievances *through* the rather impersonal, or disincarnate, voices of the spirits, the dead, the deities and so on, as in the example of the *zar* cult of Somaliland. In the context of *zar* (see also Abbasi, in this volume), we can certainly see the value of possession-related praxis as counter-hegemonic, in reference to a male-dominated, and male-oriented, Islamic context, but it should also be noted that, from region to region, the dynamics at work may be slightly different, as in the case of Sudan (see also Boddy 1989). In assessing both Lewis and Janice Boddy as if variations on a theme, Bourguignon aptly points out that:

> Specifically, we are told that for the Somali woman possession is diagnosed by a woman medium and requires exorcism. In the Sudan, a woman is initiated into a group under a female leader, and establishes a permanent relationship with the zar, and with the group. Rather than exorcism, there is accommodation, alliance and, on specific occasions, embodiment of the spirit and identification with it.
>
> (Bourguignon 2004, 562)

How to interpret, then, the occurrence of possession among the newly wed Buddhist brides in Sri Lanka? Lewis (2003, xiii) is perhaps right in denouncing as unconvincing Bruce Kapferer's statement regarding the culturally determined proximity of women with the demonic forces (Kapferer 1991), whereas a more plausible explanation would be to acknowledge the personal crisis befalling the brides as they move from their home to their husband's house. The notion of *crisis* is especially relevant here, and it is not related to the religious field itself but to the structural violence inducing a stress of sort on women. This stress manifests itself as a disruptive crisis, with many symptoms cross-culturally associated with possession: in analysing the behavioural pattern of *tarantism* (de Martino 1961), a syndrome affecting peasant women of a particular rural region of southern Italy, Ernesto de Martino introduces the idea of a condition induced by suffering, or by the so-called *crisis of presence* (De Martino 1948). Despite sharing the same hard life of men working in the fields, during the summer months women were apparently more prone to the bites of a mythical spider, the

taranta. After the bite, they were possessed by an external agency, conceived like the spider's poison inside their bodies (but also linked to Saint Paul), forcing them to behave strangely and to dance to exhaustion during musical exorcisms. The body shaken in possession rituals is a critical body, challenging hegemonic discourses and practices. In the case of tarantism, the crisis is cyclical, calendrical: it has only a temporary solution. As in the case of the *zar* cult in Sudan, in general, the crisis was released only by a drastic change of the social conditions granting more freedom, and awareness, to women (Boddy 2013; Pizza 2015). To paraphrase Doris Bargen's (1986, 1997) skilful analysis of the theme of possession in pre-modern Japan, during the Heian period, in the pages of the *Genji monogatari* spirit-possession is a women's weapon of choice to comply with a "gender-bound imbalance of power" (Bargen 1997, 55). It is not by chance that the practice of exorcism, in pre-modern Japan as elsewhere, was primarily a state-supported male occupation, to restrain the riotous bodies and re-align potentially disruptive behaviours of the possessed (Baker 2014).

The same concerns are perhaps expressed by collective village exorcisms performed by Tamang lamas in Nepal in order to expel from the community the undesired antisocial spirits as sources "of the inherent incompleteness of exchange, cannibalistic greed and unrestrained eros" (Holmberg 2000, 934). Established religions, as it seems, sometimes leave a safe niche for possession-related practices and specialists, in an effort to incorporate and institutionalize them and, again, restrain potential excesses. It is also worth noting that, recursively, those safe niches are then targeted every time a reformist movement appears.

The notion of crisis, as mentioned before, is an extremely interesting point, since many biographies or life-stories of shamans and shamanesses begin with a traumatic stage, often known in literature as the "initiatic illness". This illness is considered of a spiritual nature, and it is equated with a call from the ancestors, or the spirits, to become a shaman. The illness is inherently disruptive and dangerous: in many instances, my informants have repeated that to become a shaman is not a gift in the proper sense but an irresistible call that, if not fulfilled, can lead to madness and death. Characterized by physical symptoms and psychological disorders, the initiatory illness precedes intense exchanges with the spirit world, with a climax during the proper initiation. Relationship with the spirit-world encompasses a wide range of situations, including love and sex. The *nat* cult[2] in Myanmar, for example, entails marriages between shamans of both sexes with *nat* wives and husbands, and the term indicating a shaman, *nat kadaw*, literally means "*nat*'s wife" (Spiro 1996, 211–217). The call to become a medium is thus described as a process of seduction (see also Brac de la Perrière 2009, 285). The notion of marriage between a human being and a non-human one is found also among the Karo of Sumatra: Karo shamanism is exclusively female, and every shamaness entertains with a spirit a relation envisioned and formalized as a marriage (Steedly 1989, 140–142). The same topic

is recurrent also in Japan, where a particular class of spirit-mediums, the blind ones called *ogamisama*, are ritually married with a *kami* spirit at the moment of their initiation (Kawamura 2003). A similar pattern is present among the Saora of India, where shamanic powers derive from a wedding with a spirit of the underworld and the creation of a parallel family, the birth of spirit sons and daughters and regular domestic duties (Vitebsky 1993, 19–20). This double life is possible through the alternation of sleep and waking life that do not overlap: each world is the mirror image of the other, so when it is daytime in one, it is night in the other, and the other way around. The process of marrying into the underworld, which is experienced since childhood as a series of dream-travels to the spirit homes, is a frightening one at the onset, but it becomes less and less scary as time goes by. *En passant*, it is worth mentioning that Roberte Hamayon also highlights the role of this kind of marital relation in her research on Siberian shamanism: the logic sustaining hunting practices, she says, is grounded on exchange patterns deriving from an alliance, in the form of a marriage between the (male) shaman and the daughter or sister of the spirit master of the game (Hamayon 1996, 79).

Like in every wedding, acquiring kin and becoming in-laws involve transition through critical phases. In Korean shamanism, the initiatory illness is called *sinbyŏng* (lit. spirit-sickness). Youngsoon Kim Harvey, in relating the different life-stories of Korean *mudang* or *mansin*, underlines a common thread possibly connecting the six cases constituting the material of her book: a correlation between the spirit-sickness and family tension (Harvey 1979). Harvey describes the resolution of the *sinbyŏng* event/crisis as a way out of the impasse created by individual expectations and the oppressive domestic role in which they were trapped (Harvey 1979, 235–240). Through the call, and the initiation into the shamanic profession, the *mudang* reconfigures power relations inside her family circle, altering and rearranging domestic hierarchies (Walraven 1983, 260–261). A similar situation is described by Mayfair Yang, who in 2012 interviewed a shamaness in Wenzhou (China): Cao Jinling, now a mature woman, described herself as suffering from various ailments since she was a teenager. Due to her condition, her husband often quarrelled with her, until a wondrous event happened: after relocating to a new town to establish an economic activity, she was suddenly seized by the goddess Mother Chen and other deities of her retinue; pretty soon, her fame spread in the town and countryside, and she became very popular, albeit still with reluctance, with people in need of advice, asking for a son or for healing (Yang 2015, 63–65).

While the link between subordination and suffering and possession or relations with the spirit world as a "psychodynamic response to powerlessness" (Bourguignon 2004, 557) has been fruitfully explored by many scholars, others have significantly moved away from a purely sociopsychological approach. Mary Keller, for example, sought to integrate diverse strands of theoretical approaches with emic views, paving the way for an appreciation

of the possessed body as a significant node combining "bodily, social and cosmological experience" (Keller 2002, 67), while assessing, for example, events of mass possession that took place in Malaysian free-trade zones: throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Malay female workforce disrupted production on several occasions, requiring the management to invite *bomoh* exorcists to expel the spirits involved (Ong 1987).

A similar wave of epidemic mass possession of workforce took place in Cambodia in the years following the 2010 strikes to ask for better salaries in the garment factories. Following the failure of the movement, *neak ta* spirits of the places started to take possession of the bodies of female workers, shutting down production in the factories of the free trade zone (Wallace 2014). In these cases, the body of the exploited female worker, shifting from rural village economy to industrial work, and from the patriarchal moral order of the traditional household to the relative freedom and promiscuity of the factory, became the point of conjunction of multiple forces, diverse epistemologies and conflicting ontologies. A mirror image of this process perhaps resonates with the story of the Buryat shamaness Basaan (Buyandelger 2013). Basaan, struggling after a series of tragic events and difficult circumstances, finally became a shaman in crisis-stricken post-Communist Mongolia in transition towards a neoliberal market economy, where "with the dissolution of the state farm, a relatively gender-equal employment system also ended, production shifted from the state to the domestic sphere" (Buyandelger 2013, 192), with obvious repercussions on the status of women.

Contesting gender roles while healing the sick or bringing the dead back to life

Sometimes to be a shaman can lead to contestation of gender roles. The semi-autobiography or life story of Chona, the daughter of a Tohono O'odham[3] chief of Arizona (United States), gives one interesting example in this sense. Her story was recorded and then published by Ruth M. Underhill (1936). In her family, she reports, her brother was destined to become a shaman/medicine man. Everybody knew this since an early age, because he would suddenly fall into a state of unconsciousness. On those occasions, an old shaman used to say to leave him alone, since he was learning (Underhill 1936, 21). This is consistent with other examples from shamanic complexes, where knowledge is imparted by the ancestors and other non-human beings through dreams and visions. Chona's brother emerged from those events with the knowledge of secret chants allowing him to get in touch with non-human entities and to heal the others. Among the Tohono O'odham, shamanic knowledge is also linked to the presence of some crystals: shamans know about their whereabouts in dreams, and they go and collect them. Then they "swallow them and keep them safe in their hearts" (Underhill 1936, 21). But some shamans have a special quality: these crystals naturally grow inside their bodies, and these shamans are considered particularly powerful. Unknown to her family,

even Chona was experiencing encounters with the non-human entities of the desert: on many occasions, she heard animals speak, and a coyote often came to teach her songs in her dreams. Seeing her unusual behaviour and the frequency of her bouts of illness, her parents consulted a shaman, who told them there was a chance she would become a shaman. Unnerved by the possibility, the parents asked him to do something to prevent this, if possible, and he decided to extract the self-growing crystals from her body:

> So the medicine man said he would take out my crystals. He leaned over me and sucked them out of my breast, one by one. They were as long as the joint of my little finger, white and moving a little. He said: "Look, I have taken them out before they got big." Then he made a hole in a giant cactus and put them inside. Then he looked at me and said: "They will grow again, for it is a gift".
>
> (Underhill 1936, 26)

She grew up, and she married into a shaman's family, leading a normal life, except for the fact that she lost several children. Then, one day, she found a crystal in the desert and started meeting coyote in her dreams again. Shortly after, her husband took another wife. Following this event, she left him and went back to her brother's house, where, after some time, she was given as wife to an old but relatively rich widowed man. During an epidemic, she had an extraordinary dream, where she met a dead female relative and the Virgin Mary[4] (whom she knew from a visit to a church in Tucson), and they taught her how to heal sick children (Underhill 1936, 59). Shortly after the death of her brother, she started curing other forms of illness, too, but with limitations given by the fact that her crystals were taken away from her (Underhill 1936, 62). As underlined by Underhill (1936, 6), the whole life of Chona was embedded in a shamanic milieu: her grandfather, brother, first husband and his brothers and her son were shamans. Her second husband was a sacred clown and singer. Despite being excluded as a woman from the direct exercise of shamanism, she had a deep insight into it. An insight, in her narrative, not only from living in proximity with ritual specialists but also due to her inner predispositions, which in turn sparked dreams and visions and the creation of power-songs, despite the direct removal of the source of power from her body. While not arguing directly against the male-oriented patterns of behaviour in relation to gender roles in her society, she was nonetheless capable, through a shamanic trope, to circumvent it and to pursue her own will and desire despite external pressures. Despite obvious differences, the life of Chona resonates with that of the Korean shamaness called Yongsu's Mother, recorded by Laurel Kendall (1988). In her account, at the same time very "personal and nearly archetypical" (Kendall 1988, 69), we find the depiction of a witty woman who, being born at an inauspicious time (Kendall 1987, 95), survives extreme poverty and deprivation. In addition to the dangers and abuses of the Korean War (1950–1953), she is also exposed to the misbehaviours of, in

order of apparition, her father, her lover and her husband. Caught between opposing armies during the battle for Seoul (1950), amidst indiscriminate killings of civilians on both sides, she managed to escape the war-torn areas after meeting in her dream a white-haired elder, who was revealed to be *Sansin*, the Mountain God, who instructed her to wake up and leave at once (Kendall 1988, 57). Having survived the war, Yongsu's Mother experienced a debilitating illness for which shamanic rituals, or *kut* as they are known in Korean, were held. During these rituals, she often was so weak that she kept falling asleep and meeting an old couple of ancestors who gave her healing water to drink. Those dreams were, according to the officiating *mansin*, the sign that she was to become the spiritual daughter of a shaman in order to become a shaman herself. But her mother refused (Kendall 1988, 73). Only after becoming a single mother and then marrying a widower and becoming a widow herself was she finally free to embrace the long-anticipated path to become a shaman (Kendall 1988, 85–98).

Illness, weirdness, bad luck or even catastrophic events seem to be the norm in the autobiographies of both male and female shamans in many cultures. The lack of a difficult life seems to be alien to the idea of shamanism itself. As reported by Knud Rasmussen, an Inuit lady who was very well versed in shamanic lore despite not being a shamaness herself once explained that she was never sick nor having dreams, and because of that, she could not be a shaman (Rasmussen 1927). In the case of Korea, there is a mythical antecedent working almost as a blueprint to the hard lives and sufferings of the *mansin*: it is the story of Paritegi, or Pari Kongju, the Abandoned Princess, of which several versions[5] exist. The story of the Abandoned Princess can be summarized as follows: Having broken a taboo, a royal couple cannot have a male offspring. Already having six daughters, when the seventh-born also turns out to be a female, they decide to abandon her. Later in life, sick and in danger of losing their lives, they hear that they can only be saved by a potion and herbs to be found in the underworld. All of their daughters find excuses not to embark on the perilous journey to save their parents, except Pari Kongju, who, disguised as a male, travels into the underworld realms and after many adventures finds the healing potion and herbal remedies required. When she arrives, she discovers that her parents are dead and that the funeral ritual is underway, but with her knowledge and the potion, she manages to revive her royal parents. The story of Pari Kongju strikes more than a chord when sung in shamanic ceremonies. As an example of filial piety (Kendall 1987, 154), the princess seems to conform to the ideal of Confucianism prescribing a devotional ethos towards one's own parents, but there is obviously more than that. It is in fact also an out-loud critique of the sufferings that women have to suffer from their parents, who were hoping to have male offspring or from a society privileging males over females. It is a statement that women can be and actually are equal to men, if not better: after all, dressing like a man, Pari Kongju is able to penetrate the underworld and complete the most classic of quests, the one that in Greek

mythology is the prototypical feat of the invariably male heroes. In addition, the Pari Kongju narrative stands as a model of individual development and independent choices, no matter the apparently insurmountable difficulties ahead.

Another remarkable literary, but still plausible, example of the journey to the underworld is to be found in the story of the Nišan Shamaness, a Manchu folk epic, of which exists a manuscript tradition (Nowak and Durrant 1977). As the story goes, at the time of the Ming dynasty, there was an official named Baldu Bayan who lost two sons in similar circumstances: while hunting when they were fifteen years old. The second time, crushed in despair by what looked like a curse, the father was advised by an old man to seek the help of a shamaness named Teteke, a young widow living with her mother-in-law who was possibly able to bring back the dead from the afterlife. Teteke, with some reluctance, embarked on the journey. The narrative contains several motifs already known to scholars of mythology: she crossed the river separating the world of the living from the one of the dead, the realm of Ilmun Han. She crosses another river called the red river standing on her drum. She reaches the house of Monggoldai Nakcu, a hellish guardian who has seized the soul of the boy. He tells her that the boy is now in the retinue of Ilmun Han. The king of the underworld adopted him due to his martial prowess and marksmanship. The shamaness sends her helping spirits to fetch him and then tries to sneak out of the underworld, pursued by Monggoldai Nakcu at the order of a furious Ilmun Han. After a lengthy negotiation, the underworld lords accept the dog and rooster accompanying the shamaness as compensation. Up to this point, the text describes a conventional or at least expected shamanic journey, with details on the ritual setting, offerings and costume of the shamaness. Then it takes an unexpected turn when the shamaness meets her dead husband boiling in a cauldron and asking her to bring him back to life, too. She says she cannot possibly do this, since his body has decayed since. He attacks her for having always despised him and for not being a good daughter-in-law to his mother. As a reply, she complains, too: "When you died, what did you leave me? Your old mother in an impoverished household" (Nowak and Durrant 1977, 73), and, calling the helping spirit of the Great Crane, she asks for her husband to be taken away to Fungtu city and never to be reborn as a human being. She then sings a telling song: "Without a husband, I will live happily. Without a man, I shall live proudly. Among mother's relatives, I will live enjoyably. Without children, I shall live on. Without a family, I shall live lovingly. Pursuing my own youth, I will live as a guest" (Nowak and Durrant 1977, 74). The journey proceeds[6] through the meeting with other gods, especially the mother goddess Omosi-mama, up to the final stages, when the dead boy is resuscitated and Teteke is acclaimed as divinely gifted shamaness. Despite all this, her mother-in-law, after hearing about her son left in the underworld, asks the authorities to prosecute her for not saving him. Because of this, the Emperor

Tai-tsung condemns her to be stripped of her shamanic equipment, clothes and drum and order to throw everything into a well (Nowak and Durrant 1977, 90). While the text is surely of interest for a varieties of topics, including the relation of Manchu shamanism with Daoism and Buddhism, the most relevant part for us is Teteke's refusal to save her husband from hell and her joyful song about a woman's life free from the duties of wife and daughter-in-law. The end of the text is equally telling, because it highlights the role of state authority in curtailing shamanic activities by royal decree while at the same time upholding more established religions that are probably more aligned with power.

The previous examples seem to draw heavily on individual conditions, but since they appear so generalized, they in fact hint at structural systems of power and historical rifts. In an old article on Tamang shamanism, Holmberg (1983) comes to an interesting point, which may well serve to highlight structural systems of relational suffering: there is a consistency, if not a homology, between *bombo*, *tsen* and women. Each of them occupies an intermediate position between worlds, dimensions or units of incommensurable, and irreducible, difference. The raw material enabling him to make this statement comes from the combined analysis of social structures and myths. The Tamang *bombo*, who can be both male or female, "conveys a female perspective within the total religious system" (Holmberg 1983, 41), which also includes Buddhism in a superior position. In Tamang shamanism, the non-human entities known as *tsen* are particularly relevant, and they are considered especially tied to women: each Tamang household entertains special relations with a *tsen* in charge of the household welfare. *Tsen* are 'inherited' in a matrilineal way, from mothers to daughters. In a similar fashion, *tsen* are also personally attached to the *bombo*, for whom they constitute specific tutelary deities (Holmberg 1983, 44–46). Women, *bombo* and *tsen* appear then as the ultimate mediators: between exogamous clans, between humans and non-humans and between non-humans and humans. The origin story of the *tsen* exemplifies the inherent rift on which this homology is grounded: in the mythic time before differentiation, Tingtsa Rani, daughter of the *tsen* lord, married a human being, called simply Mha (lit. 'sister's husband'). One day he went hunting in the forest with the *tsen* Shyangpo (lit. 'wife's brother'), and they caught only a tiny bird, which they shared. One part of the game, the hindquarter of the tiny bird, was to be given to Tingtsa Rani. When Mha came home, he tossed the meat on his wife's leg, but the weight proved so big that her leg was crushed. Her family was so resentful that they took her away, and from that time on, the *tsen* and humans were separated. Despite this break, the *tsen* proclaimed that if properly worshipped and appeased, they would continue to ensure prosperity and fertility to human beings (Holmberg 1983, 52–53).

In a recent ethnography, Bacigalupo (2016) shows how intertwined strands of individual lives, political history, memory and contestation seem to be conjoined into the single (?) figure of the Mapuche *machi* Francisca

Kulipi. Shamanically born at the age of 39 during the (collective) disaster of the earthquake of May 1960, while being (individually) struck by a lightning, she became at once a thunder-shaman. The already mentioned ambiguity of the *machi* was combined in her with the untamed and untameable force of the thunder. Her ambivalent character was also enhanced by several other factors: she was a *mestizo*, or *champuria* (Mapuche and Chilean); once widowed, she refused to remarry; she manipulated *wingka* ("non-mapuche") knowledge, technology and money (Bacigalupo 2016, 5–13). Her behaviour outside the ritual context, too, did not conform to gender expectations: "she drank and swore in public, criticized *longko* for their lack of knowledge, had liaisons with men, refused to remarry, performed men's task, and generally made her own decisions and spent her own money" (Bacigalupo 2016, 180–181). Because of her traits and her family history, Francisca was often feared as a sorcerer, as an outsider from the community. Her main embodied spirit was the equally powerful and equally *champuria* Rosa Kurin, who was a descendant of Mapuche and German ancestors. Shamans have often been targeted for eradication as witnesses or living relics of static, superstitious, backward beliefs. Their biographies show instead that they are born out of individual and systemic crisis and structural or historical contradictions.

Conclusions

Shamanic bodies and persons qualify as resisting in many instances. What do they resist? They resist, to name just a few of these instances, the initiation process, variously defined as illness, a call by ancestors or election by spirits. They endure crisis, personal and collective, as well: being the result of individual distress or societal pressure, a dimension of conflict and negotiation is often embodied, as in the examples of possession and crisis given previously or in the events leading to the resolution of the initiation process. On another level, shamans also historically resisted political and religious persecution, and the issue of gender is not irrelevant in these cases: shamanesses have often been targeted by religious establishments for being 'shamans', if not witches, and for being women of power and knowledge. Even in those contexts where, as it has been pointed out, male shamans were targeted but female ones were more or less ignored, this was done at the expense of their role in the public sphere and their relegation to the private, domestic one, together with their practices and beliefs. The survival of shamanic praxis, in this secluded space, was due to its marginalization. But more that everything else, in my opinion, shamanic bodies and persons resist strict identification.

Shamanic bodies and personae defy strict identification. Shamanic personhood is intrinsically relational and dividualistic (Strathern 1990). The web of relation of which the body is just a node includes human and non-human, living and dead, animals and mountains. The human body is ritually dismembered and re-made, transformed through suffering into a shamanic

body with extra qualities and the ability to perceive the extra-human. Shamanic dress amounts to an additional body applied to the anatomical one. The dress is a second skin or, more accurately, an assemblage of bodies: ornaments, bells, necklaces are auxiliary or tutelary entities assisting the shaman(ess) in her role. See, for example, the Tamang and Hyolmo shamanic clothes and paraphernalia. The ritual vestition equates to a multiplication of bodies: when the shaman(ess) moves, it is in fact an ensemble of agents, a multiplicity in motion. The personality of the shaman(ess) is equally complex: it results from the individual person, with her life story, memory and relations, but also from the juxtaposition and merging of shamanic ancestors, deities, body-governing gods and spiritual partners of the underworld. The relation between the individual self and the adjoining personalities covers a full range of possibilities, depending on the contexts, from complete erasure of the individual consciousness, paired with ritual amnesia, to complete control and manipulation of the entities embodied by the shaman(ess).

The shamanic assemblage, as Czaplicka (1914) already realized during her research, makes the anatomical sex of the shaman (at the time, there was no discussion on gender) impossible to classify into the binary system of physiology. Male shamans act as transvestites and cross boundaries among genders. They marry into the spirit world. Even when male, they often become the brides of their tutelary entities. Shamanesses often cross those boundaries, too, with the difference that while the majority of the shamans do it in ritual contexts only, shamanesses do it in everyday life, as many of the examples from the previous pages illustrate. In bold defiance, they pursue their own path against moral prescriptions of their societies, or they take up and bear their burdens (a marriage arranged against their will, a violent husband, etc.) with a twist: in the end, they turn into powerful actors inside the house and in their communities as well. Their role is so relevant for entire households that, for example, Kendall (in this volume) reassesses Lewis's notion of peripheral: whatever they do, it is not circumscribed to the female's sphere.

Shamanic bodies and persons are characterized by fluidity. That fluidity is expressed in performance. Performance is movement and flux. The idea of flux associated with gender has been the object of the studies of Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, who, among the Inuit, identifies at least three levels of refutation of a binary notion about gender: the gender transformations of foetuses, the transgendering of children and the transgendering of shamans (Saladin d'Anglure 2012, 197). It is actually in his work that one can find the most complete assessment of the topic of gender in relation to shamanism (Saladin d'Anglure 2012, 197). The human being has been, since the beginning of the pre-natal life, an extension and a micro-cosmic image of the components of the universe: the father's sperm and the mother's blood; the animal meat consumed by the mother; the souls of the ancestors embodied through their name; the air inspired and expired through breathing,

connecting the newborn with all the living beings with whom the universe is shared (Saladin d'Anglure 2012, 197). Inuit creation myth, instead of a mythical couple of ancestors of the opposite sex, envisioned a couple of males. They had sex and one became pregnant, but at the moment of giving birth, they realized that his body could not deliver. So, with the help of a magic song, his body was transformed into a woman's. In Inuit families, children are transgendered to create symmetrical families: mother-father, brother-sister: it is not unusual for girls to be "cross-dressed and initiated into male tasks" and boys "cross-dressed and socialized" as girls until the first menstruation or the first killing of game. In studying Inuit shamanism, d'Anglure concluded that transgendering is one of its main components, and in a very clear statement, he defines the shamanic *third gender* as a "total social fact" (Saladin d'Anglure 2012, 197):

> The third gender is rooted in nature, in the infra-human reality of the biological disorders of intersex and obstetrics. It is constructed in the culture, in the family atom, where it can compensate for symbolic and real life sex-ratio imbalances resulting from deaths or births the family, thus ensuring a harmonious sexual division of labour. It develops through shamanic mediation, becoming a means to help manage the group's crises, conflicts, change, and social relationships with the natural environment and the animal world. Finally, the third gender is an intermediary with the supra-human world: the dead, the celestial bodies, and the spirits.
>
> (Saladin d'Anglure 2012, 197)

If, reasoning with Marylin Strathern (1990), we take into account the notion of interplay between individual units and societies, we can easily incorporate and adapt the idea of *dividualism* to shed light on notions of extended, fluid personhood in shamanism. Considering bodies as the privileged site of sociality, we see in fact that "persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm" (Strathern 1988, 13). Individuals emerge through differentiation only in the encounters with the others by suppressing a protean, composite and multiple identity. In relation to gender, Strathern reminds us, the dividual is androgynous (Strathern 1990, 14–15). Enlarging the view of Strathern, Nurit Bird-David (1999) employed the idea of *dividualism* to explain the relation between human beings and environment among the Nayaka, a hunter-gatherer group of Southern India. Recovering the biased notion of animism (Tylor 1871), she interpreted it as a relational epistemology, grounded in the idea of composite personhood (and bodies). Since individuals are in fact dividuals, they are constituted by the web of relations they are entangled in. These relations extend well beyond the human community but also include the

non-human, be it the landscape, its non-human inhabitants and even the deities (*devaru*). The *devaru* are not spirits; they are materially visible, as stones, as animals and sometimes also as humans. During certain possession rituals, called *pandaluo*, a *devaru* crosses the human body and acts through it. Nayaka personhood is predicated on this porosity of the body, a body which becomes the site of elements coming in from the outside. The same kind of bodies and ideas of composite personhood are found among several contexts where we have shamanic religious specialists. This composite personhood experienced through embodiment and made visible through performance bridges the gaps not only between genders but also between species and entities.

Notes

1 While ethnographic evidence has to be contextualized and certainly cannot be used to propose unsubstantiated theory about the origins of shamanism, it is certainly true that some archeological findings decidedly seem to confirm the presence of female shamans in Eurasia since prehistoric times. While recent feminist scholarship has sparked considerable debate, it seems indeed certain that several burials have to be associated with female religious specialists. From the graves' arrangements and symbols displayed, some scholars argue we are in the presence of traces of a complex that could be termed "shamanic". To name just a few examples, the Upper Paleolithic grave at Dolní Věstonice (Formicola et al. 2001) and the Mesolithic grave at Bad Dürrenberg (Germany), where the remains of a woman were inhumated with a child and bone fragments of more than 100 animals belonging to different species (Porr and Alt 2006). The concept of shamanism has also been taken into account at times to decipher the remains and findings associated with the Shang culture of Bronze Age China (Chang 1983), although this view is known to spark controversies, softly modulated by Eno (2009) or vehemently contested by Keightley (2000). In a bold statement, instead, Sarah Milledge Nelson claimed that an unknown shaman-queen was indeed buried in tomb n.98 among the tumuli of the Silla kings of 5th–7th-century southern Korea and interpreted the quality and quantity of her ornaments in comparison with her male companion as a sign of her superiority in every respect, including the actual power (Nelson 2015, 71–85).
2 "The cult involves a group of thirty-seven beings organized in a pantheon and known as *nats*. These *nats* are the spirits of people who died a violent death and whose potential malevolence was subsequently pacified through settlement in a domain as tutelary spirits" (Brac de la Perrière 2009, 284).
3 The group was also known in ethnographic literature as Papago, a name given to them by neighbouring groups.
4 Curiously enough, this couple is strikingly similar to the one appearing to *machi* Marta
5 See Seo, Dae-Seok (1999). "The Legend of Princess Paritegi", *Koreana* 13: 2 (Summer), see also http://folkency.nfm.go.kr/en/topic/detail/5353 (retrieved 01.10.2019).
6 This part of the journey, involving the passage through the places where the dead are rewarded or punished, shows similarities with Tibetan Buddhist literature dealing with similar experiences. See Cuevas (2008).

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3 Shamanesses high and low

Gender-based relationships to spiritual entities in Siberia

Roberte Hamayon

Shamanizing vs being a shaman

In pre-Soviet times, Siberian peoples regarded shamanizing in the sense of 'addressing spirits' as a practice proceeding from a basic human capacity and therefore accessible to any human being, women and men alike. They primarily assigned spirits to other species living in the natural environment in order to make them enter relations similar to those specific to humans so as to support life for all.

Now shamanizing was not necessarily understood as performing a shamanic ritual and still less as acting as shaman. So it was only in northeastern Siberia, namely among the Chukchees, where every family kept a drum for its members to shamanize with. Everywhere else, it was held to be valid only for oneself, whereas performing actual rituals valid for other people required individuals specialized as shamans. This difference led Russian ethnographers, starting with Bogoras (1904, ii. 410), to propose two types of shamanism: 'family shamanism' and 'professional shamanism'.

How social structure models the relation to the world

'Professional shamanism' made it hard for women to become shamans at that time, because of the strong patrilineal ideology of Siberian societies. Social structure mattered since relations to the world were conceived of in terms of social relationships, more precisely in terms of kinship (the use of metaphors helps to get a sense of such abstract notions, as shown by Lakoff & Johnson).[1] The most commonly found types of relationship between human and spiritual partners in Siberia were either alliance- or descent-based, with many variants of each.

Whatever the social configuration of the relation to the world, women could not be formally vested with the same status and function as men. Their practice was faced with restrictions and obstacles. As a result, although shamanesses did exist, they were rare and confined to minor private rituals. They were not entitled to conduct or even only take part in the main periodical collective ritual, which was the most significant task for the shamanic

institution in Siberia ('all *great shamans* were men', sources claim). But they were paradoxically granted specific powers and reputed to be able to overcome their male fellows in private fights.

On the other hand, women started to outnumber men as shamans under the impact of Russian colonialization and Christianization from the middle of the 19th century and thereafter. Only quite recently did men again become more numerous than women in this activity, but for quite different reasons.

West-Buryats shamanesses were prohibited from taking part in the renewal ritual

This chapter is based on data concerning mainly the West-Buryats, a Mongol ethnic group living west of Lake Baikal.[2] Their shamanesses went through a large variety of situations, relatively well documented and representative of what also happened in other Siberian societies with 'professional shamans'.

The factors of gender discrimination varied with the context. They were mostly *structural* (i.e. determined by the social definition of the relation to the natural environment) in the ancient contexts of hunting and pastoral life, where only male shamans, *böö*, were entitled to conduct the main collective ritual or at least have a part in it, whereas shamanesses were called a quite different name, *udagan*.[3] They were *conjunctural*, depending on the social environment, in the context of colonization (and so they are in the present, post-Soviet context, as we'll see subsequently) and only weakly influenced by Christianity.

Hocart has highlighted that mastering this type of ritual, which he calls 'life-giving ritual', is a major element of the power stakes and confers the institution in charge of it a central position in society (Hocart 1970 [1936]). It was the most important collective periodical ritual in pre-Soviet Siberian societies for whom it ensured the community's reproduction *in* and *with* its environment – that is, it had a totalizing function. This is but part of the reason only male shamans were entitled to conduct or take part in it.

The mastery of the renewal ritual may serve as a criterion to classify shamanist societies. It was conducted by shamans only in societies living mainly off hunting in the forest. These may be called 'hunting societies', although most of them also kept some domestic animals (especially reindeer). They were surrounded by pastoral societies living nearby in the steppe and the tundra and belonging to the same ethnic and linguistic families. These are referred to here as 'pastoral', although none of them really refrained from hunting on occasion. Although the two ways of life were often mixed in historical realities, there are indeed two types of societies which are to be examined separately here, for they differ significantly with respect to the main renewal ritual. It is worth noting that, in both cases, renewal rituals were performed by shamans for free, whereas private rituals were paid for.

In a hunting context, this ritual was crucial insofar as it was aimed to 'prepare' for the hunting season.[4] Its unfolding – which will be detailed

subsequently – displays the shamanic relationship to the spirits of natural species where subsistence comes from. This accounts for the widely acknowledged structural link between shamanism and hunting and for the centrality of the shamanic institution in this type of society. In other words, the ideology that underlies the hunting lifestyle expresses the most basic pattern of shamanism. It is therefore no surprise that local people unanimously regarded shamans originating from hunting peoples as the most genuine and the most powerful.

In West-Buryat, pastoral context or, more exactly, in a mixed hunting and pastoral context where most men still currently hunted, cattle-breeding, while prevailing economically, did not really replace hunting in ideology and remained much lower in the scale of values. Our data shows that hunting ideas and attitudes persisted to some extent even when hunting as an activity was no longer practised; they were from then on expressed mainly in private rituals, which became much more developed. What radically differed from the hunting context was the mastery of the main renewal ritual. It became the responsibility of the elders of the clans affiliated with the territorial community. It was under their direction, that is, in a second position, that one or several male shamans performed their part – which was nevertheless the decisive one for the 'symbolic efficacy' of the ritual.[5]

In pre-Soviet times, another sub-type of pastoralism was observed among the East-Buryats. These had adopted the Mongols' extensive type of nomad pastoralism and their Buddhism (marginal west of Baikal). There, Buddhist monks interfered with clan elders in the mastery of the main renewal rituals, and even male shamans had no part to play in their framework. All shamans, male and female, were restricted to occasional private rituals. There were more and more female shamans in this context where men had other possible careers (if only as Buddhist monks).[6] The East-Buryat case will not be further considered here.

A woman cannot be the representative of hunters with the spirits of game species

The renewal ritual aimed to establish mutual exchange relationships with the spirits of species hunted for food,[7] and this is what made this ritual crucial to make hunting rightful and fruitful.[8] No woman could be the representative of the hunting community with these spirits, because of the very conception of the relationship with them.

This relationship was conceived of as an exchange on the model of the food chain. The underlying idea was that, in the forest, the humans are but one among other species. They should therefore behave like them, that is, feed on members of some other species (ruminants), then let some of the latter (meat-eaters) feed on themselves.[9] Each game species was supposed to be 'governed' by a spirit, thought of as a kind of 'generic soul' of the species in question and therefore held to be somehow 'present' in all its living

members without being tied to any one of them; being not embodied, it could not be hunted nor killed. Thus, the exchange relationship was concretely represented in the ritual through a metaphorical 'marriage alliance', and its representation was therefore clearly gendered. In this 'marriage', the representative of the human community was in the husband's position and the main game species' spirit in the wife's position. The representative of the human community could be collective (e.g. several hunters) but was most often the shaman selected to conduct this ritual. In this latter case, the marriage should remain secret: any allusion to the shaman's wife could make her vanish, and then, without a spirit wife, no one could become or remain a shaman.

Since the idea of marriage was experienced in the sociological realm, it could easily serve as a metaphor to make the otherwise intangible relationship to the species' spirit conceivable and guide its understanding. It was not expressed in words, but it was staged in the ritual, and the vocabulary of the shaman's bodily movements (taken from the terminology of animal behaviours at the rutting season) made it explicit (e.g. Hamayon 2016, 73–86). In fact, in the shaman–spirit imaginary couple, everyone represented his or her own species: the sex difference matched the species difference: the male partner, the husband, was human and had to mime a stag; the female partner, the wife, was animal and wild and should remain animal and wild while being socialized by her marriage to a human. This was meant to affirm that the hunting human group would enjoy over the wild world a husband's rights over his wife. In return, it was the duty of the shaman on behalf of the human group to preserve the forest, his spirit wife's world, just the way a husband preserves his wife's goods, hence the narrow link of shamanism with the preservation of wildlife.

The female animal spirit the shaman had to mime his 'marriage' to was most often defined as a sister or daughter of the main game (big cervid) species' spirit and imagined as a female moose or reindeer. The shaman was supposed to seduce her with a crown adorned with iron antlers on his head, with his bass voice, high jumps and lively jerks. As a species' spirit, she was conceived of as generic and hence likely to be somehow multiplied, so that every shaman married her and for this reason was potentially rival to all other shamans who also married her.[10] Hence, permanent rivalry opposed shamans of different communities,[11] who all had a spirit of the same game species as a wife. Additionally, a shaman's spirit wife was often called his 'main' spirit and was not systematically a 'helper' at the same time.[12]

As a realm defined by rules, a marriage alliance was a suitable model for framing hunting with rights and duties and also the most constraining institutional framework to rule the exchange of food, since it determines an endless string – any man who marries a woman should give any daughter of hers to a husband, and so on. Thus, the shaman's ritual marriage institutionalized the exchange relationship with the game species spirits, and the periodical repetition of the ritual guaranteed the

perpetuation of the exchange. The way it was staged focused both on the alliance relationship between the two partners and on the individual shaman's marriage.

On the whole, the ritual served to legitimize hunting as such, along with making the shaman legitimate both as a hunter in the guise of a husband instead of an abductor in her world and as a fully fledged shaman for his community. For this reason, only male shamans could represent the hunting group and conduct this ritual that celebrated at the same time their dedication as such.[13] As to the rare shamanesses active in the hunting context, they practised different kinds of divination, mostly in reference to spirits of unfortunate dead humans whom they comforted. Sources are regrettably very scarce on this matter.

The husband-to-wife relationship

The 'husband-to-wife' character of the human-game relationship modelled the perception of the exchange: apparently reciprocal, it was made asymmetric by the ritual's taking on the male standpoint. It was expected that the shaman's 'spirit wife' would, out of love for his high jumps and bass voice, enable him to obtain 'promises of game' from her, that is, 'good luck at hunting' for the hunters of his community. At the end of the ritual, the shaman lay on the ground so as to offer himself as a 'promise' of human vital force to complete the representation of the exchange, as if he were both woman and game offered as a guarantee that humans will respect the law of exchange fairly, that is, will die. Here the antlers on his crown and all elements that likened him to a moose or reindeer became all the more meaningful: after having adopted this animal's male attitude, the shaman was now to adopt its fatal destiny as quarry. In the mind of the audience, he was then being devoured by carnivore species' spirits – part of his duty as shaman. The imbalance in favour of the human 'husband' allowed the ritual to convey a doubly positive vision of the hunting lifestyle. It concealed its predatory aspect by presenting it in terms of matrimonial appropriation (a hunter would never say that he 'killed' an animal, but that the animal 'gave itself' to him out of love). And it introduced a certain rhythm in favour of the humans into the alternation of life and death by showing at length only these human actions that are typically male and keeping the apparently 'fatal' final sequence extremely short and silent.

Could female shamans replace male shamans as 'spirit's husband'?

If the season initiated by the ritual was deemed good, the community solicited the same shaman to conduct the next ritual, during which he had to 'marry' again. But if it had not been successful, game had been scarce and many people had died, he was to be replaced by another shaman. No mention

could be found of a shamaness invited to conduct such renewal ritual nor being offered a public dedication ritual.

If the absolute necessity to adopt a husband's position toward the world of animals and their spirits was the major reason for the exclusion of shamanesses, an additional reason could be the very strong taboo on menstrual blood, especially in connection with hunting. During the Second World War, however, when there were almost no men left in some remote areas, it happened that old women performed informal rituals to make hunting possible and favourable and went hunting themselves – which did not conform either to the established order of things; however, even in such exceptional circumstances, most probably, no young woman would have been allowed to perform a renewal ritual of that kind. Besides, there is no mention of shamanesses wearing a crown with antlers (but some of them have in the post-Soviet context) and making jumps and other bodily movements similar to those of men.

Love, fortune and success associated with the 'marriage' metaphor

Since it was aimed to justify the activity of hunting and the position of men as hunters, the metaphor of the shaman's 'marriage' to a game species spirit was associated with life, love and luck. It was said at the time that a shaman lost his spirit wife's love and consequently his luck at hunting on growing old and losing his teeth. A tint of love and luck was at that time (and still is) reflected in current representations and practices tied to being good at hunting.

By contrast, there was no mention of love affairs between shamanesses and animal spirits. On the other hand, there were plenty of them between women and wild animals (bears, for instance), but these love affairs inspired only sad stories that all ended with the woman's tragic death; they were mere tales and didn't give rise to ritualised practices.

A passing remark. When hunting stops being a valuable resource for these societies, we can observe a transfer of the reference of 'luck' from game to other desirable goods that, similarly, cannot be produced. Such unproducible goods are also held to be more or less uncontrollable, limited in quantity, unpredictable, contingent. People think that something like 'luck' (but generally called other names) is then required to have a chance to get them. Even nowadays, many private shamanic rituals are aimed at calling for 'good fortune' for a journey, an exam, a job, fertility or mental health or 'success' in business or in love affairs – that is, for all that is held to be necessary for life (or a better life). A shaman may be asked to perform a ritual for a young lady in order to find a husband (Merli 2010, 184–192). It is remarkable that secular peoples (mainly women) may also 'call for good fortune' for themselves with the same type of requests, offerings and conventional gestures; these practices are considered shamanic but do not require the presence of a shaman.

A woman cannot be the representative of herders with their ancestors

In the pastoral context, the major concerns were rights over pasturelands and nomadic routes, transmission of flocks and so on; in other words, the main concern was how to socially organize relationships to the natural environment. The renewal ritual gathered a community composed of lineages of two or more clans who had their winter camp in the same area, were often related by marriage and nomadized in coordination. It was conducted by male clan elders and addressed to male ancestors from whom pasturelands and herds had been inherited. The elders sang invocations and made libations and invited the shaman just to make a kind of 'blessing' on the sacrificial meat that the participants could bring back home (when cooked) after the ritual.

As with several other specialities (blacksmith, saddle-maker and so on), the shaman function was reserved to certain lineages within which it was inherited. But in this case, the patrilineal rule came into conflict with the principle that shamanizing was accessible to all human beings regardless of gender. When the last shaman of a lineage died, the lineage's shaman ancestors, taken as a whole, collectively and anonymously, were supposed to call one of their descendants to take over the function so that the new shaman also inherited the female spirit spouse of his ancestor-shamans.[14]

Torment associated with the ancestors' call

The chosen one, at the age of puberty, was supposed to endure illnesses, lack of appetite, losses of consciousness and wanderings, sometimes for years. As a rule, the family circle used to complain about these hardships but actually (consciously or not) assumed them as signs that he should become a shaman. Many observers have noted both the reality and the denial of pressures on the young boy to accept the call. On the whole, the call was perceived as a 'torment' all the more painful since it was impossible to refuse. Pre-Soviet observers remarked that this negative perception was quite conventional. Significantly, Petri (1923, 7–9) noted that the only shaman who had received the call with pleasure was a woman. This did not mean that all women were happy: the same Petri reported that another Buryat female shaman lamented in this way: 'if this dead shaman would have had male descendants, I'd never have had to shamanize' (1923, 6; Hamayon 1990, 649–651).

Women prohibited from becoming shamans and repressed

In fact, no shaman lineage would ever have encouraged their daughter, even in the case when there was no male among its living members (they would always have preferred a distant nephew or cousin). And it was well known that if a girl claimed shamanic heritage for herself, her father and brothers

would by all means have tried to prevent her from becoming a shaman for fear that, once married, she would call her ancestors to the benefit of their husband's line (at the time of the Russian Empire, all women were to be married and lived at their husband's house). According to Hangalov, our main source for the pre-Soviet Buryats,[15] in shaman lineages, there were fathers and brothers who went as far as burying their daughter or sister alive if she wanted to become a shaman. We don't know how far such cruel measures were actually applied, because this strictly patrilineal exclusivism came into conflict with important principles at work in pastoral societies: shaman ancestors should have a living representative on earth, and women inherited the right to represent the line's ancestors as well as men. Thus, there were parents with no son who incited a daughter of theirs to have her husband live with them in order to later transmit the family heritage to the integrated son-in-law's children.

And we have mentions of male shamans whose sisters or wives also performed shamanic practices and of husbands who assisted their wife shamans during rituals (Hamayon 1984).

The wrong end falls on shamanesses in epics

In some epics (for instance, those of Ajduuraj Mergen and Alamzha Mergen, where the hero has a sister and no parents),[16] a decisive part is played by a shamaness, who harshly harms the hero from the very beginning of the narrative – hence her very negative image, given the ideological significance of the epics. No epic character is a shaman, but the hero himself can be regarded as embodying the principle of shamanism as the necessary conceptual frame for hunting.

Women recognized after death as founders of shaman lines

Unmarried mothers were usually rejected by both their family of origin and that of the boy's father. It happened that some nevertheless managed to survive with their sons, according to several stories about lineages and clans told during winter evenings.[17] If the single mother died after a few years, her son started at the age of puberty to shamanize for his mother. Since he was born of an unknown father, his existence on earth was reinterpreted as being of spiritual origin. Then, he invoked his dead mother as a spirit who founded a shamanic line on earth, and he became recognized as the first shaman of this line. The founder spirit was thereafter called 'mother' of the hill near where she had lived.

Women's access to a shaman's function

Thus, there actually were shamanesses, but apparently, they mostly acceded to function quite informally and much later in life than men. Never were women regarded as having been personally 'elected' by ancestors, and rarely

were they officially acknowledged as shamans. Some sources mention 'consecrated' female shamans,[18] but they are based mainly on myths, and none of them provide an ethnographic description of a 'consecration' ritual. Here is a story I was told in the Barguzin area in 1978: a Buryat female shaman who died in 1975 had run away from home entirely naked when she was young; on coming back home, a male shaman shamanized for her and gave her a cup of milk alcohol, *tanhatai arhi*; she then had to climb up three trees and was considered shaman thereafter; nobody could decide if this episode could be regarded as a 'dedication' or 'consecration' ritual and if a particular relationship had then been established between the new shamaness and some spirit.

Turning female specificity into an unstoppable weapon

Most often, the best, if not the only, way for a woman to be acknowledged as a shamaness was successful practice. Some of them became famous by performing private divination or healing rituals. As a social category, they were reputed (mainly on the basis of myths) to be better than shamans at 'having [someone's] soul be eaten', *hünehe edyüülhe*, in symbolic fights against their male fellows. However, their greatest power rested on the fear they instilled in all shamans merely by being women (because menstrual blood is the source of the worst defilement) and by having shamanic skills in making use of it. This female specificity which was at first glance a handicap could be turned into an unstoppable weapon. Thus, a hunter would not take his gun to go hunting if a cloth permeated with menstrual blood was in contact with it; if such a cloth fell on a shaman during a ritual, the shaman was fixed in the part he had in the ritual and could not return to the non-ritual situation (in such case, it was easy to have a spirit 'eat his soul'). Our sources insist on this specificity and its dangerousness for shamans as if to give evidence that Siberian societies consciously wanted their shamanesses to remain women. Otherwise, they might have decided that the function and position should prevail over gender and authorized women to shamanize like men.[19]

Comforting unfortunate dead souls who could not become ancestors

There is no clear information about which spirits shamanesses turned to when shamanizing – if any – except for their being prohibited from contacts with the spirits of game species. Although they mentioned ancestors at the beginning of their invocation songs, they did not enter relations with them. By contrast, they specifically addressed unfortunate dead souls – those who could not become ancestors – and did so using their personal names and recalling some events of their tragic life and death. In the course of the ritual, shamanesses (and male shamans alike) played a twofold part with the concerned dead soul: they embodied and negotiated with it, alternately uttering its laments and demands on its behalf,[20] and they gave their own

words of comfort, questions and proposals of offerings to settle all matters with it and prevent its possible attempts at revenge. For all these reasons, a shade of potential transgression was attached to shaman rituals addressing restless souls of dead people.

Shamanism as a tool of transgression: women's liberation in the beyond

The conflict between the rigidly gendered rule of inheritance and the non-gendered rule of access to shamanism gave rise to a new phenomenon in West-Buryat social life in the second half of the 19th century, when Russian colonial pressure intensified (Hamayon 2006). It consisted of the rapid expansion of the category of spirits called *zayaan*. Initially, only the souls of exceptional dead shamans were called *zayaan*, a word that means 'fate, destiny' in common discourse. This name was extended to the souls of people who had suffered great hardships during their life and died a premature, violent or cruel death, in particular with no descendant in whom their soul could come back to live a new life. Such souls could not be made into ancestors and would be doomed to continuous restlessness and wandering unless they were made into *zayaan*s, which allowed them to take revenge. Unlike ancestors, who were addressed anonymously and collectively, *zayaan*s were addressed personally by name and regarded as fully fledged individuals.

Not all souls of unfortunate dead people were turned into *zayaan*s. Most, if not nearly all, *zayaan*s came from the souls of women who shared the following common points: they had been forced to marry husbands they hated; they belonged to shaman lines; they could find no other means to oppose their in-laws than claiming their shamanic heritage and their in-laws prevented them from becoming shamans, punished them and eventually put them to death or pushed them to commit suicide. Those who voluntarily killed themselves believed that, as *zayaan*s, they would be freed from all social rules and, more importantly, able to take revenge on their in-laws.[21]

This is why living people asked shamans to worship these dead women's souls, in the hope that repeated invocations and offerings would eventually appease their vindictiveness and transform them into protecting spirits. It is noteworthy that shamans did not attempt to make them join the normal ancestors' anonymous community. Like ordinary people, they were attached to keeping them individualised, as if they thought them potentially more useful as individual spirits. Unlike ancestors, *zayaan*s were seen as available at any time and likely to be mobilised contractually; more importantly, they could be considered particularly apt to help people with delicate affairs implying transgressions and social changes. These female *zayaan*s were held to be all the more dangerous since their quite new freedom and empowerment made them totally unpredictable, but they were seen at the same time as potentially the most powerful of all kinds of spirits.

Besides, the many similarities between the cult of *zayaan*s and the Christian Orthodox cult of saints evoke a possible influence of Christianization – a process which took place in parallel with colonization throughout the second half of the 19th century in this area.[22]

On the whole, making the soul of a dead potential shamaness into a *zayaan* amounted to ascribing the status of an individual free of social bonds to a woman who transgressed social norms. Unfortunately, this status was only valid in the beyond, that is, too late for her to enjoy it. Anyway, the *zayaan* procedure amounted to turning a woman's failure in life into her empowerment after death.

Notable is the shamans' ambiguous role in this procedure: they gave these non-conformist women a position in society without threatening the existence of society as such, since this was a position in the other world. In fact, their intervention manifested a kind of counter-power: transforming unfortunate dead women into powerful individualised spirits was a means to manipulate social norms and open the way to new social patterns. This was a sort of 'women's liberation movement' in the beyond, and we may only wonder if it was foreshadowing a similar women's liberation on earth. . . . The answer from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods will be positive with respect to everyday social life, but with respect to shamanism?

Before a short overview of this question, just a few words to stress how flexible shamanic practices are always likely to evolve or innovate in order to adapt to all kinds of changes and support life in all types of contexts, as if some 'life-giving' aim were inherently present in shamanism – which might account for its being accessible to men and women alike.

The inherent 'life-giving' aim of shamanism

Here are several examples of a link between shamanism and birth or 'giving life'. The term for shamaness widely used in Siberia, *udagan*, means 'mid-wife' among the Mongol Ordos of Inner Mongolia in China. Two shamanesses/*udagan* play a decisive part in the myth of origin of the main ethnic group of the Cisbaikal Buryats, the Ehirit-Bulagat, whose way of life mixed hunting and cattle breeding before the Soviet era. Being widows, old and with no children, the two shamanesses are aware that they are to be put to death by their clans. They shamanize and divine that a human girl has given birth to a boy whose father is a supernatural bull. They manage to discover the baby and his twin brother, who become the two ancestors of this group. The myth does not detail what was their fate thereafter.[23]

Male shamans were sometimes solicited to perform secret fertility rituals and more frequently to be *naizha* – a sort of godfather – for newborns whose soul was to be 'fixed' in their bodies. During the Soviet period, when shamanism was repressed, a Buryat whose ancestors for six generations had

all been shamans returned to his village in the Tunka area south of the Baikal after being seriously wounded at the beginning of World War II and there impregnated more than thirty women who were alone and longing for children. People around recognized him as very strong and reliable and did not hesitate to ask him to perform rituals.[24]

As firmly as shamanism is inherently tied to all that concerns life, it is in general kept out of all that concerns death. Funeral rituals fell into the hands of the Christian or the Buddhist clergy depending on the place at the end of the 19th century.

In the Soviet context

At the beginning of the Soviet period, male shamans were the first to be persecuted by the anti-religious politics, but only very few women could take over the profession, for shamanic practices themselves were severely repressed, especially in the late 1930s. Although information is extremely scarce, we know that no public shamanic rituals could take place but that some people, not necessarily shamans, performed here and there private rituals in reduced form and in secret. In addition, according to Znamenski (2007), many natives had absorbed anti-shamanic views as a result of scientific education and atheist propaganda (whose influence should not be underestimated, the author adds); they maintained these views until the end of the 1980s and, for a part of them, much later.

In the post-Soviet context

After the fall of the Soviet regime, the first persons to become shamans all over Siberia were women, and these were no longer called the distinctive name for shamanesses, *udagan*. The Buryat Nadia Stepanova is one of the most famous, since she was also the founder of the first shaman association in Buryatia, *Böö mürgel* ('Shamanism') in 1992.[25] A few years later, such associations multiplied, because being affiliated with one of them was indispensable to be allowed to practise shamanism officially. All shamanic practitioners, men and women as well, began to be similarly called *böö* (or the now internationalized Tungus *shaman*) and similarly performed mostly private rituals in their association's office at prices fixed in advance.

The relative number of men increased at the turn of the 21st century, and nowadays men are again predominant. In rural areas, 'every village has its own local shaman, but in urban areas such as Irkutsk, shamans are much harder to find'.[26] Specifically, men are in greater number also as leaders of shaman associations, all the more since most of them have achieved higher education in humanities (MA or PhD). These associations are unstable because they are basically rivals to each other and therefore permanently conflicting; some of them are short lived indeed. Many of them lack local

followers and survive mainly through their websites, where they can maintain close relations with foreign tourists intending to attend their meetings. On the whole, the situation is extremely mobile and versatile.[27]

Over the course of time, shaman associations more and more have proceeded to organize collective rituals such as *tailgan* for 'old men' (ancestors of several territorially related groups). In most such cases, a few shamans, both male and female, shamanize together, performing as a group. Up to now, while some female shamans are young women, only women over fifty occupy founding or leading positions in shaman associations. I personally have seen no mention of a female shaman in charge of collective rituals, except for those limited to a lineage, and men – even young – outnumber women in such positions.[28] In addition, the sociological pattern of the most important shaman collective rituals organized in Buryatia (as elsewhere) is blurred by the fact that a majority of participants are tourists or New Age pilgrims rather than local peoples (Quijada and Stephen 2015).

Likewise, in neighbouring Mongolia, according to Laetitia Merli, new shamans, men and women alike, whether in Ulaanbaatar or in the Darhad country, freely elaborate, but their careers do not last for long. At the end of her book, the author gauges that the Tsaatan shamaness Enhtuya, a member of the smallest minority still living on reindeer raising, could be able to maintain her shaman activity thanks to tourists, thus proving more enduring in her remote area than the male shamans she met in the capital city Ulaanbaatar (Merli 2010; see also Hangartner 2006). This held true for a few years. Those whom Merli calls 'the official shaman for great events' were all male urban shamans. Also male are the young ones who are nowadays trying to organize themselves into shamanic brotherhoods.[29] Male again are the new shamans who 'proliferate' among the Buryats living in northeastern Mongolia in order to perform rituals aimed to reconstruct the genealogy and ancestry of descendants of victims of the Stalinian purges so their identity will be indisputably Buryat (Shimamura 2014).

There are some examples of women being 'initiated' or 'consecrated' as shamans in the last twenty years as well in Mongolia (Merli 2000, *Call for Grace*) and among the Mongols of Inner Mongolia in China (Knecht 2018). Peter Knecht describes the sacred space built for the initiation ritual of a young Buryat shamaness. Her teacher, an Ögeled (Ööld) Mongol shamaness, had gathered information from Buryat sources to construct the ritual space: a Mongol *ger* (yurta) with a table to serve as an altar for the *ongod* (ancestors) to be enshrined. A photograph shows the young shamaness with a crown with antlers on her head.[30]

Parallels and contrasts from elsewhere

The use of kinship and, in particular, matrimonial metaphors to conceptualize and experiment with relationships to the spirit world (in particular the relationship that affords ritualists legitimacy as such) is widespread all

over the world. The 'husband-to-wife' version of the matrimonial metaphor is mainly encountered in non-state contexts, with various modalities. As to its opposite, the 'wife-to-husband' version – which reflects somewhat opposite human attitudes towards the supernatural world – it is found in many possession cults; besides, it is also characteristic of the monotheistic religions, but in a very different manner. Whatever the case may be, being in a wife's position always implies being subordinate to the one in the husband's position, whether human or spiritual, without necessarily requiring being female.

The 'husband-to-wife' metaphorical structure

Ioan Lewis includes a section called 'Mystical Marriage' in the chapter 'Shamans and Sex' of his book *Arguments with Ethnography* (1999).[31] He mentions the case of the Malay *bomoh*s, who have spirit spouses as their 'main' helping spirits – a category which also includes ancestors, tiger spirits and Muslim saints – and gives the following example:

> a man lives on a mountain for two years; a female spirit appears to him and wants to marry him, which he does; then he descends the mountain with a sack full of medicinal herbs and . . . his spirit wife. . . . After 13 years . . . and the birth of two spirit children . . . they separated but the spirit wife remained as his spiritual guide and medical adviser.
>
> (Lewis 1999, 111)

Commenting on this example, Lewis adds that: 'it seems more pertinent to regard the shaman's celestial marriage as a unique validation and guarantee of his spiritual power, rather than as essentially a cosmic instrument to control the game supply' (Lewis 1999, 112–113). However, the 'validation of a spiritual power' does not justify by itself the specific form of 'celestial marriage' it takes. I suggest that something similar to game is at stake here, too. As mentioned previously, game is only the most ancient and probably the most concrete of all conceivable 'unproducible' goods – for example, fertility, health, rain – that can only be obtained, like game, through rituals held to provide people with 'good luck' or 'good fortune'.

While the conception the Kulunge Rai of Nepal have of the spirits of the 'forest' (or the wild), is very similar to that of Siberian hunters in some aspects, it differs with regard to the manner the relationship with them is socialized. On the one hand, a mythical shaman's 'primordial marriage' with the daughter of a spirit of 'nature' is ritually evoked, but it is a unique marriage that happened in mythical times – as if a marriage relationship had been concluded once and for all. On the other hand, a current divinatory practice is aimed at repelling any forest spirit and excluding any further relation with it in spite of its attractive power – as if formalizing relationships with the

wild was unconceivable for the Kulunge Rai who were firmly engaged in farming (Schlemmer 2004).

Among another population of Nepal, the Kham-Magars, the shaman, whether male or female, is in a son-in-law's position towards the spirits, who are supposed to give him a spirit wife. The complex *boshine* ceremony may be read as both the rebirth of the shamanic ancestor in the neophyte and the neophyte's marriage with the daughter of the spiritual entities associated with wilderness (Sales 2015).[32] However, on the one hand, Sales insists that the female shamans wear trousers when shamanizing.

> One of them said: 'Look at me, I am a woman. But when we wear our pair of trousers we are like men,' and another one: 'I was born a "woman" *(nāmarda)* from my (biological) parents, and then in the middle of my life I was (ritually) born a male *(marda)* because the divinity chose me. And then we have feathers on the head, an arm guard on the wrist, a drumstick in the hand, an iron chain around the neck. . . . What do you think we are? We are *marda*.'
>
> (p. 27)

The author adds:

> Sex is not relevant here, . . . [there is] no ritual aversion to menstrual blood among the Kham-Magars. . . . a female shaman can be as powerful as a man as long as she learns the ritual chants . . . they enter the role the moment they don the costume, with the costume comes the role.
>
> (ibid.)

This is unlike Siberia. But on the other hand, Sales gives the following precisions which call to mind situations found formerly in Siberia:

> none of the female shamans were able to perform alone . . . [and] they participated in larger shamanic gatherings . . . and skipped the more frequent healing séances (they have to assist [the male shaman guru] during healing séances and repeat the lines after him. The lineage of her husband becomes the relevant unit in shamanic ceremonies. . . . women's capacity for creation and innovation is closely associated with the transgression of the dominant and masculine order. Their capacity of creation is a result of their transgression.
>
> (Sales 2015, 24)

Finally, Sales notes that since 2010, new shamans are all males again but do not know the chants either. To her, a young female shaman's refusal to learn the chants is due to her household and family responsibilities. However, after refusing, one of them confessed: 'I said my ancestors left me, but actually they still play me, they still are tormenting me.'[33]

The 'wife-to-husband' metaphorical structure: possession cults

Possession is generally classified along with shamanism in the same category of religious phenomena.[34] However, in many cases, the structure of the relationship to spiritual world possession appears to be an inversion of what is for me the typically 'shamanic alliance'. So it is when the 'possessed' specialist is seen as the 'wife' of the spirit or god that possesses them, whatever their sex or gender.

In Burma, for instance, 'possessed' persons, whether men or women, are called *naguedo*, a derivative of *naq* that means '*naq*'s wife' (Brac de la Perrière 1998, 2007). They ensure the cult of the thirty-seven *naq*, local entities to which a decisive role in the formation of royalty is allocated and who are an extension of the king's power. Domination being established by the taking of women, marriage can be seen as the 'model of hierarchical relationships'. The incarnation of a *naq* in one of his 'wives' is manifested in her dancing, to such an extent that the mere fact of dancing is interpreted as possession; the cult's key role belongs to the musicians who are men and 'play the part of men' (Brac de la Perrière 1994, 183, 1998, 177–178).[35]

The 'wife-to-husband' metaphorical structure: monotheistic religions

In the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions, the 'wife-to-husband' metaphor concerns the relationship of the whole human community to the supreme being – and not in particular that of religious specialists.

The 'matrimonial alliance' is but one of the many versions of the notion of 'Alliance' ('Covenant') present throughout the Bible.[36] Since it requires from the woman a moral attachment to her husband, it is particularly apt to express relationships between Israel (the wife) and Yahweh (the husband).[37] In all its forms and very clearly, this metaphor unites a *personal* divine husband to a *collective* human wife.[38] Just the way Yahweh is defined in a husband's position to the Jewish people, Allah is to the *umma*, the community of Muslim believers, and Jesus Christ to the Christian church (so was it perceived in medieval Christianity and by the mystics). Moreover, the monotheist God is also defined in all three cases as the *father* of the concerned community. Although his representatives on Earth (such as Catholic priests) are submitted to him as members of the human community defined as being in a subordinate position to him (whether he is perceived as a husband or father according to the context), they are also his representatives, especially in a father's position.[39]

The metaphor is currently taken one step further. While the wife owes attachment and obedience to her husband, likewise the husband has obligations to

his wife. This principle can be highlighted by an example taken from our own history.

> In his famous book *The King's Two Bodies* (2000, 802–817), Ernst Kantorowicz describes the King's status and duties in medieval France and England. Kingship was then organized on the model of the Christian Church. Just as Christ contracted an 'Alliance' ('Covenant') with his Church to be her husband, a Bishop became the 'husband' of his bishopric and a King of his kingdom. As a consequence, the bishop had to take care of his bishopric and its goods, the King of his Kingdom and its goods, just the way a husband must take care of his wife's dowry.

This accounts for the strong attachment of Siberian hunting societies to their *taiga* (forest) as the place par excellence where game species can live. For them, protecting the forest was a duty symmetric to the right to 'hunt' in it, although neither one nor the other was formalised in words. And this also accounts for the present-day claim of Siberian shamanist peoples: an ideal of 'harmony with nature', which is inherently shamanic; insofar as shamanism is aimed at protecting nature, Siberian peoples want it to be acknowledged as the main forerunner of ecology since the dawn of time. They express this ideal by organizing public rituals in the open air, with or without shamans. These rituals address 'Nature' as a supreme entity with no gender precision and without any gender constraint.

In guise of conclusion

This short overview of Buryat data shows that shamanesses existed at all times and in all types of contexts but that they did not enjoy a specific position in any of them. Their position, however, changed with each change in society, as did shamanism itself, something of which, although reduced and altered, survived Christianization as well as Sovietization.

Paradoxically, shamanesses proliferated more than ever in the period of most intensive Christianization, when shamanic practices were maintained in the margins of Christianity on a par with the cult of saints. And precisely the contact may partly account for the previously shortly noted similarities between shamanic *zayaan*s and orthodox saints. However, it is mostly as *zayaan*s that women were considered free individuals, independent and powerful, that is, only as potential and not real shamanesses, and only when dead.

It is significant to note that, now that Christianity has declined in post-Soviet Buryatia, the spiritual entities many adepts of New Age or other new religious movements who take part in shamanic festivities refer to are figures clearly defined as essentially female, for instance, Mother Earth or Gaia,

along with nonidentified shamanic spirits. In a way, this recalls the primary form of shamanism in Siberia, when shamanism rested on a marriage alliance of the human community with a female (though animal) entity.

Should we conclude that female figures are perceived as more important and powerful when they belong to the supernatural than to the human world?

Acknowledgements

This title is inspired from that of the new English translation by Rayner Heppenstall – A Harlot High and Low (1970) – of a novel by Honoré de Balzac, Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes 1839–1847, previously translated as Splendors and miseries of courtesans by Ellery Sedgwick, 1895.

I am grateful to Sophie Roche and Davide Torri for inviting me to talk on this topic in Heidelberg in 2016.

Notes

1 Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that such conceptual metaphors reflect a basic cognitive procedure, whose 'essence . . . is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing [generally abstract] or experience in terms of another [generally concrete]'. (1980, 5). They demonstrate that we don't use metaphors only in language: we actually perceive and act in accordance with the conceptual metaphors in use in our society. We note that many metaphors used for speaking of relationships come from the vocabulary of kinship.
2 For the pre-Soviet period, this study recapitulates previous works based on personal fieldwork, research in Buryat oral sources and in the extremely rich ethnographic literature (in particular Hamayon 1990), and, for the post-Soviet period, on some colleagues' works and online info.
3 This word, *udagan (~odigon),* is common to all Mongol and Turkic languages of Siberia, whereas terms for male shamans differ from one to the other language.
4 It is described in detail in Hamayon (1990, 454–490).
5 Hamayon (1990, 627, 637–643).
6 It is well known that 'feminization of the shamanic profession usually happened in all preindustrial societies that underwent deep modernization or state formation', Znamenski writes (2007, 344).
7 It did not concern game hunted for fur.
8 This is described at length in Hamayon (1990 chap. X, 1998, 2016).
9 As a matter of fact, people attribute their progressive loss of vitality and death to the fact that meat-eating animals suck their vital force from their flesh and blood as a 'reimbursement' for the game they ate during their life. For them, one should go and 'give oneself to the forest' when one has grandsons able to hunt.
10 In addition to setting the terms to the game-supply contract between humans and animals, Lewis notes: '[the notion of] marriage, with the shaman in the role of husband and the game spirit in the role of wife, illuminates the sexual imagery which abounds in shamanic discourse' (Lewis 1999, 109–111).
11 This is one of the reasons shamans could not form a clergy and why there could be neither king nor pope shaman.
12 Besides a spirit wife, a shaman had also 'helping spirits', tied to him by personal agreements and not by 'marriage'; they 'helped' him mostly in the framework of private rituals.

13 For this reason, this ritual was also called 'shaman's consecration' or 'animation of the [shaman's] drum'.
14 I proposed to call this 'affiliation of alliance' (Hamayon 1990, 647). The idea of election by a female spirit was thus preserved within the sociological framework of inheritance.
15 Unpublished text preserved in Hangalov's Archive in Budapest called *Shamanka i zhenskaya obshchina* (51b: 1438), partly reproduced in Hangalov (1958–1, 175; Hamayon 1990, 650).
16 Hamayon (1990, 192–201), on epics in general chap. III–VI.
17 Such stories have been collected and published in Russian in Baldaev (1970, 232, 262, 266, 273, 284, 307). There is no such story for unmarried mothers of girls.
18 Petri (1923, 9), Baldaev (1970, 142, 306), and Hangalov (1958-I, 184) (a fictitious reconstitution of the past).
19 Hamayon (1990, 417–422, 445–448).
20 This should by no means be interpreted as possession; hardly can the 'embodying' part of the shamanic action be assimilated to mediumship, since it is very soon interrupted by a new series of consolation words on behalf of the shaman.
21 Among the Yakut also, a majority of unfortunate dead souls were female; they were called *üör*.
22 The cult of dead souls is common to many religions, contrary to relations with animal spirits, which seem specific to shamanism.
23 Hangalov (1958, I-417–425, III-102–107), Baldaev (1970, 35–38), and Hamayon (1990, 615–616).
24 Zhukovskaya (2000, 51, 57–58).
25 N. Stepanova is particularly famous in Italy: www.terranuova.it/Il-Mensile/Sciamanesimo-un-ponte-tra-natura-e-uomo,https://sites.google.com/site/manuelajanabella/home/sciamanesimo-misticismo-e-animismo/nadia-stepanova-ed-i-suoi-insegnamenti.
26 Buck Quijada and Stephen (2015) http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/2589.
27 Znamenski (2007).
28 The *tailgan* organized by the association Tengeri on Ol'hon island in the middle of Lake Baikal in August 2012 was headed by a man, Bair Zhambalovich Tsyrendorzhiev (Quijada and Stephen 2015). There are twenty-eight slides on the website www.reqphotos.com/Events-in-Buryatia/Shamanic-Ceremonies/Tengeri-Shamans-Association/i-m963Zmm, but it is sometimes difficult to identify whether the shaman with fringes on the face is a man or a woman.
29 Delaplace and Humphrey (2013). The motivation is the rapid failure of individual attempts to start a shaman's career (information collected on the field by Delaplace in 2010).
30 Knecht (2018), fig. 5 p. 28. The article focuses on the construction of the sacred space and does not comment on the crown with antlers and very little on the relationship to the *ongod*.
31 Lewis considers that 'shamanic ecstasy is often explicitly identified with orgasm', and he reports that, 'in Christian Sri Lankan exorcism . . . female pilgrims achieve orgasm and are penetrated, as they believe, by Christ himself' (1999, 110).
32 This is similar to the West-Buryat pastoral pattern presented previously.
33 The meaning of 'playing' is not specified. In Siberia, it would evoke sexual intercourse from the male point of view, the woman being 'played': the ancestors would then also be lovers. So is it among the Yorubas in Africa, where women are possessed by their ancestors who are at the same time their husbands (Hamayon 2016, 177–178, 275–276).
34 The most currently used distinctive criterion is the place where the presumed 'contact' with the spirits occurs: within the ritualist's body (possession) or out of

it (shamanism). At first glance, this would lead us to ascribe the Buryat shaman's relationship to human dead souls to possession. But the notion of 'possession' would not be appropriate, neither in the case when the shaman somehow 'incorporates' his ancestor shamans in order to be 'stronger' to meet other spirits nor in the case when he or she 'embodies' some unfortunate dead soul to negotiate with it compensation for its hardships.

35 The responsibility for the possessed (individuals or groups) and for the organization of the cult very often fall on men (Bouchy 1992). So it is even in matrilineal societies, as, for instance, among the Austronesian societies of East Taiwan, such as the Kavalan (Liu Pi-chen) and the Puyuma (J. Cauquelin).

36 The Latin tradition uses the word *testamentum* (Old and New Testament), whereas the Greek tradition used *diatiki* (Old and New Covenant). *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible* (1987, 35).

37 *Ibid*. Adjacent questions are developed in Hamayon (2008).

38 For sake of comparison, a short remark. Here, the human partner of the married couple is thought of as collective in the wife's role, whereas in Siberian shamanism, each human community is *singularized* in the husband's role – either directly or through its representative, the shaman. As to the supernatural partner, it is a *generic* animal figure in the wife's role in shamanism instead of a more or less anthropomorphic masculine *personal* figure in the husband's role in monotheistic religions.

39 For sake of comparison again, the difference between the 'husband-to-wife' relationship that gives control to humans and the 'wife-to-husband' relationship that gives control to the monotheist God may account for the current opinion that shamanism is 'subversive'. Under the Tsars, the Buryats used to define themselves as 'people with shamans', in contrast to 'people with a God' as were Russians and Jews in their neighbourhood. This reflected their idea of shamanic people's dynamism and ability to react and resist, as well as their idea of Christian people's submissiveness, amenability and obedience to their God and their Popes.

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4 Retrospectives

What I got wrong in my first book

Laurel Kendall

It is a strange, destabilizing experience to re-encounter one's own words several decades later and through the tissue of another language. Reading Kim Song Nae and Kim Dong-kyu's translation of my first book, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* (*Mudang, Yŏsŏng, Sillyŏngdŭl* 2016), caused me to regard a once-passionate project as from a distant place. The distance spun out from a sentence on the first page: "For the Chŏn family *kut* one must imagine a traditional Korean country house." In 1978, just returned from fieldwork and writing my dissertation at a desk in New York, I saw in my mind's eye the wall-enclosed houses of rural Kyŏnggi Province with their open verandas and broad front courtyards, each house with its big front gate. Like most anthropologists, I was writing from memories that were both recent and intense, an act of reportage. When I had first visited Enduring Pine Village, in 1971, the houses had straw thatch roofs. When I returned for fieldwork five years later, these had only recently been replaced by far less picturesque slate or corrugated/iron as part of a New Community Movement rural development campaign. This was a changing landscape but, as if in the eye of a storm, I was nearly oblivious to the velocity of the transformation. When I wrote "one must imagine a traditional Korean house," I was using "traditional" as a distinguishing diachronic adjective. In South Korea in the 1970s, there were "traditional" houses and "modern" or "Western-style" bungalow houses and some, but still relatively few, new blocks of high rise apartments. Most rural houses were traditional houses, and most houses in low-rise urban neighborhoods followed their general floorplan in more restricted space. Reading these words today, the "*traditional*" of "traditional houses" marks past time, the stuff of nostalgia found in a few intentionally preserved neighborhoods and villages as sites of tourist consumption. When I wrote, this was how my village subjects lived. The traditional Korean house of 1970s Kyŏnggi Province, backdrop to the world of shaman ritual that I described in my first book, was also a threshold to what I saw and understood there, as I will explain subsequently. This chapter, then, is an exercise in time travel over the space of four decades, an accounting of why I framed a project on the gendered practice of Korean

shaman ritual the way I did back then and how such a project might look different today.

A research question: how did the women get away with it?

When people ask me how I happened to study shamans, I tell the following story: When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in South Korea in the early 1970s, I found myself teaching English to performers of Pongsan masked dance drama, some of them refugees from Hwanghae Province, now in North Korea. In the dancers' company, I went one day to a Hwanghae *kut*, a major shaman ritual performed by a group of well-regarded older Hwanghae *mansin* and a then–young and beautiful Kim Geum-Hwa who would, a decade later, become a National Treasure[1] shaman and a media sensation. I experienced that first *kut* as an explosion of color, percussive music, theatrics, and feats "at odds with the normal" (Taussig 2009, 8), and I was drawn in. But what really caught my attention was that all of the shamans I saw that day were women. Male *mansin* existed but were a distinct minority. I was not finding it easy to be female in South Korea in the early 1970s. "Man is respected and woman abased, and this is Confucian culture"; so I had been told over and over again. The anthropology that I had learned as an undergraduate promised that if I were patient enough to really understand how things worked, it would all make sense. But the *kut* seemed to turn these Confucian assumptions on their head.

Women were at the center of the action, both *mansin* in bright silk costumes who spoke with the authority of the gods and seemingly ordinary women who served as the gods' interlocutors – joking, laughing, weeping, and sometimes shouting back at the gods themselves. For once, it was the men who huddled in the corners. A god in a bright scarlet robe and a high-crowned hat pulled the master of the house by the ear, drew him into the center of the action, and gave him a tongue-lashing. That moment changed my life. It was clear, even to me with my then-limited understanding of spoken Korean, that the god was not pleased with the behavior of the master of the house. "I can study this," I thought. My gender would not get in the way, as it had seemed to limit me in nearly every other domain of South Korean life. Being a woman among women might even be an advantage. How was it that these shamans were women, dressed in bright robes and speaking with divine authority? How did they get away with it?

When I began graduate school in 1973, it was a very good moment for a young scholar who wanted to understand "how women got away with it," or more broadly, in the language we used then, how an understanding of women's culture might reshape an understanding of any culture. At Columbia, what we then called "the anthropology of women" – not yet the anthropology of gender – was very new, and the literature was

sparse. Women anthropologists in graduate school in the 1970s felt that we were on the edge of an important trend. In retrospect, we *were* on the edge of an important trend, and so successful that no one really remembers how absent women had been from most ethnographies before the 1970s. There were a few exceptions, and we read them voraciously: Margaret Mead of course and a handful of other books written by and about women. We all read Rosaldo and Lamphere's *Women, Culture, and Society* (1974) hot off the press. Margery Wolf's *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (1972) was important for those of us who would work in East Asia. It turned our understanding of the much-studied Chinese family (in Taiwan) inside out and showed how some basic social practices looked different when seen through the perspectives, experiences, and aspirations of wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law. If there is any one book that shaped my own approach to ethnography and helped me to craft the project that eventually became *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* (1985), it would be *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*.

In thinking about influential books that I encountered in graduate school, I should also express my gratitude to the British anthropologist I.M. Lewis for publishing a book that really made me mad. That book was *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Lewis 1971). In *Ecstatic Religion*, Lewis makes an elegantly simple and gendered case: "shamans" are found in simple societies without strong centralized political control. Here "shamanism" constitutes the "main morality religion," and the shaman, a figure of authority, fear and respect, is, of course, a man. Possession cults appear in this text as the shaman's mirror image, peripheral activities found in complex societies and embraced by socially marginal people, especially women. Possession cults, in Lewis' view, were an oblique means of making claims on the dominant social order. In the *zar* cult that Lewis studied (1966) and in other African ethnographies of spirit cults which he cited (Harris 1957; Messing 1958; Onwuejeogwu 1969), women and other marginals were described as using possession to demand treats and luxury goods, temporarily enjoying the fantasy of empowerment. Superficially, the model fit Korea; fit so well that some Korea scholars invoke I.M. Lewis to this day. Most successfully, Youngsook Kim Harvey (1979) offered biographical portraits of six articulate, intelligent *mansin* who described histories of personal injustice meted against them as daughters and wives and argued convincingly that becoming a *mansin* was the most accessible career path for their otherwise thwarted lives. And yet, was women's marginality a sufficient explanation for the whole phenomenon? Were the woman in the red silk robe and her female interlocutors merely enacting a ritual rebellion that was of little social consequence beyond the functionality of an emotional safety valve? Were the modernists correct in considering the *kut*, in all of its theatrical splendor, just some superstitious thing that benighted Korean women did?

Spirit medium or shaman?

Yes, gender inequality was obvious in every aspect of Korean life. It seeps through the pages of my first book. And who could deny that *kut* were opportunities for village women to have a good time in the company of other women? Yes, shamans were themselves social marginals, officially designated outcasts in dynastic times who, even in the 1970s, had trouble marrying off their children. And yet, two aspects of Lewis' tidy formulation troubled me. First, his argument was circular: women are peripheral, marginal social beings/women participate in possession cults/possession activities are peripheral because women are socially marginal. How do we know that women are marginal? Because they do things like participating in possession cults. "Women," "marginality," and even "possession" were broadly glossed. Second, even my superficial acquaintance with *mansin* before graduate school, and the things I was reading about them in the works of Korean folklorists seemed to more neatly fit the characterization of "shaman" than that of the spirit mediums or possession cult devotees whom Lewis and others described as passive vessels, puppets animated by spirits.

If these possession cults were to be construed as a kind of therapy, then the mediums themselves were the intended beneficiaries of ritual practice, the equivalent of patients as seen through the lens of psychological or medical analysis. Most shamans and most spirit mediums have in common the claim that they have been chosen and tormented by the spirits/gods/ancestors, forced to acknowledge a divine or demonic calling that compelled them to embrace this identity. In the possession cults that Lewis had seen in North Africa, women engaged in the *zār* cult as personal therapy to manage the spirits who were making claims on them. This was a passive possession, the entranced woman controlled by the spirit in a trance experience orchestrated by a ritual specialist, usually a male ritual specialist, who was not possessed.[2] Shamans, by contrast, are fully realized religious practitioners, agentive doers engaging the spirits on behalf of the community, and so did *mansin* seem to be. On the gods' (*sin*) authority, *mansin* divine, exorcise, and heal as agents acting on behalf of clients, client households, villages, and, in dynastic times, the nation. In Shirokogoroff's term, they are, with other shamans, "masters of the spirits" (Shirokogoroff 1935; Hamayon 1990; and for Korea, Walraven 2009). Granted, Shirokogoroff's "mastery" might be an overstatement in the Korean case because the relationship between a *mansin* and a god is explicitly hierarchical, as is the relationship between human and god in most manifestations of East Asian popular religion. The gods represent powerful beings – kings, generals, high buddhas from the mountains. A god with the power to bestow good fortune is a god with the power to demand. The skilled *mansin* is in the role of a canny courtier, a broker who persuades, entertains, and entices the gods to look favorably on her petitions, calling on her guardian gods to empower her so that she may drive inauspicious forces from her clients' path, placate their restless ghosts

and ancestors, and open their gates of good fortune. These are things that I would come to learn through fieldwork, but it was already obvious that the *mansin* were religious actors who wielded agency not for the sake of their own thwarted desires but on behalf of followers who sought them out and compensated them for the work they did.

This notion of a professionalized shamanship, and the attendant onus of possible exploitation, already complicates the notion of shamans as typical of "main morality religions" in what we once called "simple societies" of hunters, gatherers, herders, and horticulturalists. In Korea and much of the rest of Asia, history did not, in Sherry Ortner's term, "arrive, like a ship, from outside the society in question" (1984, 143). Rather, *mansin* had long since accommodated different iterations of a state society, cohabiting with Buddhist and Confucian worldviews for many centuries, absorbing, among other things, notions of moral behavior, cosmology, imagery, bits of ritual business, and the underworld as a place of judgment and punishment. Modernity, both before, during, and after Korea's colonial experience (1910–1945), would target shamans as agents of superstition, as in other places, but the object of attack was far from a primitive survival. The *mansin* had been shaped by their long experience inside the Korean Kingdom, and they would prove themselves to be extremely tenacious and adaptive in a modern and post-modern Korea as well (e.g. Kendall 2009; Kim 2001; Kwon and Park 2018). The spirits that *mansin* engage were not the animal energies that empowered Siberian shamans in classic accounts or the jaguar spirits that cause Amazonian shamans to crave human flesh. Rather, the imagery of the premodern state is widely deployed as an idiom of divine power in Korea, as in many other Asian settings where gods appear in the trappings of antique courts and armies (e.g. Wolf 1974 for China; Nguyễn 2015; Pham 2009 for Vietnam). Today, with a better recognition of shamans inside histories (Thomas and Humphrey 1994) and a broader appreciation of their multiplex modes of operation per accounts in this volume, it is not difficult to appreciate the *mansin* as one among many variations within a larger conversation about "shamans." This was less so when I began writing about them. At that time, Eliade's (1964) writings, which had largely revived scholarly interest in shamans, were causing Korean researchers to either stuff their subjects into procrustean notions of ecstatic trance and soul journeys (e.g. Kim 1981) or, in reaction, to resist the notion of a Korean "shaman" altogether (Yim 1970).

A research strategy

My early encounters with *mansin* had given me an ethnographic passion. *Ecstatic Religion*, with its uncomfortable generalizations, gave me the intellectual curiosity to engage with questions that resonated beyond Korea, something that I had been told all good anthropology projects must do if they were to be funded and ultimately published as a book. For me, the

critical question turned on Lewis' characterizations of marginality and symbolic redress: did the rituals that *mansin* performed reflect problems particular to women and thus to the disadvantaged status of women? Did they give women the space to articulate grievances against a male-defined social order? Or not? Or maybe sometimes, but not all of the time? Significantly, I did not question the category "women" per se, as one reviewer of my first book would critically and appropriately note (Ohnuki-Tierney 1989). It was all too easy in the anthropology of forty years ago to believe that a study of some women in villages in a particular corner of Kyŏnggi Province would stand for "Korean women." In the context of that first book, "women" were the shamans' clients.

I set out to learn why a broad universe of women visited *mansin*. I would observe rituals and talk to the women who sponsored them. I would follow the shamans' clients over a period of time and examine how their particular problems were addressed in the rituals they sponsored. I would do a community survey, asking a broad sample of village women about their experiences of marriage, childbirth, family histories, and household economies as background to the circumstances that brought them to seek a shaman's aid. And I would supplement the formal interviews with earfuls of village gossip and observation over an extended residence. In other words, I would do a village study in the old sense of the term in the place I call "Enduring Pine Village" in a time when nearly half of the South Korean population still lived in villages and most anthropologists – Korean, Japanese, and Western – did their fieldwork in the Korean countryside.

The problem with structuralism

At Columbia in the early 1970s, structuralism was an ascendant faction of theoretical endeavor, duking it out with the theretofore-hegemonic cultural materialism of the Columbia School. Structuralism assumed that systematic variations between societies – differences in the ways societies organized relationships of kinship, gender, and space – could be understood as sequences of balanced oppositions or contrasts. Variations between societies with respect to such things as inheritance, marriage, and residence patterns would be reflected in systematic variations in gender relations and ritual activity. Lewis' *Ecstatic Religion* was a structuralist interpretation, a yin/yang juxtaposition of "women" and "men," "shamanism" and "possession," "main morality religions" and "peripheral cults." Structuralism was a seductive paradigm for studies of Korean society where *yin* and *yang* (in Korean: *ŭm/yang*) were already a part of the local cosmology and also richly gendered. Early accounts of Korean society had been structuralist before the term, most notably Akiba Takashi's study of Korean folkways that juxtaposed Confucian ancestor worship in the masculine sphere with rituals performed by women and female shamans (Akiba 1957). Vincent Brandt's *A Korean Village between Farm and Sea* (Brandt 1971) broadened

the comparative frame, dichotomizing a hierarchical, elite Confucian *yangban* ethos, marked by formalism and restraint, and the more spontaneous and egalitarian behavior of non-*yangban* but noting that ethos might shift with social context. Brandt offered a summarizing contrast that followed upon Akiba's characterization, the sedate behavior of a Confucian scholar juxtaposed with the ecstatic dancing of a female shaman. Structuralism was seductive, and the handful of Korea anthropologists in my cohort found it an appropriate tool for approaching Korean society, particularly when we delved into popular religion among village conversation partners who seemed happy to discuss questions of cosmology and kinship.[3] In my own work, I would fight a structuralist analysis with a structuralist analysis.

The structuralist paradigm was, in retrospect, the greatest weakness of *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*. If I could make any one single change in the book today, I would eliminate the final chapter, a broad comparison of "families" and "households," "family ritual" and "household ritual," "women" and "men" across "China," "Japan," and "Korea" – all now in fright quotes. At the time, it was an acceptably ambitious analysis and probably what enabled me to get the book published. Anthropology today is far more cognizant of differences within societies, within single villages, up and down the social spectrum, and across time. I do not think that what I said was wrong so much as grossly overgeneralized: women and men, Korea, China, and Japan. Unfortunately, an independent publication of the summary argument seems to be my most-read publication on academia.com.

Structuralism led me to juxtapose the ritual activities of men and women, but fieldwork enabled me to see these domains not as oppositional but complementary, something closer to the actual East Asian notion of yin and yang as mutually constituting. This would be my central argument, a riposte to ideas of "marginalization." Rather, the *mansin*'s rituals were a space for addressing the afflictions that happened to both women and men inside Korean households and with the larger prospects of the household itself. As a writing strategy, I began the book with a description of one particular *kut* that I would return to as a reference point throughout my discussion. In the Chŏn family *kut*, as in some other *kut*, the primary afflicted subject was the old man, not a woman, and the son's career prospects were also a matter of concern. This *kut*, like most others, addressed the broad anxieties of household and kin. The particular afflictions of women were at the center of some other *kut*, and I mentioned these in my text, including, most dramatically, the story of Mrs. Min, a woman whose fit of sudden insanity occasioned sympathy for her hard life and the loss of her male babies, a *kut* I described in greater detail in my first scholarly publication (Kendall 1977, 2009, 34–50). Had I made Mrs. Min's *kut*, instead of the Chŏn family *kut*, the cornerstone example of *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*, would it have supported an *Ecstatic Religion* sort of interpretation? Only if it had it stood alone: Mrs. Min without Mr. Chŏn and without many, many

other examples of male as well as female affliction. And had I used even this single case study, it would only have stood if the lens had been selective, ignoring how even amid the crisis prompted by a madwoman, the assembled family also petitioned the gods and ancestors for a variety of collective concerns from the husband's gambling to the daughter's marriage prospects and with some words of wisdom for her husband's married sisters and brother's wife. For this was what *kut* were ultimately all about, the health, harmony, and prosperity of *households*; those who dwelled within them; and their close kin; the objectives were collective, not adversarial.

But then why were most of the shamans and the primary sponsors women?

Confucian precept tells us that man is "outside" and woman "inside" and that this is the proper relationship of the sexes, reflected in traditional domestic spatial relationships. One is tempted to read this aphorism as a distinction between public and private in a modern middle-class Western sense – which would become a modern middle-class East Asian sense – of bread-winning men and stay-at-home housewives, but this is an anachronistic reading of how most Koreans lived well into the 20th century (Kendall 2002). The ideographs link "outside" not with the working life of a bread-winning husband – the household was a unit of both production and consumption – but with formality, with how one presents oneself in the world, with public face. "Inside" implies intimacy and the informality that goes with intimacy. Inside/outside is a statement of complementarity rather than of opposition. The rituals that men have traditionally performed in Korea – ancestor veneration and related lineage rites – are public displays of propriety, moral statements about proper kinship relations. Women and female shamans take care of the messy stuff of life, when the domestic realm needs to be brought back into harmony with its gods and ancestors. Women have less face to risk – I would hazard that this is why Korean women have been so active in the real estate market and in both amateur and professional matchmaking. Women can haggle, women can risk a rebuff. But that is about as far as I dare go with grand generalizations, and I am far less enthused about making them than I used to be, particularly when they project historical precepts onto contemporary practice.

The question of history

Structuralism was also ahistorical; structural contrasts worked in synchronicity and with the tacit implication that they had been in a balanced stasis for a long time. Structuralism succumbed, sometime in the 1980s, to a historical turn in anthropological practice. I would like to think that I was a faithful ethnographer and that whatever my interpretive bent, I painted a reasonable portrait of Enduring Pine Village as it existed in the mid-1970s, with its

New Community Movement Hall and the Christian Church, with Korean War memories inflecting the evocations of ghosts and ancestors, with village children going off to work in urban factories, land sold to finance taxi cabs, and new residents from nearby military installations. A television set was very present in my description of an exorcism. Some of the shamans' clients, and consequently my subjects, were petty entrepreneurs rather than farmers. But I did not focus, in any substantive way, on the enormous changes that were enveloping South Korean society in the 1970s. In the moment, I did not fully appreciate them. My analysis of women's ritual assumed a rural agricultural household as a unit of production and consumption, a way of life that would soon nearly disappear. That 1970s moment is now nostalgically evoked in the secondary title of the Korean-language edition of my book, *Korean women's ritual practices in the 1970s* (*1970 nyŏndae han'guk yŏsŏngŭi ŭiryejŏk silch'ŏn*). Likewise, I was more interested in finding parallels between village ethnography and the old Confucian society of the Chosŏn period than in exploring how village life and women's lives had been affected by the colonial order that ended in 1945, the Korean War, postwar poverty, and the developmental projects initiated by the Park Chung-hee regime which were current at the time of my fieldwork. Engaging these different strata of social history would have productively muddled my idea of "Korea" as a unit of comparative analysis, inhibiting the production of that final comparative chapter. At the time, I shared in the fantasy held then by many city South Koreans that the village world was, in some sense, a more authentic Korea. Village Korea could, it seemed, be compared with ethnographies of rural Japan and a rural China known then primarily through postwar ethnographies of Taiwan. When I returned to South Korea in 1983, I realized that even rural Korea has never stood still. Change became the engine of my second major research project, a study of marriage and the rituals surrounding it over a period of nearly 100 years. The engine of change would also drive my return to research on shamans in the 1990s and my 2009 book, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF*. But it is always easier to problematize change in a second and third project, where change has become a part of one's own experience.

The problem with "trance"

Our language also changes. On re-reading *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* against Kim Seong-nae and Kim Dong-Kyu's translation, I was chagrined to note the number of times I used the word "trance" to describe a shaman speaking and acting for the gods in the middle of a *kut*. In my dissertation and in early drafts of the book, I had not been comfortable with this word. I had used the verb "manifest," meaning to display or show the gods' presence by one's acts or appearance. I knew that I did not yet completely understand what the shamans were actually experiencing during *kut* apart from the basic fact that they were expressing the gods'

moods, desires, and prognostications; that they sometimes saw, heard, and felt things which they read as divine inspiration; and that these actions had consequences for their clients. From what I saw and what they told me afterward, something was going on, but the nature of that something, what they were actually doing and experiencing, was unclear to me when I tried to write it out. In the field, I had thought of the gods and ancestors as characters in my story along with the shamans and their clients. When I discussed what had happened during a *kut* with my *mansin* interlocutors, we spoke of them as presences, characters in the drama. How shamans experienced the gods and ancestors during these encounters had not been a pressing question until I began to write up my material back in New York and needed to find the right descriptive verb.

One of the reviewers of my book manuscript did not like the word "manifest" and complained that it was too vague; were the gods present or was the shaman "just acting"? Whatever the shamans were experiencing, I knew that they were not "just acting," at least not all of the time. I changed the word to "trance," bowing to common practice, not wanting to imply that my subjects were charlatans and anxious to please a gate-keeper. This was a mistake.

Subsequent fieldwork, more conversations with *mansin* and insightful colleagues, and especially work on the film *An Initiation* Kut *for a Korean Shaman*, have given me a better sense of what actually happens when shamans speak for the gods. I am now convinced that "manifest" *is* the proper word. The gods give the *mansin* inspiration (what they call *myŏnggi*), enabling her to sense their presence and will through visions, intuitions, dreams, and bodily signs. What results is not a one-on-one possession but an inspired modeling of gestures and words to match the gods' intentions. Even where inspiration is insufficient, the *mansin* must correctly transmit the gods' will or risk divine punishment. This is not "just acting"; the stakes in getting it right are high, either the gods are pleased and the outcome of the *kut* is auspicious, or the *mansin* fails and bad things happen (Kendall et al. 2015, 82–84).

Roberte Hamayon (1993) argues that given the imprecision of the word "trance," covering a range of experiences, we might be better off discarding it completely. I agree with her line of reasoning but hold that the word still has its uses, though "trance" is not a good descriptor for what *mansin* experience during *kut*. This distinction became clear to me when I reviewed old slides. During an interlude in a *kut*, clients borrow the *mansin's* costumes and dance to a mild euphoria. Occasionally, very occasionally, a client who is dancing is taken over by her body-governing god and either shouts out complaints in the persona of an angry spirit or mimics the actions of a shaman incarnating a god. This is rare; I saw it only three times during a year and a half of fieldwork and once again, some years later, on a random visit to a commercial shrine. When I looked at the slides from one of these occasions, I noticed the glazed expression on the face of the woman who had,

to everyone's amusement, been drawn into mimicking the actions of a *mansin* manifesting the spirit warrior, offering divination flags to the amused participants and collecting small bits of cash. I have subsequently seen this glassy-eyed stare in other places, when a woman spectator on the sidelines of a spirit medium ritual in Vietnam began to rock back and forth or on several different ritual occasions in Bali when trancers shouted, writhed, or fell limp, flexing their hands in dance postures. I would safely call this "trance," a dissociative state that in these contexts could be called "possession trance" (cf. Bourguignon 1976). In a *mansin's* interpretation, the client who had acted the part of a Spirit Warrior had a strong personal body-governing Spirit Warrior, a personal spirit who was particularly present when the woman danced in appropriate costume at *kut*. She did not consider this woman a *mansin* or even a potential *mansin* and did not consider the brief and gentle possession as requiring an exorcism. I compared this old slide to one of a shaman manifesting this same god with a bold, wide-eyed expression, something the client experiences as a bold stare. Korean participants, who normally avoid an excess of eye contact, find this glaring engagement unsettling, as an encounter with a demanding god might be. The painted images of gods that hang above the *mansin*'s altar are similarly unsettling for the disproportionately large, bold eyes on the image that seem ever-focused on the spectator.

A *mansin manifests* gods; she acts as their prosthesis in the *kut*, speaking in the god's voice and bearing the god's demeanor with her body. There is a great deal of variation from shaman to shaman and from *kut* to *kut* with respect to what a *mansin* experiences; the kind and degree of inspiration she feels (or not); and the aural cues, bodily sensations, and visions she receives from the gods (or not). What matters is that the *mansin* is able to transmit divine presence, intention, and will to the client. This is important to the god who has urgent business with the client, important to the *mansin* who will be punished by the gods if she fails, and consequential for the client who will suffer if the *mansin* fails. "Manifest" remains the best word I can think of for what the *mansin* does. I should have trusted my own first instincts.

A medical anthropology moment

The book bears the mark of its time in other ways that I find less embarrassing in retrospect than those cited previously. From the days of the missionaries into the rural reforms of the Park Chung-hee era (1961–1979), Korean intellectuals had juxtaposed shamans and doctors, the one superstitious, the other modern; the one a waste of resources, the other a means to possible healing. It was an either/or proposition: ignorant, superstitious people went to shamans; modern, progressive people went to Western-style doctors. I hear this still. I hear it from my fictive little sister who was a child in Enduring Pine Village when I did my fieldwork. But by the 1970s, medical anthropologists had begun to dispute the idea of doctors and indigenous

healers as "either/or." Studies, including some done in South Korea by Soon-young Yoon (1976), Dorothea Sich (1978), and others, showed that people routinely used many different kinds of healers, sometimes to treat the same medical problem. In Enduring Pine Village, the shaman was never a substitute for modern medicine, usually first from a pharmacy and then a clinic or a hospital, sometimes with acupuncture and herbal medicine in the mix. *Persistent* problems, bundles of different kinds of problems – medical, domestic, financial – or sudden and seemingly inexplicable problems, such as a sudden fit of madness, were reasons to consult a shaman. The *mansin* themselves ingested large quantities of patent medicine, visited pharmacies and clinics, used Chinese herbs and acupuncture treatments, and were keen to swap medical advice. Even the gods urged biomedical treatment, sometimes with specific directions, such as "Seek a pharmacy in the West. If you go west you will find a pharmacist with a thin face. If you get the medicine from that pharmacist, you will be healed." I realized on rereading how very present the concerns of medical anthropology were when I conducted my interviews and made my field observations, and I am glad that I recorded them.

The village study

Doing fieldwork in a rural village was a part of the anthropological romance in the 1970s. I knew very well when I planned my project that *mansin* were active in the city. I had first encountered them in Seoul, and one held frequent *kut* just down the lane from my boarding house in the neighborhood of Yonsei University where I taught English as a Peace Corps volunteer. I could have done fieldwork in Seoul and written a creditable dissertation. Chungmoo Choi would do a spectacular study of urban shamans only a few years later, asking a creative set of fresh questions (1989a, 1989b, 1991). My rationale for village fieldwork was that by living in a village, I could garner a better sense of background, both for specific instances of ritual practice and with a fuller sense of women's lives gained by living among them. This was true. From the 1990s forward, I would confront the challenges of doing fieldwork with busy and far more reticent urban subjects. In Enduring Pine Village in the 1970s, there were few secrets and lots of opportunities to gossip; gossip was entertainment in a time before every household had a television and broadcast hours were limited. In those days, an American who spoke far from perfect Korean was amusing rather than tedious. In a more private urban world, I would likely not have been able to focus on clients the way I did, on the specific problems they brought to *mansin* and on the ways their relationships with a *mansin* developed over more than a year.

In the city, even in the 1970s, most *kut* were performed not in private homes but in the *mansin*'s own shrine or in a commercial shrine (*kuttang*). Today nearly all *kut* are performed in commercial *kuttang*. In the countryside, *kut* unfolded in rural households, beginning outside the gate, entering the courtyard, moving up onto the veranda, into the inner room, out again

to the veranda, down to the courtyard, around the house site, and out the gate again. As I watched them, from house to house and *kut* to *kut*, I found myself thinking of the conjunction between anthropologist Victor Turner's work on ritual process (1968, 1969) and *avant-garde* theater director and theorist Richard Schechner's (1985) ideas about environmental theater. Turner encouraged students of ritual to study the social field where ritual activity takes place. What situations prompt the holding of a ritual? How are the precipitating problems addressed inside the ritual itself? How does the flow of ritual action cause participants to engage symbolically and emotionally in transforming their situation? In Turner's writing, movement through time, space, and a sequence of symbolically and emotionally potent ritual engagements worked a transformative effect from a condition of affliction to healing. Schechner's "environmental theater" also helped me to see this, theater not restricted to a theatrical stage or even to a single space, but moving, like Turner's descriptions of Ndembu ritual. *Avant-garde* theater, as I had seen it in New York in the 1970s, sometimes did this by forcing the audience out of their seats. Schechner took inspiration from the Ramlila plays of North India that move through an entire city over several days until an epic tale of Indian gods is done and the Bavarian Passion Play of Oberammergau where the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ are performed on open stages throughout the city in biblical "real time." I wrote the *kut* for the Chŏn family and the *kut* for the temporarily crazy Mrs. Min as such a process, moving in the direction of healing as the *kut* moved through the physical structure of the house, the *kut* as ritual theater, not something artificial, but theater as something alive and powerful, enacted in and through temporal space, and with a spatial logic.

The gods were initially invoked outside the main house gate and invited into the compound and up onto the veranda where most of the action took place. The Seven Stars and the Mountain God – gods who inhabit pure, high space – received their offerings on the high storage platform outside the house and appeared beside them. The Birth Grandmother, concerned with conception and childbirth, appeared in the inner room of the house. As the ritual unfolded, gods appeared, each in turn, complained of past neglect, bargained for cash, and, having been won over, gave lavish promises of succor and blessing. These were predictable encounters interspersed with personalized bits of recent family history, flashes of humor and grief from the gods and ancestors, and sometimes uncanny happenstances. When the *kut* reached its climax, the action began to move away from the house again. The Supernatural Official of the house site secured the boundaries, spilling cups of wine around the periphery. Ghosts and other unclean and troublesome entities were sent off at the main house gate, and the physical residue of the *kut* – wispy clothing offered to the ancestors and shreds of cloth torn to break the hold of ghosts – was carried away from the house in an auspicious direction and burned. A *mansin* confirmed the expulsion of negative forces with the cast of a knife, the tip pointing away from the open gate. So

organically obvious did this all seem that I neglected to adequately cite the two authors who had caused me to see it and whose influence is belatedly acknowledged here.

The house and house site was an environmental theater of the household, a social space inhabited by both women and men but (in structuralist terms) more nearly women's sphere than the "family," defined by patrilineal and patrilocal connections (Freedman 1979 for China). Women's lives bespoke not just the enclosure of the house as a place of domestic labor and nurturance but a fluidity of entrances and exits: women left one home as daughters and joined another as wives and daughters-in-law, bringing associations and connections with them. Where the world of ancestor rites acknowledged male-defined kinship, fathers' ascending generations of fathers honored by son's descending generations of sons, the world of *kut* evoked broader connections. Some gods, like the Great Spirit Grandmother who was the primary source of mischief in the Chŏn family *kut* of my opening chapter (Kendall 1985, 1–22), followed a woman from her natal home and affected the fortunes of the husband's family when she married in. A woman's own dead parents or siblings would often appear along with the ancestors of her husband's family during the ancestors' sequence of a *kut*. My interest in gender made me very attentive to this, struggling to record the precise kinship relationship of each weeping ancestral presence. "Grandmother has come, grandmother has come," but whose grandmother? Members of *mansin* team quickly caught on to my interest and sometimes helped me by shouting my question at their lachrymose colleague, "Are you 'father's mother' or 'mother's mother'?"

In the middle of my fieldwork, I returned briefly to New York and had a conversation with my advisor, Myron L. Cohen, who asked me how many *kut* I had seen. By that time, I had seen dozens. He kindly suggested that perhaps I could stop going to *kut* since after all, weren't they all the same? It was a productive question that sharpened my understanding of what I had been seeing. No, they were not the same, even though the sequences and much of the business was predictable; they were filled with different stories, different crises, different histories of relationships with gods and ancestors. Some gods were more salient in some families owing to their particular histories, remembered or reconstructed through a *mansin's* visions: the ancestor who carried a knife and served in the palace, the grandmother who venerated the Seven Stars such that her identity was merged with theirs when the god appeared in *kut*, the shaman ancestress. Such ancestors acquired the status of gods, powerful gods who periodically demanded attention, and these gods were likely to make particularly vivid appearances when these families held their *kut*. I would not stop going to *kut*. Turner's foregrounding of the dramas of Ndembu ritual in fields of intimate and broader circumstance and my exposure to a case-history driven literature in medical anthropology encouraged me to see and engage difference within the logic of shaman practice and the particular skill of *mansin* who made these encounters

emotionally resonant. Happy families are all alike; unhappy families hold *kut*, to paraphrase Tolstoy.

If I had not lived in Enduring Pine Village and traveled with *mansin* through the countryside of Kyŏnggi Province, lived in and visited houses that were still built with open verandas facing courtyards surrounded by walls and accessed through imposing gateways, I might never have seen the connection between the physical structure of the house and the social dynamics of the household as a ritual unit. I might not have written about these things in quite this way, and they are not written anywhere else. The life of the small family farm that went with the traditional house, the rural household as a social, economic, and spiritual unit is mostly gone now. Few South Koreans live that way today. The closest equivalent to self-sustaining rural households are small family business households, and it is no accident that one often finds such households involved in shaman rituals (Kendall 1996, 2009, 129–153).

The power of the *kut* was in making the household's own gods and ancestors *effectively present*, causing the client family to laugh and weep in their confrontations with gods and ancestors, to feel that something had been transacted and fortunes transformed. A good shaman, a team of good shamans, could create this sense of engagement, working with the clients, bringing them through the sequence of god after god, ancestor after ancestor, so that at the end of the *kut*, they would feel purged and lightened. The folkloric descriptions of *kut* that I had read before fieldwork and that are, in some quarters, still being written, are fixed, archetypal sequences of god appearances, sometimes with listings of costumes, offerings, and paraphernalia. *Mansin* also reproduced these lists for me, but these were the bare bones of what I was actually seeing them enact. When I turned to writing up my observations of *kut*, I tried to write them as alive, infinitely variable in all of their predictability, and intimate in their knowledge of sponsoring families, linking current misfortune with histories of particularly powerful household gods, active ancestors, and angry ghosts flowing from both paternal and maternal bonds. The *kut's* power as ritual theater – when the *kut* was effectively performed – gave it credibility as a transformative process. This assumed skillful, inspired manifestations on the part of the *mansin*. I would like to think that my descriptions of *kut* as a space of tears and bawdy humor encouraged some younger observers of *kut* to write in ways that do justice to their material.

Concluding remarks

What are the lessons of this exercise in time travel? First, it is a reminder that all theory has a shelf life. One of my professors, Robert F. Murphy, used to say, "we will be remembered for our ethnography." In other words, academic trends and interests come and go, the structuralist moment is long gone, but an account of a people in a time and place remains as

history. A village study that essentialized "Korean women" is surely dated in a moment when we have become sensitized to the fluidity and contingency of gender itself. And if theory has a limited shelf life, any South Korean "now" has almost no shelf life at all. Since the 1980s, anthropological practice has been far more cognizant of the pasts, colonial and its preludes and postscripts, that shape the ethnographic presents of our subjects. But with the irony of time, what I wrote about Enduring Pine Village in the ethnographic present of the 1970s returns as a work of recent history. As ethnography, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* accomplishes what I set out to do, acknowledging the agency of female shamans and housewives in ritual activities that were neither marginal nor redressive attacks on a male-dominant order. I did this through a detailed knowledge of relationships between *mansin*, gods, and households that was not recorded elsewhere. An interpretation enabled by extended observations of *kut* in old country houses in the context of long-term fieldwork sheds some light on how and why *kut* work the way that they do and what contemporary *kut*, held in the transformed space of a commercial shrine room, still try to accomplish. A second realization is that some theoretical tools, particularly those that encourage deeper looking, thinking, and engagement with one's subjects, might be productive of ethnographies that outlast the fashions attending their birth. I would like to think that *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*, in print for more than thirty years, is such a work. Insights from medical anthropology, emergent gender studies, ideas about ritual as process and ritual space as environmental theater, and, yes, the structuralists' attention to kinship and ritual in a Korean village world where these things were still a matters of consequence helped me to make sense of a year and a half of observation, conversation, and a bundle of fieldnotes and photographs. My subsequent encounters with Korean *mansin* would lead me to a deepening appreciation of their engagement with the raw material of quicksilver human experience in a changing South Korea.

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A preliminary version of this chapter appears in Korean in Seong-nae Kim and Dong-Kyu Kim's (Kendall 2016) translation of *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*.

Notes

1 Her technical title, *poyuja*, literally means "one who bears," in other words, a bearer of intangible national heritage, but at the time of her appointment, she and others so designated favored the journalistic term *In'gan Munhwaje,* "Human Cultural Treasure."

2 Lewis' characterization of the *zār* would be complexified by subsequent studies (Boddy 1989; Kenyon 2012), and Lewis himself would subsequently broaden

his characterization of both shamans (1993) and female mediums (1990), albeit without abandoning his central argument regarding female marginalization and redressive strategies but making an important shift from complex societies to organized religions as the defining context for the marginalization of spirit possession activities.

3 See, for example, Janelli and Yim Janelli (1982) and the several contributions to the edited volume *Religion and Ritual in Korean Society* (Kendall and Dix 1987).

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5 Shamanism and gender (in)equality in South and South-East Asia

The Chepang of Nepal and the Semang-Negrito of Peninsular Malaysia

Diana Riboli

Introduction

The chapter focuses on the role of female shamanism in egalitarian South and Southeast Asian societies. The main question addressed is if gender equality follows similar rules in social and religious contexts.

In anthropological literature, egalitarian societies are described as foraging nomadic or semi-nomadic groups where the social order is maintained by moral and ethical rules and by sharing in particular. In these groups, the perceptions of property and private property – despite not being totally absent – are shaped in a very different manner in comparison with groups with an economy based on other livelihood systems (Vermylen and van der Horst 2007; Widlok and Tadesse 2005; Morrison and Junker 2002; Keen and Yamada 2001; Lee and Daly 1999; Woodburn 1998, 1982, 1980). Although we should keep in mind that the existence of a perfect egalitarianism is questionable, it is true that acephalous societies' organization and ethical code are based on principles of equality among all individuals regardless of their age and gender. Despite the fact that nowadays, social groups with an economy entirely based on the wild products offered by the natural environment are very rare, several ethnic groups in Asia, Africa and Oceania maintain the hunter-gatherers' social organization, even if their economy is now mixed and they are not conducting a nomadic (or even a semi-nomadic) lifestyle any more.

Absolute egalitarianism in human groups was probably a myth born in a western scholarly environment, although in small-scale foraging societies, gender equality in particular (or at least a certain amount of it) is undoubtedly present.[1] But do shamanic contexts mirror gender equality norms? In fact, in many hunter and gatherer societies, it seems that shamanism is mostly a male domain. Gender equality does not mean that there are no differences between the men's and the women's world, and in all societies, a certain amount of division of labour exists. In groups still depending at least in part on the natural environment, hunting is in general a male activity. For this reason, in many cases, a shaman was or is also the religious specialist leading the hunt. Therefore, it seems that in hunter-gatherer societies, male

shamanism predominates, while women shamans are rare. In certain cases, women have some shamanic knowledge (as in the case of midwives, for example), although they are, in any case, considered less powerful in comparison to men shamans. According to Mathias Guenther:

> As regards the shaman's biological gender, it is usually male among hunter-gatherers, as against hierarchical societies (such as Korea and Japan), where because of the religious marginalization of shamanism by the priesthood, a high incidence of female shamans can be found.
> (1999, 427)

Mircea Eliade, in his famous work *Le Chamanisme et les Techniques Archaïques de l'Extase* (1951), makes very limited reference to female shamanism, which, in his opinion, represents just a more recent and somehow "decadent" form of shamanism that appeared later, after the male one was already established. Recently, few scholars have argued that probably Eliade's view on female shamans contributed to the fact that for quite a long time, "anthropologists have neglected feminine religious authority" (Swenson 2009 [2005], 139).

In her book *The Woman in the Shaman's Body* (2005 [2000]), Barbara Tedlock presents a totally different theory in comparison with Eliade's, that is, the existence of an earliest female shamanism preceding the male. Although this theory seems to shift in religious context the debates about a possible matriarchy preceding the patriarchal organization of many societies, Tedlock's book opened the doors to more accurate analysis of the role of female shamanism not only in cultures where this predominates (for example, in Japan and Korea) but also among egalitarian groups.

In this chapter, I will discuss two case studies from my research projects in Nepal with the Chepang and in Peninsular Malaysia with the Jahai and the Batek (both of them Semang-Negrito groups). Of these populations, only a few groups of Batek are still leading a nomadic lifestyle in the tropical forest of Malaysia, while other groups of Batek, Jahai and Chepang are now sedentary or semi-sedentary, although they maintain most of the ethical rules and social organization of hunter-gatherer societies with a high level of gender egalitarianism.

The Chepang of Nepal

The Chepang, a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group with a population of 68,399,[2] are one of the most marginalized peoples of Nepal and face discrimination on several levels. Hunters and gatherers up to approximately fifty or sixty years ago, this population was one of the last to abandon nomadic life. When this happened, other groups had already occupied the few fertile areas of the country. Nowadays, Chepang villages are mostly scattered in secluded areas along the Mahābarāt mountain range, mostly in Makwanpur,

Dadhing and Chitwan districts. According to recent statistics, 88.16% of the population lives well below the poverty line (Lama 2018; Haughton and Khandker 2009). Most of the Hindu inhabitants of Nepal consider the Chepang – at present still an acephalous group in part depending on forest products, with a high level of gender equality – Untouchables. This is despite the fact that the legal code *Muluki Ain* (1854) ranked them in the cast of "enslavable alcohol-drinkers", one of the lowest in the hierarchy, although still a "touchable" group. Despite their marginalization in the Nepali social fabric, Chepang shamans – called *pande* in Chepang language – were, and are, considered among the most powerful in Central and Southern Nepal.

I carried out my first long-term research among the Chepang in the '90s. In 2018, I started a new research project, still ongoing, focused on the impact of massive conversation to Christianity among the same group (Riboli 2016a; Rai 2018).

My study on the Chepang was the first one focused on their ancient and rich shamanism (Riboli 2000). When, in the beginning of the '90s, before my first fieldwork, I started to collect information on them – because of the lack of scientific texts on their culture – I relied on personal communications with other local and foreign scholars working in Nepal. Most of them believed or had heard that among the Chepang, only men could become shamans. It is possible that these perceptions were based on the fact that, at the time, Eliade's theories were still predominant. Hunting was still practiced in few Chepang areas, and anthropologists considered Chepang culture very similar to those of other Nepali foraging forest people, such as the Kusunda and Raute.

Among the Chepang, hunting seems to be exclusively a male job, and one of the most important other-than-human persons in the Chepang pantheon is Namrung, the Lord of Hunting and wild animals. Namrung, a male god, was created by the divinities, and his task is to hunt for them (Riboli 2000, 127). In the past, *pande* led their companions in the hunt, a role which in part they still play today, during the annual festival called Namrung Pujā, when exclusively male hunters must offer at least one wild animal to Namrung (Riboli 2000, 213–219).

It is true that in the '90s as well as nowadays, the majority of *pande* were and are men and, in fact, I collaborated with about twenty-five male shamans but also with four women, one of whom I met in 2019, during my most recent research in Makwanpur District. What struck me most in the '90s, during my first research projects, was that the Chepang community considered at least two of the three women *pande* – Krishora Devi and Dam Maya[3] – much more powerful of their male colleagues. I found exactly the same perception about the woman *pande* I met recently whose name is Bisnu Maya.

Actually, this perception seems to be quite common in many parts of the world where male shamanism predominates. Already in 1923, Maddox highlighted that:

> while it not infrequently happens that the female idea of the shamanate prevails to such an extent that the most powerful shamans are women, and in order to make themselves more worthy in the eyes of their constituents medicine men attire themselves in female habiliments.
>
> (Maddox 1923, 90)

The female *pande* I collaborated with could perform all the ceremonies and rituals conducted by men shamans, other than killing a sacrificial animal themselves. However, this taboo does not seem to be only ceremonial, as the Chepang also observe a similar rule during normal daily activities. In general, only men are in charge of animal killing, also for alimentary and not only ritual purposes, a fact that, in itself, excludes women from hunting.

As highlighted by Hamayon (1990) and analogously to what happens in Siberian groups, women are subject to the same prohibitions that apply to hunting, for the reason that they are often impure, such as during pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation. In many parts of the world, women's blood is much more powerful than men's, although ambivalent: it represents one of the gravest dangers for the male population and one of the most (if not the most) harmful ingredient used for black magic. In this sense, women are potentially much more powerful than men, and this is the reason women chosen by other-than-human persons will be "stronger" and "more dangerous" than their male colleagues (Hamayon 1990, 446–447).

The two female *pande* I met in the '90s – both died a few years ago – were very respected, could treat even the most serious and dangerous cases and conducted funeral rituals, which only very skilful *pande* can perform.

The rest of the community and the female *pande* themselves explained the great power of women *pande* by the fact that, after the call to the profession occurred in dreams, they were kidnapped at an early age by the *ban-jhākri*. In Nepal, with this term, which literally means "the shaman of the forest", many ethnic groups indicate an other-than-human person, short and with a hairy body, who lives in the wood. This being kidnaps mostly young people in order to teach them whatever necessary for the shamanic profession. Actually, not all the *pande* experience the kidnapping, only the ones who are chosen to carry out the most difficult and dangerous tasks. The *ban-jhākri* is not alone. In fact, he is married to the *ban-jhākrini*, often called *ban-boksi* or *ban-boksini*,[4] a dangerous bloodthirsty witch, taller than her companion, with a hairy body and very long breasts. During the learning process of the shamans-to-be, the *ban-jhākri* must protect his disciples from his wife's attempts to kill and eat them (Torri 2014, 148; Riboli 2000, 84–89).

Analogous to what happens in the non-human world, quite often also in the human one, *pande*'s wives are suspected to be witches and, in any case and despite the egalitarian social order, it seems that in the Chepang community, women are much more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men.

As mentioned, women *pande* who collaborated in my research were kidnapped by the shaman of the forest. Actually, Dham Maya was the only *pande* I ever met who remembered receiving the first initiatory dreams sent to her by other-than-human persons, even before her birth, when she was still a fetus in her mother's womb. In her words:

> The most powerful *pande* are those who have been kidnapped by the *ban-jhākri*. I had been having dreams from the time in which I was in my mother's womb . . . this was my destiny created by gods. I was born a *pande*. I was able to see all the dreams I had when still in my mother's womb in other dreams I had later on. . . . I become powerful not because I wanted to, but because this is what the gods had decided. No-one can become a powerful *pande* just because they want to be.
>
> (Riboli 2000, 88)

In the same way, Bisnu Maya, the old *pande* I recently met, also told me the story of her kidnapping, highlighting the fact that only *pande* designated to be extremely powerful have similar experiences. Despite her old age, Bisnu Maya is very respected by her community and others. Almost on a daily basis, not only Chepang families but also other ethnic groups and even high-caste families require her intervention, sometimes in faraway villages, asking Bisnu Maya to celebrate rituals for the most difficult cases and, in particular, cases which could not be previously solved by other (male) *pande*. The respect and her fame are also due to the fact that she lived more than twenty years in a cave, an event that – according to Chepang beliefs – indicates her close, privileged and intimate contact with other-than-human beings.[5] Moreover, Bisnu Maya is believed to have superhuman powers, as the old *pande* spends very long periods fasting. From a very young age, before difficult rituals, she could spend more than one week drinking only a very small amount of water each day. People interpret her fasting periods as proof that Bisnu Maya doesn't need any food other than spiritual, provided to her by the *ban-jhākri* himself. In the more than twenty-five years I have spent in the field, I have never met a male *pande* with the same attributes.

Moreover, Dam Maya and Krishora Devi were believed to be among the very few *pande* able to call a tiger-spirit during particularly difficult séances, and many Chepang were sure that both women could probably even transform into a tiger themselves. This is particularly interesting, as *pande*, as well as their companions, often talk about extremely powerful tiger-shamans, stating that there were plenty of them in a faraway – often described as prehistoric – past. Nowadays, these powerful tiger-shamans are very rare or, according to different versions, extinct. I still do not know if Bisnu Maya also has this special relation with tiger-spirits.

Not only do women have the potentiality to become very powerful *pande*, they can even have the strength to refuse the shamanic call – fact almost unique, as all male *pande* told me that nobody would dare do it, as the refusal would certainly mean being killed by the angry divinities.

In fact, in the only case of refusal I heard over the years, the protagonist was a woman. In the '90s, I met a middle-aged woman – Sancha Maya – who for all her life struggled against the shamanic call. Sancha Maya's brother and grandmother were *pande*. She married at a very young age, and immediately after her wedding her beloved brother died. She received the call to the profession during a dream when she was approximately sixteen years old. At that time, she already had two children and a very hard and poor life. Sancha Maya categorically refused to become a *pande*, feeling that she would not have the time and strength to accomplish her shamanic tasks. In the end, and after years of struggling with the spirits and divinities, she managed to find a deal with other-than-human persons who, even many years after her initiatory dreams, wanted her to be a shaman. A compromise was reached when she accepted to beat the drum (*ring*) at least once a year during the most important Chepang festival – the Chhonam or Nwagi – celebrated by *pande* in the occasion of the new harvest (Riboli 2000, 197–213). After reaching the compromise, from time to time, a spirit possessed her, trying to change her mind and to convince her to become a *pande*. Despite the fact that the spirit often made her faint, Sancha Maya managed to be firm in her refusal. In her words:

> I received a complete knowledge but I refused [to become a *pande*]. [Despite this,] I am still alive. I do not want to become a *pande*: when I was young I already had two children and also had to work both at home and in the fields. . . . Now it is too late because I am old.
>
> (Riboli 2000, 77)

It is possible that the scarcity of women *pande* could also be attributed to very practical reasons. Women undoubtedly have a more difficult life than men. Frequent pregnancies, sicknesses, a high child mortality rate, the fact that they are in charge of domestic work but also work very hard in the fields probably leave very little space, time and energy to perform tiring ceremonies which *pande* celebrate exclusively at night-time.

Despite maintaining basic principles of gender equality, a certain (unequal) division of labour is present among the Chepang, probably increased by the change in their subsistence economy that occurred when the group became sedentary.

Anne de Sales describes a similar situation among the Kham-Magar. According to her study, in this group, the number of female shamans is increasing, a fact probably linked to the departure of many men either for political reasons during the Maoist insurrection or with the aim to find a job in foreign countries. However, most of these women *jhākri*, despite the fact that they cannot refuse the election by their ancestors, categorically refuse to learn the chants. The refusal is in part due to pragmatic reasons, as women are householders with many tasks to fulfil daily and not enough time and energy to perform night ceremonies. According to de Sales, at present, Kham-Magar women "are the drivers of the transformation of shamanic practices" (de Sales 2015, 33).

The Semang-Negrito of Peninsular Malaysia

To a first analysis, female shamanism among the Batek and Jahai would seem to be almost absent. The Batek and Jahai belong to the Semang-Negrito, one of the three groups included in the Orang Asli (Original People) population of Peninsular Malaysia.[6] Despite the fact that most of them were forced in different ways to become sedentary about three or four decades ago (with the exception of about 500 Batek still conducting a nomadic life), their culture and economic activities are still very much linked to the world of the increasingly agonizing rainforest (Tacey 2018, 2013; Riboli 2016b, 2011; Tacey and Riboli 2014; Lye 2000, 2004).

Despite the high level of gender egalitarianism, during the research projects I conducted between 2005 and 2013, I never met a woman who was a full shaman – *hala'* in Batek and Jahai languages – although nobody in the communities ever excluded the possibility that women could receive a call to the profession as well as men. It is possible that the absence of women *hala'* is mostly attributable to major changes in the life of these populations which had also a major impact and provoked the decline of male shamans in the last two decades or so. Poverty, discrimination, environmental pollution and destruction due mostly to mining and logging activities, social exclusion and, last but not least, intense Islamization campaigns launched by the government with the aim to "modernize" indigenous groups and to assimilate them into the dominant Malay Muslim culture (Toshihiro 2008; Nicholas 2000) are undoubtedly greatly challenging Semang-Negrito cultures and religions.

According to Kirk and Karen Endicott's research among the Batek, carried out mostly in the '70s, both men and women could become *hala'*, although – even four decades ago – the number of women was inferior in comparison with men (Endicott and Endicott 2008; Endicott 1979). However, it should be noted that among the Batek still leading a nomadic life in the national park Taman Negara, the eldest people, and in particular the old *hala'* Macang – one of the last shaman-tigers of the rainforest – told me that many years ago, when all the Batek were still hunter-gatherers, there was a woman *hala' bəw* ("great" shaman) considered the most powerful in the pluvial jungle.

Working in Jahai villages I recorded a very similar story about women *hala' bəw* of the past, although I was not able to find out if these extremely powerful female *hala'* really existed or if they are mythological figures, as nobody – not even *hala'* Macang – had ever met them.

One more element that is important to underline, which is probably related to the egalitarian social order, is that almost all the Batek and the Jahai – common men and women – can experience some sort of shamanic powers/abilities and, in particular, they are able to "walk in the dreams" (*cip ba tiwin* in Batek language). This expression indicates an altered/modified state of consciousness which people experience while awake and which

allows them to communicate directly with the spirits' world. The Batek and the Jahai consider dreams and trance very similar states. In both cases, one of the person's souls, translated to English by Endicott as "shadow-soul" (Endicott 1979), abandons the body and travels and acts in a different, parallel reality. In this state, people feel they can travel everywhere and interact with other shadow-souls, as well as with other-than-human persons. In this sense, the difference between a non-religious specialist and a shaman is that the *hala'*, while dreaming or trancing, receives more power, along with personal therapeutic songs from the spirits.

At present, due to the aforementioned reasons, shamanism is declining, and in many Batek and Jahai villages, there are no *hala' bəw* (or even "normal" *hala'*) anymore. Rituals are celebrated more and more rarely, mostly conducted in secret in the forest, far away from the villages and indiscreet eyes.

Despite all the obstacles, according to my observations nowadays in sedentary and semi-sedentary Batek and Jahai groups, many women play an important religious and spiritual role, although they probably cannot be considered full *hala'*.

Among the Jahai in particular, I believe that the decrease of the number of male *hala'* corresponds to the accumulation of symbolic power accrued by women.

Life in Jeli – the Jahai area in Kelantan District, Northern Malaysia, where I conducted part of my research – is particularly difficult. Poverty, bad sanitary conditions, religious and political oppression, social exclusion and other forms of structural violence are threatening Jahai's culture and well-being. As witnessed by other scholars working with different Orang Asli groups (Dallos 2011; Gianno 2006; Howell 2006; Endicott and Endicott 2008), gender equality is still considered an important value, although, in the last years, major changes in sustenance, economy and livelihood have created a situation of imbalance which is rapidly opening the door to gender inequality. Almost every day, Jahai men still enter the forest: they hunt and collect medicinal plants and other wild products to trade and sell to Chinese and Malay dealers. Women are left back in the villages deprived of the possibility to contribute to economic activities since the jungle has become an extremely dangerous place for them. National and/or foreign loggers, poachers, seasonal workers and traders of legal and illegal goods represent a very serious threat for Jahai women, who can easily become victims of sexual harassment and violence. While, up to few years ago, most of the income from the sale of forest products was equally divided in the community, it seems that nowadays men are mostly in charge of the money they gain, more and more often used not for the benefit of all the community but to buy electronic gadgets (Riboli 2016b; Riboli 2013).

Most of the Jahai converted to Islam, although the reasons leading to conversions were mostly to avoid discrimination and violence and obtain a better future for the young generations (Toshihiro 2008). Despite Jahai acephalous organization and the fact that the most important decisions were

and in part still are discussed collectively, the government forced them to have village headmen with whom the authorities could speak directly. Of course, the headmen designated by the government are all men, while in the past, women also had an equal role at a political level.

I believe that in the villages, the women's loss of political and economic power facilitated the increase of their religious and symbolic power. Despite the fact that ceremonies and altered states of consciousness take place rarely and mostly in the forest, women "walk in their dreams" even when in the village.

In particular, in the Jeli area, Kelantan District, a few women[7] quite often experience modified states of consciousness during which they communicate with ancestors or, in some cases, even with their deceased children, who take on the role of auxiliary spirits. Most of the times, men seem not to be aware of this, or they simply avoid talking about it, claiming that this is a "women's matter". However, especially in the case of calamities threatening the crops and the villages – such as floods and violent thunderstorms – the messages the spirits communicate to women are very much taken into consideration.

The increase of women's modified states of consciousness while in the villages can also be attributed to another fact. Since the jungle became extremely dangerous, women – during dreaming or dream-like states – are able to go back to the forest they are missing so much. A few of them feel they can fly and, in this way, they reach far-away beautiful secret places and waterfalls of the forest. Although not *hala'* with complete knowledge, it seems that women's magic flights are quite similar to those of the shamans, who – as the Batek *hala'* Macang told me – in their shamanic journeys, most of the time do not visit other cosmic zones but the forest itself, considered a perfect universe.

Moreover, in Jeli – despite the fact that in the village, there are no more full *hala'* (either men or women) – an important role is played by traditional midwives (*bidan*). Generally, the *bidan* are declared not to have full power and knowledge. However, at least few of them deal not only with problems connected to pregnancy but are able to handle even complicated situations resulting from attacks coming both from the non-human and human worlds.

In fact, in 2007, I attended a ceremony for an unmarried Jahai girl who was raped by a *gob* (outsider) while in the forest looking for wild tubers. Unfortunately, the girl had become pregnant, and three *bidan* – very concerned about the possible negative effects of the violent act on the fetus and the mother – performed a small ceremony in order to chase away negativity and sorrow from the mother and her child. The ceremony was held in the forest, in secrecy and in the presence of only five women, three of whom were in charge of performing the ritual.

Because of the lack of studies, it is very difficult to determine if in the past female shamanism was stronger or weaker than in the present. In any case, even in Endicott's book on Batek religion (1979) – probably one of the first scientific anthropological studies on the Semang-Negrito's belief

systems – the *hala' bəw* who collaborated with the anthropologist were men, although several women could experience modified states of consciousness.

Batek and Jahai, despite their past as nomad hunter-gatherers, surprisingly enough, do not seem to have in their pantheon the figure of a Lord of Hunting. The main divinity is the Lord of Thunder, called Gobar by the Batek and Karei by the Jahai, most of the time described as a singular male entity (Tacey 2018, 93), although Endicott collected different stories in which the Lord of Thunder was described as a multiple entity (a married couple, brother and sister or two brothers) (Endicott 1979, 163). Gobar/Karei is an irascible god, who punishes the breaching of taboos with severe thunderstorms. He is very sensitive to odours, in particular to the odour of menstrual blood and the blood resulting from childbirth. For this reason, during menstruation or after childbirth, women should not come in contact with rainwater and rivers. Women's blood, as in the case with the Chepang, is a powerful and potentially very dangerous fluid.

In one story I collected in a nomad Batek camp, I was told that the devastating tsunami which started from Sumatra in 2004 and killed thousands of people in fourteen countries worldwide was caused by a magic concoction whose main ingredient was the menstrual blood of an Indonesian girl hired in one of the Arab countries as a maid. The poor girl – after many abuses suffered by her employer – threw the magic concoction in the sea, and it tried to go back to her country of origin. When it reached Malaysia, Gobar smelled the menstrual blood and his rage provoked the devastating tsunami (Riboli 2013, 145–146).

Conclusions

In egalitarian societies maintaining the social organization of hunter-gatherer groups, shamanism does not seem to follow the rule of gender equality in terms of distribution of power, although it seems to follow rules similar to those regulating the division of labour. In many foraging societies, men were not only hunters but also warriors, one more element that made them more suitable to become shamans (Riboli and Torri 2013).

When these groups still depended mostly on hunting and gathering, and when women still contributed as much as men to economic activities, shamanism, at least in Eliade's sense of the term, was probably mostly a men's prerogative and duty. But it is also true that Eliade's work contributed to the construction of the idea of a "classical" shamanism as superior to many other similar practices, probably and in any case present and active in the past as well as today. The adoption of "shamanism" as a scientific category was decided in a western scholarly environment. It is possible that the (mostly male) academic community was probably more interested in the more striking expressions of it than in more intimate and small-scale phenomena. What I mean is that it is fair to assume that in the past women were also in charge of probably more limited but still very important sectors

in comparison to their male counterparts. An example of this would be the role of women in promoting the well-being of women and children. In fact, among the Batek and the Jahai as well as the Chepang, women seem to have better knowledge of medicinal plants as well as of symbolic therapeutic practices for all kinds of problems not requiring the organization of a full shamanic ceremony. These practices are more limited to a familiar or closed circle of acquaintances and therefore more intimate and personal, not requiring the presence of the entire community. In this sense, they can also be more discreet, confidential and secret, as in the previously mentioned case of the ceremony for the pregnant Jahai girl, a victim of sexual abuse.

As mentioned, women in some exceptional cases can become shamans and – probably because they are exceptional cases – they are much more powerful than their male colleagues. In this sense, I am tempted to suppose that this could be also interpreted as an exception that, in the end, proves the rule.

This seems still to be the case with the Chepang, who, despite the abandonment of nomadic life about fifty years ago and their dramatic life conditions, face less political and religious pressures from the dominant culture in comparison to the sedentary Jahai and Batek of peninsular Malaysia. This was probably the case with the Batek and Jahai, among whom – mostly because of the governmental Islamization campaigns – I met only very few men *hala'*, although many of them mentioned that in the past there were very powerful woman *hala'* in the forest.

The unequal distribution of shamanic knowledge and power among men and women has different possible and probably concomitant causes. First of all, practically speaking, women have more duties to take care of on a daily basis than men, also considering frequent pregnancies and the tasks of feeding the babies and taking care of the needs of the youngest kids.

Especially for peoples still living in a natural environment, such as a few Batek groups, the "practical" problems are also strongly connected to the religious sphere. Women, much more often than men and at least once in a month, during menstruation, become impure. While women living in villages can avoid any contact with rainwater and rivers connected to the Lord of Thunder by just staying at home, those women living in the tropical forest must follow a stricter set of rules in order not to anger Gobar/Karei. In this sense, while men *hala'* can always be available to perform any ceremony in case of need, women's availability would be more limited.

In all groups I studied, men do not know much about the world of women, which they undoubtedly consider powerful but also secret and potentially dangerous. As I mentioned, women are more likely to be accused of black magic than men, since their blood can have a destructive power. In this sense, while among men, only shamans have superhuman powers, on the contrary, potentially any woman with basic skills can do magic, since – at least until she is fertile – she is an inexhaustible source of the most powerful of all magic substances.

This is also the reason many Chepang women told me that, in their opinion, the lack of women *pande* can be attributed not only to practical reasons but to the fact that women are also constantly afraid of being accused of black magic. In the words of Dam Kumari Chepang, the only woman who was until recently a leader of the Chepang Nepal Association:

> In my villages there are three *pande*. All of them are men. The fact is that there are many possibilities for a woman to be accused of doing evil things, or being a witch. This is why women do not want to become *pande* as people could think: "why is that woman learning mantra? Is she becoming a *boksi*?". Even if a woman tells she has having bad dreams or if she celebrates a *pujā* in her home, people suspect that that she is a *boksi*, doing something evil.

The decrease of gender equality due to new sedentary life conditions; religious, political, economic pressures and major changes seems to correspond to a more distinct separation between male and female duties. But, at least in certain cases, the increase of the division of labour and the fact that women are more and more excluded by political and economic life are counteracted by the increase of their power on a more spiritual/symbolic level. This seems to be the case of the sedentary Batek and Jahai of peninsular Malaysia. At present, in Jahai villages in particular, men are involved in a market economy, while the children are obliged to attend the primary school, where all the teachers are Muslims. The population was pushed to convert to Islam,[8] and women became rapidly more and more marginalized. While men are probably losing their interest in shamanism, women are regaining their social role thanks to their intimacy with the world of spirits and ancestors. In this sense, female shamanic powers also represent a strategy which allows women to be connected with the world of the forest and manage to counteract or at least deal with various forms of violence, oppression and injustice.

Similar to what Guenther observed in Korea and Japan (1999), it seems that also in Malaysia, the increasing political marginalization of women – a quite new event in Jahai and Batek social organization – leads to a higher incidence of female shamanism. As in the cases of the Chepang and the Kham-Magar of Nepal (de Sales 2015), Jahai and Batek female shamanisms assume a less elaborate, more intimate and pragmatic character in comparison with the prevalently male shamanism of the past.

Notes

1 In particular in the 1960s and 1970s, the so-called anarcho-primitivistic critique idealized and romanticized egalitarianism and non-violence in hunter-gatherer society. Flanagan (1989) and Woodburn (1982) were probably among the first scholars who demonstrated that egalitarianism is a complex social formation with very different meanings in different cultures.

2 2011 Census, Nepal Government.

3 The third women *pande* I met at the time was already very old, almost blind and deaf, although she was still able from time to time to conduct therapeutic ceremonies for minor diseases.
4 The Nepali term *boksi* is widely used in the country to indicate male or female witches. *Boksini* is only used for female witches.
5 According to my information, there are still *pande* who conduct rituals in caves located in very secluded and inaccessible forest areas in Dadhing. This part of my research is still not complete, and Bisnu Maya is the first *pande* I ever met who, together with her family, spent so many years in a cave, performing rituals which I was still not able to attend.
6 As estimated by the Department of Orang Asli Development, the Batek and Jahai have a population of 1,447 and 2,387, respectively (JAKOA 2012).
7 Most of the Jahai female friends who collaborated with me during my research prefer to remain anonymous, while in the case of the Chepang female *pande*, the religious specialists themselves, not having particular problems with the dominant culture and religions, asked me to use their real names.
8 In Malaysia, Islam is represented by the Shafi'i version of Sunni theology.

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Section 2

Sociopolitical contexts

Exclusion, marginalization, and participation


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6 Shamans, Islam and the state medical policy in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Danuta Penkala-Gawęcka

Introduction

In the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, I noticed that shamans and other spiritual healers whom I observed during their healing sessions commonly uttered Muslim prayers and used objects connected with Islam alongside more "traditional"[1] elements of healing. It was hardly surprising, as accounts of "Islamised shamanism" have been provided by many researchers (e.g. Basilov 1992; Garrone 2000). However, especially in the last decade when I did research in Kyrgyzstan, an increase in the influence of purist trends in Islam was visible, which has modified the approach to and discourse on healing practices. On the other hand, "folk"/"traditional" medicine of titular nations, treated as part of their revived and highly valued cultural heritage, has received official support in the newly independent Central Asian states. The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for many reasons, did not lose sight of traditional medicine in their medical policies, but this generally positive stance has begun to change in recent times. This chapter deals with the complex relationship between shamanic and other forms of spiritual healing, Islam and the state since the proclamation of independent Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It focuses on local understandings of spiritual healing, its legitimacy and connections with Islam, and examines the role of female healers. It also discusses the influence of changing political, economic, social and religious conditions on the position of healers in the context of medical diversity, which is especially characteristic of urban settings.

The notion of "shamanism" requires special consideration. Although well rooted, popular and widely used in reference to the Central Asian context, this term is also seen as problematic and has been contested by many scholars. Some researchers do not hesitate to write about shamanism and do not reflect more thoroughly on this term (e.g. Heyat 2004, 278; Sultanova 2015 [2011, 2014][2]). It is sometimes used as an umbrella term, as proposed in the description of the Uzbek shamanism (Sidikov 2004, 647), and often questioned, for example, in reference to Uyghur healing (Bellér-Hann 2004b, 642–643). Scholars notice its troublesome nature and wonder, as Roberte

Hamayon (2001, 8) does, whether it would not be more reasonable to speak of "shamanisms", or whether we should simply analyse particular cases where the use of the term seems to be justified. Bruce Privratsky rightly argues that "shamanism is not a religion *per se*" (2001, 217). Following Caroline Humphrey, he proposes the term "shamanship", which does not have associations with "religion". It is impossible to recount these discussions at length, but I would state that my position is similar to that of Privratsky or Devin DeWeese, who prefers to put the word "shamanism" in quotes, since this term implies understanding the described phenomenon as a religious system, "a coherent pre-Islamic religious tradition" (2014, 355), in accordance with the Soviet evolutionary vision of religious development. He suggests, instead, the other view: "that the activities classed by some as 'shamanic' represent not a coherent religious 'system,' but a modality of religious behaviour (or a set of such modalities) that may be actualized within a wide variety of religious traditions and social contexts" (2014, 356).

The existence of shamans in today's Central Asia is doubted by some researchers; however, most acknowledge that they are still present, although very rare. I will discuss them together with other kinds of spiritual healers.

This chapter is based on the longitudinal anthropological research which I carried out in Almaty, Kazakhstan, between 1995 and 2000, and in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, between 2011 and 2013.[3] The first project dealt with complementary medicine and its relations with the state and biomedicine, and with non-biomedical practitioners, spiritual healers in particular. During the next fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, I was especially interested in people's perspectives on health, illness and treatment; their health-seeking strategies and practices and the popularity of healers. I applied ethnographic methods, such as semi-structured interviews and numerous talks with healers, biomedical doctors and "ordinary" people, as well as observation (including participant observation), and I used a variety of available materials, from scholarly literature to newspaper articles, TV programmes and so on.

It is worth mentioning that my research in Kazakhstan revealed the attitudes to healing during the first decade of the state's independence, whereas the later fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan took place at the beginning of the third decade of its sovereign existence. Assuming that there have been significant similarities between these countries regarding the processes described in the chapter, implied by the common Soviet past (see also Hohmann and Lefèvre 2014, on the South Caucasus), I will also discuss observable differences.

The first section deals with shamans and other healers, their role and position in society within Imperial Russia and in Soviet times and the relationship between Islam and shamanism. Next, I describe forms of spiritual healing in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the context of medical diversity that offers people many treatment options alongside biomedical therapies. I also tackle the position of female shamans and other healers, as well as the issue of "feminisation" of this sector and women's marginalisation. In the following part of the text, I discuss governmental attitudes to

traditional healing and reflect on the growing "anti-charlatan" discourse and observed changes, which influence the position of healers. The last section before the conclusion examines an increase in the purist trends in Islam and its impact on spiritual healing and other local "traditions", commonly treated in Central Asia as part of everyday, "lived" Islam.

Shamans and Islam in Central Asia under the Russian empire and in Soviet times

Early reports of travellers, deportees, colonial officials and first ethnographers on Central Asia abounded in descriptions of shamans, perceived as exotic others and often as servants of the Devil or charlatans and cunning deceivers. The other view on shamans presented them as mentally ill. It is striking that other healing methods did not receive much attention from the observers and only scarce sources on them are available (Basilov 1992, 30–39). In addition, contemporary researchers note the contrast between this fixation on shamanism and a common neglect of such important aspects of religious life of Central Asian peoples as domestic cults and veneration of the dead (Bellér-Hann 2001, 2004b; DeWeese 1994).

Scholars stress that Russian medical policy formed part of the Imperial political project, and shamanism served as a clear evidence of the backwardness and wildness of the native peoples who ought to be civilised. As Anna Afanas'eva puts it, "Kazakhs' commitment to such 'barbarian' practices became for the Russian authors the proof of deep ignorance of this people" (2008, 133). The figures of the wild, mentally ill or cheating shaman, together with that of the mullah, treated as another kind of charlatan, were present both in ethnographic accounts and relations of medical doctors. In Paula Michaels' words, "this scholarship became the foundation for discrediting traditional medical practices, and for placing a monopoly of medical authority in biomedical practitioners' hands" (2003, 9).[4] It obviously provided a basis for the "civilising mission" of the superior Russian nation (Afanas'eva 2008; Michaels 2003; Hohmann 2010a).

In this respect, the Soviet modernisation project can be seen as a continuation of the Russian colonial approach. The same ideological basis underlay the Soviet efforts undertaken in the name of cultural revolution (Michaels 2003; Roy 2000). According to Privratsky: "Russian scholarship treated the shaman as an obsolescent survivor of the nomadic cultural phase and thus encouraged the Soviet attack on the old healing arts" (2004, 570). The perspective on shamans as individuals with serious mental disorders endured, as works by some Soviet scholars show (e.g. Alimkhanov 1978). However, during the long period of Soviet rule, the approach to shamans and other healers fluctuated. After the ban on traditional medical practices issued in the 1920s, they were most persecuted during the 1930s,[5] together with mullahs and especially imams and Sufis. The political changes made for waves of intensification or relaxation of antireligious campaigns and had an impact

on the attitude to non-biomedical methods of treatment, including traditional forms of healing.

Despite longstanding efforts directed at eradication of shamanic and other healing practices, they have persisted, which was in good part due to their closer connection with the private, not public, sphere. Johan Rasanayagam argues that in Central Asia within the USSR, "Islam was largely experienced as an element of national and cultural identity, manifested in such events as life-cycle rituals, shrine visitation, and various forms of religious healing" (2006a, 377). In this context, researchers often underline the role of women as "guards of tradition" who preserved religious rituals and healing methods and tend to generalise about the "feminisation of shamanism" in Central Asia in the Soviet period. It is quite justified to claim that it has been women who performed many domestic rituals, for example, those connected with remembrance of the dead ancestors; however, it had also perhaps been their role earlier. Regarding shamanism, although the majority of early accounts on Kazakh healing, from the late 18th to the early 20th century, depicted male shamans, there were also some indications about female shamans. Michaels (2003, 29) suggests that various factors influenced the observers' underestimation of women's contribution to healing, such as their limited contacts with female representatives of the population. Vladimir Basilov (1992), who distinguished two types of Central Asian shamanism, "Turkic" (or pastoral) and "Tajik" (or sedentary) and claimed that in the first one, exclusively men were shamans, then admitted that fieldwork data proved the existence of shamanesses among Kazakhs. His own materials and those gathered by other ethnographers in the 1970s and 1980s, in the southern parts of Kazakhstan, presented female shamans whose practices did not differ from those of the male *baqsy*[6] (Baibosynov and Mustafina 1989). In Basilov's view, the "Tajik" type of shamanism (characteristic of Tajiks, the majority of Uzbeks, Uyghurs and Kyrgyz from the South) was actually its female version. However, Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi argues that "ethnographic data from Khorezm contradicts this kind of gender division along the nomadic-sedentary divide" (2008, 198) – there is evidence in the material collected by Soviet ethnographers (e.g. Snesarev 1969) that among Uzbek spiritual healers in Khorezm, men and women were equally represented.

It should be noted that apart from the dominant discourse on "Sovietisation" of Islam in Central Asia – the process that made it part of "national tradition", the new scholarship emphasises the persistence of Muslim religiosity not only in the private but also in the public sphere (Sartori 2019). Paolo Sartori (2019), in his recent work, convincingly argues against approaches reducing Islam to a marker of national identity and shows various non-private manifestations of Muslim religiosity in Soviet times. In a similar vein, DeWeese (2014) exposes the perseverance and continuity of evidently Sufi practices in Soviet Central Asia.

The question of relationship between shamanism and Islam, and Sufism in particular, deserves closer attention. Muslim influences on Kazakh

shamanism were described in many ethnographic accounts. Patrick Garrone (2000) argues that because of Islamisation of Central Asian shamanism, especially its "sedentary" variant, it is more relevant to speak today not about shamanism but *baksylyk*, which has revealed exceptional syncretic capacities. Soviet ethnographers stressed Sufi influences on shamanic practices (for example, the healing séance was sometimes called *zikir*, *zikhr, dhikr*, as Sufi rites) and some researchers, such as Olga Sukhareva (1959), tried to find the origins of Sufism in shamanism. In this view, the loud Sufi *djahr* (*dhikr*) originated from shamanic *kamlanie* (Sukhareva 1959, 132). According to DeWeese, Soviet scholars strove to reclassify Sufi forms of religiosity, still vivid during the Soviet era, as Islamised shamanism. He points out that "'shamanism' was assumed as the substrate in which the rites and ceremonies of the *zikr* were actually rooted, despite being rife with Sufi terminology" (2014, 343). Interpretations provided by Basilov (1992) and other Soviet scholars suggested that the "popular" Central Asian religion in those times was shamanism "with a veneer of Muslim, and Sufi, elements laid atop it" (DeWeese 2014, 344), which should be perceived as pre-Islamic survivals (*perezhitki*) doomed to extinction. Contrary to these views, DeWeese shows the persistence of Sufi communal rituals connected with healing and life-cycle events and reveals their significance in the religious landscape of Soviet Central Asia. However, he does not deny the existence of shamanic practices as "a modality of religious behaviour" (2014, 356).

Researchers point out that Soviet ethnographers (e.g. Poliakov 1992) made a distinction between "official"/"pure" (textual) and "popular"/"traditional" Islam (which comprised, among others, healing, divination and the use of amulets), and tended "to identify non-scriptural practices as 'pre-Islamic' survivals" (Rasanayagam 2006b, 221). Such dichotomies, and especially the concept of "parallel" Islam, also adopted by western scholars, have then been strongly criticised (see Louw 2007, 3–5). However, in Rasanayagam's words, researchers still "fail to take seriously the practice of the majority of Muslims" (2006b, 222) and write about "official" and "unofficial" Islam. Importantly, an anthropological approach focuses on the role of religion in people's lives, on the practices of "lived religion", and not its compliance with doctrines and dogmas. Islam, in the process of its "nativization" (DeWeese 1994, 51) or "contextualization" (Privratsky 2001, 15) in Central Asia, assimilated various local beliefs and practices, including shamanic ones, which have become inseparable components of "Muslimness" of its followers.

Shamans and other spiritual healers in contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Spiritual healing forms part of what can be called the "medical landscape", "medical pluralism" or more accurately "medical diversity" in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Medical diversity is the term which seems the most appropriate in this context, since it implies not only the coexistence of

different therapeutic methods (as the more popular term, medical pluralism, suggests) but also "mutual borrowings of ideas, practices and styles" (Parkin 2013, 125), and it was just the situation that I observed during my research. Strikingly, besides biomedical services, many other therapeutic options are available to the inhabitants of Almaty and Bishkek. Complementary medicine[7] is represented by various modalities, from medical traditions of the titular nations and other ethnic groups, through therapies derived from Chinese, Korean, Tibetan or Unani medicines, to many new or relatively new forms of treatment arriving from the former USSR or the West (some are also locally invented). It is noticeable that these therapies are often considerably hybridised.

Among the mentioned varieties of complementary medicine, spiritual healing belongs to the most popular, and people in their health-seeking strategies often seek help of this kind of healers. I cannot elaborate here on the reasons for their popularity in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; however, the most important factors seem to be uncertainties connected with socio-economic hardships, deficiencies in healthcare systems, common distrust of doctors; people's shared ideas about health and illness (its causes, methods of prevention and proper treatment) and social closeness of healers to people (Penkala-Gawęcka 2016, 2017b; Pelkmans 2017). Farideh Heyat (2004) mentions economic difficulties of the post-Soviet era as major reasons for the increase in the number of *tabib*s, as well as the interest in their services in Kyrgyzstan.

I understand here spiritual healing in its wide meaning, as such varieties of treatment whose practitioners appeal for help to spirits or more generally, to the supernatural. Rasanayagam (2006a) calls these practices "healing with spirits".

The most general term used for spiritual healers is *emshi* (Kaz.), *emchi* (Kyrg.), which simply means "healer" (from *em* – cure). Privratsky (2001, 194–195) distinguishes four "semantic categories" of Kazakh *emshi*: 1) *molda* (mullah) or *Qoja*[8] – those who know the Qur'an and use "the Muslim way of healing"; 2) *täwip*, which is a diversified category of middle-range folk healers, often women – they exorcise evil spirits and use pulse diagnostics and massages; 3) *palshı* (*balger*) – a fortune teller (usually a woman) who can predict the course of illness and 4) *baqsı* – a shaman, rarely found among the Kazakhs today. Similarly, among the Kyrgyz, the terms *emchi* and *tabyp*, *tavyp*, *tauyp* seem most popular. Some healers use pulse diagnostics and herbs, though they also connect these abilities to the assistance of spirits. Additionally, there are *moldo* (mullahs) who perform healing with Qur'anic prayers and very rare shamans (male: *bakshy*, *bakshi*, female: *bübü*). Another practitioner, *köz achyk, közü achyk* ("with opened eyes"), can see the future and find lost persons or objects; however, this specialist acts as a healer as well (Duyshembiyeva 2005; Biard 2013; Pelkmans 2017, 152). There are other healers, called *kuuchu*, found rarely and only in villages, who – in Duyshönkul Adylov's words – most firmly preserved

shamanic traditions and "clearly distinguish themselves from *bakshy*", whose practices assimilated more Islamic elements (2007, 381). It is interesting that such two types of "shamans" have been differentiated; however, it would perhaps be difficult to separate their practices.

It should be noted that the nomenclature is not stable, and the range of methods practised by particular types of healers sometimes significantly differs. In Kokjangak (Kyrgyzstan), according to Mathijs Pelkmans: "many practitioners used more than one term to describe themselves, . . . the terms did not indicate fixed professional traditions but rather overlapping and changing fields of spiritual practice" (2017, 153), and this statement is also relevant in reference to Kazakh healers. Privratsky writes that the most common self-ascription for Kazakh healers is *emshi*. In particular, mullahs – men – prefer this term to *täwip*, since the latter refers to healers of the lower status, predominantly women (2001, 195, 212). Askar Jumageldinov (2016, 193), who conducted fieldwork in Astana between 2013 and 2015, notes that healers are usually called *emshi* or *täwip* (especially those who use prayers from the Qur'an), and the term *baqsy* is rarely heard. My observations showed that in many cases, healers preferred not to name themselves and rather described their fields of competence and therapeutic repertoire. However, some particularly respected healers were given honourable names and used them themselves, for example, "Umut Apa" (Mother Hope) or "Jer Apa" (Mother Earth) in Kazakhstan.

An important question is whether today there are shamans among such healers. Near the end of the 1980s, Kazakh ethnographers Baibosynov and Mustafina claimed that "at present, encounters with a shaman or shamaness are very rare" (1989, 70). Privratsky (2001, 216 ff.) maintains that *baqsılıq* is not a living tradition among the Kazakhs anymore, and even if he mentions some examples of shamans, actually seems to doubt their shamanic identities. Pointing to Islamisation of shamanic practices, he tends to treat them as "faint images of archaic practice vaguely understood by Kazak healers themselves" (2001, 227), in a similar vein as Garrone (2000, 2013). According to his interesting remarks, he occasionally heard about a *baqsı* in some villages in the vicinity of Turkistan, but after such information followed "the dismissal that there are no true *baqsı*s any more" (Privratsky 2001, 217). I heard similar statements in Almaty and Bishkek when people compared very strong, extraordinary *baqsy*s/*bakshy*s of earlier times with much weaker shamans of today and claimed that the latter often usurped this name. This shows people's uncertainty and cautiousness, as well as a sort of nostalgia for the past, which was also revealed in Pelkmans' research in Kyrgyzstan. In his book, which bears the telling title *Fragile Conviction*, the author presents such an attitude of his interlocutors, who, often being sceptical about the abilities of contemporary healers, recollected the performances of *bakshi*s of the past and commented on their "real power" (2017, 154–155). Pelkmans notices that Kyrgyz healers avoid calling themselves *bakshi*, because they also admit that their powers do not "match those of

the great *bakshi*s of the past" (2017, 152). However, this does not diminish the popularity of spiritual healers.

While Privratsky (2001, 224) writes that he has not talked with any healer who calls himself/herself a shaman, some other researchers mention *baqsy*s whom they met in Kazakhstan (Jessa 2001; Bellér-Hann 2001; Grzywacz 2010; Vuillemenot 2013). I encountered during my stay in Almaty an Uyghur healer, Rakhilyam,[9] who called herself *bakhshy* (Uyg.) and was recognised as a shamaness not only in her neighbourhood but in a wider urban community. I was able to observe many times her extraordinary healing séances, which differed from usual therapeutic sessions of other spiritual healers, since after summoning her helping spirits, she entered a state of trance and danced and chanted. However, it was the social recognition of her exceptional shamanic gift which gave her legitimacy and great popularity among the patients, especially Uyghurs, Kazakhs or Tatars, but also people of non-Turkic backgrounds, for example, Russians, Ukrainians or Germans. It is believed that shamans can gain the help of many powerful spirits, and – as one of my interlocutors put it – "they act as a bridge between earth and heaven". Whereas there are numerous spiritual healers, some of them charismatic and highly respected, shamans are considered extremely rare. Apart from Rakhilyam, I only met a novice shamaness, her daughter, who performed healing séances for her mother and had, in addition, the gift of clairvoyance.[10] Although the "shamanic gift" is obviously a rare phenomenon today, I argue that we should apply emic perspective and accept local understandings about who is and who is not a shaman/shamaness and consider their recognition among the surrounding people.[11]

What is common to shamans and other types of spiritual healers is their close relationship with the supernatural world, especially with ancestor spirits (Kaz. *aruaq*, Kyrg. *arbak*). Beliefs in the role of dead ancestors in lives of their descendants are deeply rooted in the worldview of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz and form the basis for the persistence of spiritual healing, visiting sacred sites and other practices perceived as characteristic of traditional, local Muslim religiosity (DeWeese 1994; Privratsky 2001; Aldakeeva 2009; Dubuisson 2017). Ancestral spirits play a crucial role in the path of spiritual healers – the specific shamanic/healer's illness is interpreted as the call of spirits who urge a chosen one to become a healer and then support him/her in his/her further development. As my research revealed, this is an invariable pattern in the career of spiritual healers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The narratives of my interlocutors were strikingly similar in the recollections of their strange sufferings, visions of old men in white clothes who wanted something from them, the successive revelation of the ancestors' gift and a further way of the future healer. Disobedience would cause more sufferings, misfortune and even death. One of my interlocutors, Kunduz from Bishkek, recalled her ancestor spirits' warnings that in the case of her refusal to heal people, they would "take away a half of her". She admitted that she could understand the meaning of this warning only when she had been partly

paralysed. I described the way of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz healer in detail in my other articles (Penkala-Gawęcka 2013, 2014) and showed that the continuity of its traditional pattern had been provided by older, experienced shamans or other healers, who made clear for the novices the meaning of their sufferings, explained the kind of gift offered by ancestor spirits, gave the blessing and assisted in gaining more strength and helping spirits.[12]

Close connections between shamans and mullahs (Kaz. *molda*, Kyrg. *moldo*) are underlined by many researchers. Michaels (2003, 32) claims that, actually, it was impossible to separate shamanic and Muslim healing methods, because they strongly overlapped. In Rasanagayam's words: "the distinction Basilov makes between shamans and mullahs is a problematic one. He adopts an essentialist conception of Islam which fails to take account of the heterogeneous nature of religious practice in most Muslim societies" (2006, 380). The author rightly argues that "it is more productive to view all practice identified as Muslim by practitioners as part of a single local tradition" (2006, 380). Similarly, Kehl-Bodrogi (2008) and Pelkmans (2017) stress inseparability of mullahs', shamans' and other healers' practices, and Privratsky (2001), as stated previously, mentions them in the same category of Kazakh *emshi*. As can be easily observed, healers use the Qur'an and Muslim prayer beads, display wall hangings of the Ka'ba, start rituals with invocations to Gods and Muslim saints and include Islamic methods into their practices (*dem salu* – "putting the breath" after saying a Qur'anic prayer, is especially popular). They give their patients instructions about the proper Islamic conduct, reading *namaz* in particular. They commonly emphasise their Islamic identities, in spite of the application of methods and objects clearly not associated with Muslim religion, such as a whip or a knife (cf. Biard 2013). Mullahs, in turn, not only pray to Allah but also – according to Privratsky's reports from Turkistan – refer to ancestral spirits. *Molda* Abdisalih, from the sacred *Qoja* blood-line, said: "it is *ärūaq* I see. They come to me in dream-visions (*ayan*). My ancestors (*ata-babalar*) told me that if I would use the whip and knife, they would come and help me" (Privratsky 2001, 197). This may serve as clear evidence of the closeness of mullahs and other healers. However, there are also differences: many *täwip*s, in contrast to mullahs, are women, their abilities to use Qur'an are often limited, they do not prepare amulets with Qur'anic verses and, although demanded, they may be treated as charlatans (Privratsky 2001, 202). It should be added, based on findings from Kyrgyzstan, that the proximity and similarities between *moldo* and healers are especially visible in the case of the "village *moldo*", who did not receive any officially confirmed religious education (Aitpaeva 2009, 245–249).

Spiritual healing, together with pilgrimages to sacred sites (*mazar*s) connected with Muslim saints and ancestors, wearing and hanging amulets (*tumar*) and domestic rituals (especially those conducted in remembrance of ancestor spirits), are commonly treated as forms of the local, traditional Muslimness, the Muslim way of life (Kaz. *musulmanshylyk*, Kyrg. *musulmanchylyk*), and at the same time an expression of *kazakshylyk* or

kyrgyzchylyk, which may be understood as the culturally constructed identity of the Kazakh and the Kyrgyz, respectively (Aitpaeva and Molchanova 2007; Toktogulova 2007; Grzywacz 2010; Dubuisson 2017).[13]

Eva-Marie Dubuisson, in her insightful study on the "guardians of ancestors", reveals how the messages of ancestors are conveyed to living "descendants" at sacred sites in Kazakhstan and what the role of *mazar*s' caretakers is in this transmission (2017, 56–83). Collective pilgrimages to sacred sites are commonly organised by healers,[14] and, as Bellér-Hann showed, they are often female undertakings, expressing "women's religious commitment" (2004a, 336). Visiting *mazar*s is closely tied to the spiritual path of healers whose development depends on gaining the blessing and support of saints and ancestor spirits, and, significantly, healing in sacred sites is thought to be the most effective (Adylov 2007; Tulebaeva 2009; Penkala-Gawęcka 2017a, 27–28). Duyshembiyeva writes about healers, their patients and mullahs at the *mazar* in Kyrgyzstan:

> Another significant group of visitors are *baqshï*. Experienced ones bring their patients, because it is a general belief that there is a greater chance of a cure if the performance is conducted at the holy places where the spirit of the ancestors is strongest. Younger *baqshï* come to Kochkor Ata shrine for the initiation ceremony, usually accompanied by more experienced ones, and they spend a night there. A local *mullah* . . . maintains the place and makes it his task to take people around the shrine.
>
> (2005, 40)

However, discourse on healing and visiting *mazar*s has been changing, and conflicting voices have more and more often been heard about what constitutes the "proper Islam". I will comment on these struggles in the changing ideological and political environments, which influence the position of spiritual healers, in the last section.

Shamanesses and other female healers – marginal or empowered?

I cannot expand here on the issue of women's history in Central Asia and changing ideas of the role of women in society after establishing the Soviet regime. It is necessary, though, to refer to the groundbreaking scholarship on Central Asian women, namely Michaels' works (1998, 2003), in which this question takes an important place, and a book by Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (2006). As Kamp convincingly shows, George Massell's (1974) attractive and influential concept of Central Asian women as the "surrogate proletariat" during the Bolshevik revolution is not well substantiated, since "the argument for making women a surrogate proletariat was just that, an argument" which was made by a Women's Division and not taken as the Party's goal (2006, 260).

Nevertheless, it is true that the efforts of the propaganda were directed at denouncing women's deplorable situation, their exploitation and backwardness seen as a result of the patriarchal system. This was a powerful basis for pursuing the "civilising mission" in Central Asia (see Roche 2016, 210–211).

It is unquestionable that the period of Soviet rule profoundly changed the place of women in society and their educational and professional opportunities and enhanced their agency. However, women's emancipation, emphasised in the communist propaganda, ran parallel to promoting their role as mothers producing Soviet citizens and responsible for their raising. In post-Soviet Central Asia, this side of womanhood has been significantly stressed. Sophie Roche points out that in Tajikistan, "Along with a revival of Islam since independence, motherhood has been reinforced as a sacred status by both the government and the Islamic opposition, albeit in different ways" (2016, 208–209), and she explores how the state has integrated the mother and motherhood into its ideology of the "healthy nation".

Researchers describe contemporary efforts directed at "re-traditionalisation", a recourse to the model of traditional roles of women as mothers and wives, promoted by orthodox Islam and supported by Central Asian states in the name of "tradition" (Heyat 2004; Cleuziou and Direnberger 2016), but also argue that Soviet modernisation has had a long-lasting impact on women's lives (Ismailbekova 2014, 376). It is remarkable that many women entered the market as small entrepreneurs and traders to sustain their families during the difficult time of transformation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Scholarly works that oppose the image of the oppressed and passive Central Asian woman and reveal her agency usually concentrate on women's economic activities (e.g. Tursunova 2014).[15] Besides, several studies present female religious authorities *otin*, *otun*[16] as active "cultural transmitters" responsible for teaching Islam among women, especially in Uzbekistan (Fathi 1997; Kandiyoti and Azimova 2004; Kamp 2006; Tursunova 2014; Sultanova 2015 [2011, 2014]) but also in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Cieślewska 2017; McBrien 2017, 97–102). These respected religious specialists, as the research shows, have close links with healers. Habiba Fathi points out that in Muslim communities, "women have always emerged on the public scene, thus transcending the limits of the patriarchal social order" (1997, 27). This is evidently true about female spiritual healers.

In the face of the observable prevalence of women among contemporary Central Asian healers, also in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan, where the dominance of male shamans in the past had been documented, researchers tended to treat this phenomenon as evidence of marginalisation of shamanic practices. The diminishing social status of shamans and other healers, according to this view, led to a feminisation of shamanism and other kinds of healing. In my opinion, an argument about the domestication of these practices during Soviet times as the cause for this "gender shift" is more convincing (see Kehl-Bodrogi 2008, 198–199). Some scholars still support the concept of marginalisation in connection with female healing in Central Asia. For

example, Biard argues that the functions of healers in the patrilineal Kyrgyz society correspond "to the expression of a form of fragmented, feminised and sometimes marginalised, or even disintegrated, counter-power" (2013, 88). However, the well-known argument about female engagement in healing as compensation for their peripheral social status has been strongly criticised on the basis of empirical studies from many parts of the world (McClain 1989). So, while Sultanova writes: "When shamanism was declining, women took it up" (2015 [2011, 2014], 22), she does not mean, most likely, passing such practices to marginal actors, since in her book she underlines the role of esteemed female Sufis, religious teachers and healers in Central Asian societies.

In post-Soviet Central Asia, as the existing studies show, shamanic and other forms of healing should not be deemed marginal practices, since the services of healers have enjoyed great popularity. The collapse of health-care systems in the 1990s and the official support which traditional healers received in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan gave impetus to further interest in this profession. Privratsky points out that the *täwip*'s skills are a source of income, even if small, for women and give them reputation and social confidence. In his opinion, it is the reason that the calling of the healer may be attractive: "Its [the calling] validation of a woman's authority helps explain the multiplication of Kazak *täwip*s during the hard times of the 1990s" (2001, 211). Farideh Heyat (2004) mentions the economic difficulties and uncertainties of the post-Soviet era as major reasons for the increase in the number of *tabib*s, as well as the interest in their services in Kyrgyzstan. So, during my research in Kazakhstan I could observe an intense rivalry among healers (cf. Bellér-Hann 2001), especially at the big Centre of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty. It was noticeable that women who became healers often reinforced their agency, gaining the ability to make decisions and act on their own behalf.[17] What is interesting, is that this might be seen as the continuation of the traditional path of the shaman/other healer, who had to abandon everything which might be an obstacle on his/her spiritual way. It might sometimes be perceived as a sacrifice but, on the other hand, an opportunity to exert agency.

Experiences of some of my interlocutors proved that engagement in healing was the source of their empowerment. Rakhilyam's husband was an alcoholic, and she decided to divorce him, since the healer's family must be "pure", with good intentions and deeds. Similarly, her daughter's husband was a drunkard, and he opposed her decision to take the spirits' gift. Both shamanesses, after divorcing their husbands, married Kazakh men who entirely accepted their shamanic vocation, supported them and obeyed religious prescriptions. Notably, Rakhilyam, who was the principal breadwinner of the family, earned high respect from the community, and her position in the family and society evidently transcended the limits of the patriarchal order. Also, Zeynat, a Kazakh charismatic healer from Almaty, who enjoyed great popularity and had rich and prestigious persons among her patients,

was the head of the family. Her husband and brother acted as helpers and fulfilled administrative duties connected with her work. Zeynat's healing profession completely released her from the domestic chores (performed by younger women from the extended family), and her high status, noticeable, for instance, in taking the honourable place at the table, strikingly contrasted with the patrilineal and patriarchal rules.

An example of a prominent female healer was Umut Apa, who led a "healing village" near Pavlodar in northern Kazakhstan, a kind of commune where patients stayed for longer and worked for the community. I met this famous charismatic healer at the 1st International Conference of Traditional and Folk Healers in Almaty in 1997, where she was greeted with honours and her husband stood at her side as a humble companion. Similarly, Bifatima Apa, a *baqsy* who was also called "the last Kazakh dervish", was widely known as a strong, extraordinary healer, and many patients came to her "healing commune" in Ungurtas, near the holy mountain Aydarly Aydahar Ata (Bilialova et al. 2007; Grzywacz 2010, 28–29, 47). Her charisma even made her a heroine of the feature film entitled *Baksy*, directed by Guka Omarova and released in 2008. Although the last examples refer to extraordinary personalities, they may additionally support the argument of empowering qualities of female healing.

Changing official attitudes to traditional healing: from "national treasure" to "quackery"

Official revalidation of traditional/folk healing, including shamanic practices, in post-Soviet Central Asia was closely connected with nation-building processes where the newly independent states strove to enhance their legitimacy using references to the "tradition", rich cultural heritage and deep historical roots of the titular nations. Local medical traditions were regarded as an important part of this cultural heritage.[18] Such endeavours, which gave healers an opportunity to expand and professionalise their practices, were undertaken in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and also in Uzbekistan (Hohmann 2010b; Kehl-Bodrogi 2008). As a result of the supportive attitude of the authorities, Republican Centres of Folk Medicine were established in Almaty and Bishkek[19] under the auspices of the Ministries of Health. It should be noted that, undoubtedly, the dramatic situation of healthcare systems in the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union influenced the states' medical policies in the first decade of independence, leading to the approval of various complementary therapies as often effective, inexpensive and easily available.[20] It was also not without significance for these policies that the popularity of healers had greatly increased.

The basis for the process of professionalisation of healers and other non-biomedical practitioners, and institutionalisation of their practices, was created by government regulations. In Kazakhstan, Acts of Parliament passed in 1992 and 1997 recognised and then confirmed the position of "folk and

traditional medicine", and detailed regulations concerning healers' attestation and certification were issued by the Ministry of Health. I could observe their implementation and further modifications when I regularly visited the Centre of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine in Almaty between 1995 and 2000.[21] A "school for healers" with special courses was organised there, and a commission at the Centre, with the participation of ministerial officials and a psychiatrist, was responsible for examination and certification procedures. According to Centre statistics, between 1991 and 2000, about 1,000 healers received certificates. They could be assigned to one of four specialties: a bone-setter, a herbalist, a bio-energy therapist and a "theopsychotherapist". The last category referred to spiritual healers, including shamans, and the shamaness Rakhilyam got her certificate in this specialty. Healers were also obliged to obtain licenses for practice. As I learned during my later research in Bishkek, similar processes of professionalisation of traditional healers had started there at the beginning of the 1990s, and the Centre "Beyish" was entrusted with this task. The director, Omorbay Narbekov, claimed that about 3,000 candidates came to this institution throughout the first five years, and in the course of a thorough selection, 200–250 persons with special gifts were appointed (mainly *ekstrasensy*, clairvoyants, herbalists and bone-setters); some of them after licensing began to work independently, and 50–60 healers stayed at the Centre.

Importantly, both Centres employed doctors and healers, and although the latter had a subordinate position, contacts between them contributed to mutual borrowings and hybridisation of practices. Physicians working at the Centre in Almaty often expressed their positive opinions about certified healers while pointing to the necessity to control their activities. They also tended to manifest their superior position, which was expressed, for example, in such kind of statements: "We are head and shoulders above healers"; "Our task is to put them in their place".[22] It should be noted that in Kazakhstan, complementary treatments have been officially divided into "folk" medicine (spiritual healing, herbal therapies, bone-setting and extrasensoric treatment, among others) and "traditional" medicine (e.g. Chinese and Korean acupuncture, homeopathy, hirudotherapy) practised by medical doctors who get training at special post-diploma courses. The latter segment receives strong and continuous support from the authorities, and some of its branches are taught at medical universities.

Whereas the position of doctors who use non-biomedical therapies seems stable and their practices are usually treated as "almost medicine", the attitude to healers has been significantly changing during the last decades. In Kazakhstan, the growing "anti-charlatan" discourse was already heard at the beginning of this century. According to an Act of Parliament from 2003, the use of folk and traditional methods of treatment should be restricted to medical doctors, with only some exceptions. Although these formal restrictions were not put into practice, they reflect the boundary work directed towards separating the segment of complementary medicine practised by

doctors, fully recognised and supported, from "folk" medicine, of doubtful value (Penkala-Gawęcka 2018). Then the activities of the Centre in Almaty were constricted, and procedures of legitimisation were passed on to the Ministry of Health, while the Association of Professional Folk Healers (then renamed the Association of Folk and Spiritual Healers of the Republic of Kazakhstan) took over a part of the Centre's obligations (Grzywacz 2010, 46–47; Jumageldinov 2016, 193–194). The efforts to separate "charlatans" from "healers with a gift" have been strengthened, but healers' professionalisation has not ceased.

The situation of healers in Kyrgyzstan looks different. An official anti-charlatan discourse has evidently increased in recent decades. The activities of the "Beyish" Centre have gradually been constricted, and in 2011, I could observe that among non-biomedical practitioners working there, there were no spiritual healers. That same year, the Centre was closed and a new institution established, called the Academy of Traditional and Experimental Medicine. The deputy minister of health, Sarybek Jumabekov, pointed out that the Centre did not fulfil its mission and stated: "Quacks, *ekstrasensy* and often common charlatans . . . had worked here before" (Nichiporova 2011). It was overtly expressed that the new Academy should get rid of charlatans and work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health.[23] Actually, the process of healers' professionalisation had been terminated earlier. According to one of my interlocutors, a doctor who practised some complementary therapies herself and worked on the premises of the former "Beyish", the regular attestation of healers had been pursued until the second half of the 1990s, then proceeded only to some extent and eventually stopped. She lamented the loss of "real" *tauyp*s in Kyrgyzstan:

> We have lost this generation. They already died out, like mammoths. Perhaps because the strongest did not leave disciples, and if they had some, maybe somewhere in villages . . .
>
> They all say [today]: "we are truthful", everyone wise their own way, everyone God their own way, everyone a mage their own way . . .

And she added:

> There is no institution now which would control healers; this is why today's healers are mostly charlatans who can cheat and deprive people of money.

The other persons I asked about the regulations regarding healers' activities – two female doctors previously engaged in healthcare reform – regretfully admitted that this question had been abandoned, although there were many complaints about dishonest practitioners. These doctors were convinced that this problem should be tackled. One of them had been a member of a special commission organised at the Ministry of Health but soon dismissed

because of other more urgent tasks. In their opinion, in the face of numerous severe problems of healthcare in Kyrgyzstan, the regulation of healers' practices has to be left for the future.

I was interested in healers' opinions about the process of professionalisation, about advantages or disadvantages of licensing. The healers I met at the Centre in Almaty generally approved the opportunity to get attestation and pursue their activities legally. However, they complained, first of all, about the cost of certificates and licenses (then reduced), which sometimes made them resign from finishing the procedures or taking re-attestation, needed every three years. Many practitioners were disturbed by the arrogant and rude attitude of the doctors towards them, and some women lamented the harsh manners of their male chiefs and colleagues. It was often heard that they were under strict supervision, received small earnings and had to pay taxes. On the other hand, working at the Centre, as well as in similar yet smaller private institutions, provided them a more stable position and shelter. What seems especially interesting is the importance of the traditional legitimisation of spiritual healers, which was still much more valued than the bureaucratic one. This traditional kind of legitimacy based on beliefs in the ancestor spirits' call, specific "illness" and close relationship between a shaman/other healer and spirits remains the most important (Penkala-Gawęcka 2017a; Pelkmans 2017, 162; cf. Lindquist 2006 on healers' legitimacy in Russia). Rakhilyam, for instance, was convinced that the decision to take attestation, contrary to the warnings of her spirits, prolonged her spiritual way – she was punished for disobedience. In her words, only after working at the Centre for some time did she understand that it was a hotbed of black magic and evil spirits. Evidently, an intense rivalry between the healers led to mutual accusations of practising black magic (Bellér-Hann 2001; Penkala-Gawęcka 2014, 75).

I talked with the healers in Bishkek already during the process of dissolution of the "Beyish" Centre. Two female spiritual healers, who used to work there, bitterly related their experience of being thrown out of the Centre in 2011, although they fulfilled all the requirements. Kunduz and Ainagul showed me their certificates as nurses, which they had just received after completing a six-month course, but then they turned out to be worthless. However, for them, such bureaucratic credentials were also of secondary importance. Although they regretted the loss of the "Beyish" umbrella, they had managed to establish their new practices in the same building, and they still had many clients. It was the traditional kind of legitimacy – receiving the gift from spirits – that counted, both for the healers and their patients.[24]

Observable changes in the official attitudes to traditional healing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, from approval and efforts towards healers' professionalisation to taking a more and more reserved stance and eventual withdrawal of previous support, mirror more general political, ideological and socioeconomic transformations. Central Asian states do not need legitimisation of their sovereignty based on "tradition" any more but rather strive to present themselves as modern and developed societies, free of what

may be considered backward and superstitious. However, the growing anti-charlatan discourse has not diminished the demand for healers and their popularity,[25] which has to be taken into consideration in the medical policy of these states. The process of professionalisation and institutionalisation of healers' activities has not been stopped in Kazakhstan, in spite of some fluctuations, and this may be at least partly explained by a relatively strong position of healers' professional associations, mentioned earlier. In the face of a lack of similar organisations in Kyrgyzstan, such traditional practitioners, deprived of the previous official support, have found themselves in a worse, less stable situation. Nevertheless, although there are some formal restrictions limiting their practices, they are not enforced, and the process of deprofessionalisation has paradoxically led to further proliferation of healers and development of their spontaneous, uncontrolled activities in the market.

An important factor which has impact not only on the popularity of spiritual healers and other non-biomedical practitioners but also the governmental policy towards them is the difficult situation of healthcare systems in the region. Researchers point out that in independent Kazakhstan, the state retrenchment from the social sphere, including public healthcare, led to dramatic deterioration of medical service delivery, and despite the better overall economic conditions in the country and increase in spending since the 2000s, the results are still not satisfying (Sharipova 2015). Also, Kyrgyzstan, which was the first country in the region to embark on wide-ranging healthcare reform, still experiences underfunding, an uneven regional distribution of doctors and medical facilities, insufficient medical personnel and other severe problems in the system (Penkala-Gawęcka 2016, 2018). These factors undoubtedly have impact on the attitude of the authorities towards complementary medicine, including traditional healing; however, the position of healers seems fragile and dependent on changing circumstances.

Spiritual healing and Islam in today's Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

The influence of controversies between advocates of the "new", purist trends in Islam and adherents of local, traditional[26] forms of "Muslimness" on spiritual healing did not lie at the centre of my research. Nevertheless, since such disputes have been increasing, this question gains importance and cannot be omitted.

Central Asian countries, as researchers notice, have followed different paths since independence, which has shaped, among others, the ways of tackling the issue of religion (Balci 2018). While Bayram Balci underlines the diversity in the forms of Islam in particular countries of the region, he notes that at the same time, these states "stifled unduly pluralistic expressions of it [Islam], as potentially subversive and threatening to its own survival, in favour of a single, strict definition of acceptable religion" (2018, 185). What is stressed in this and other commentaries is the desire of the states to control

Islam and to support "a 'good' Islam, a *preconceived Islam*, supposed to be the respectable guarantor of national traditions" (Balci 2018, 184). This is closely connected with the process of securitisation of Islam, observed, among others, in Kazakhstan. As Mariya Omelicheva argues:

> Because of the close connection between religious and ethnic national categories, both public authorities and ordinary people eagerly embraced "traditional" Islam as part of the greater ethnic idea. This local, cultural or "traditional" Islam has become the glue holding the Kazakh people together. Securitization of "non-traditional" forms of Islam, alien to Kazakhs, has served to strengthen the unity of the Kazakh nation.
>
> (2011, 252–253)

What is regarded as "good" Islam, and what is perceived as "extremist" and a threat to the state security vary in particular countries,[27] and the official attitudes to external Islamic influences and to the local forms of Muslimness are subject to change. In Kazakhstan, for instance, informal religious movements were emerging and gaining popularity since the second half of the 1990s, with the aim to revitalise Muslim religiosity. The most influential was perhaps *Aq jol* ("Pure Way"), which promoted "spiritual purification" and healing performed by leaders-healers during group séances (Jessa 2006). Then renamed *Ata jol* ("Ancestors' Way"), it focused on pilgrimages to the shrines of saints and close contacts with ancestor spirits (Schwab 2014; Dubuisson 2017, 47–51). Although it was an apolitical and not "foreign" movement but based on local traditions, *Ata jol* was banned in 2009. It was put on the list of "occult and mystical organisations" whose activities are prohibited in the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the official statement, "it undermines the security of the state by posing a threat to health of the population of Kazakhstan".[28]

Government regulations on religious activities have impact on the freedom of debates concerning Islam, and – as Vincent Artman (2017, 69) rightly states – in Kyrgyzstan, where such regulations have been less severe than in the other Central Asian states, there is a popular interest and open discussion on different understanding of Muslimness. These issues are addresses in anthropological works.

Most of the scholarship, as I mentioned earlier, denies simplistic dichotomies, such as "official" and "unofficial" Islam. Privratsky (2001, 238) points to the local contextualisation of Islam in Kazakhstan, and Omelicheva writes in a similar vein: "[Islam] is traditional because religious practices and discourse of Kazakhs have been attuned to their indigenous values and pre-Islamic traditions" (2011, 246). Maria Louw, in her influential book on Islam in Uzbekistan, rightly rejects considering people's beliefs and practices, such as visiting shrines, in relation to Islamic orthodoxy, and postulates focusing on "everyday Islam" or "experiential realities" (2007, 169–170). Anthropologists also write about "practised" or "lived" Islam.

However, contemporary debates in Central Asia differentiate between local, "traditional" forms of Islam and its "purist" versions, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan perceived as foreign and newly introduced. For anthropologists, it poses some problem to find an appropriate terminology for these opposing approaches. David Montgomery writes about Islam practised by Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan: "In one sense, the mountain-valley border is one of heterodoxy and orthodoxy", with ancestral veneration and reverence of nature in the mountains and more mosque-centred Islam in the valley (2016, 48). He frames his research using the categories of "inward-looking traditionalism" and "outward-looking orthodoxy" (2016, 141). While reflecting on people's contradictory visions of Muslimness, or stereotypes about more religious Uzbeks and less Islamised Kazakhs or Kyrgyz, researchers underline "the complicated religious history in the region", as well as the contemporary role of state-controlled Islam and "imam-centered Sunni Islam" (Dubuisson 2017, 61). The latter is also called "scripturalist" (Rasanayagam 2006a), "textual" (Artman 2017) or simply "new" Islam (Tulebaeva 2017).[29] It is promoted by various organisations, groups, trends and movements, but they all treat the Qur'an and Hadith as the sole basis of the "real", "pure" Islam.

What is significant, from the purist point of view, locally rooted traditions and customs, commonly perceived in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as Islamic, should be condemned as *bid'a* – "unwelcome innovations" (Artman 2017, 70). These traditions include, among others, visiting sacred sites, wearing amulets, performing various domestic rituals and practising spiritual healing. As Artman points out: "this 'traditionalist Islam' does not constitute an organized movement or group; rather it should be understood as a perspective on the faith that is less concerned with *bid'a* than it is with honouring Kyrgyz customs and traditions"; therefore, "traditionalists" "have not attracted the attention of the state" (2017, 74). However, in Kyrgyzstan, there are organisations which actively promote *kyrgyzchylyk*, first of all the Aigine Cultural Research Centre in Bishkek, combining research with an educational mission.[30] Among the aims of this institution, founded in 2004 and directed by Gulnara Aitpaeva, was reviving and promoting the Kyrgyz cultural heritage. Under several research and cultural projects implemented by the Aigine Centre, spiritual healers and *mazar*s' caretakers have received concern and support as carriers of *kyrgyzchylyk*, which has undoubtedly strengthened their position.

Struggles over the "proper" Islam are described in the literature, particularly regarding visiting sacred sites (Aitpaeva and Molchanova 2007; Aitpaeva 2009; Dubuisson 2017; for Uzbekistan – Louw 2007; Kehl-Bodrogi 2008). There are also reports on relationships between "old", "unofficial" *moldo* and "new", young mullahs, often educated abroad (Aitpaeva 2009), or on contradicting convictions about the role of ancestor spirits and saints in the lives of the Kyrgyz (Aldakeeva 2009). McBrien quotes an interesting opinion of a respected religious leader from Bazaar-Korgon in southern

Kyrgyzstan about wearing amulets. He claimed that the most important is whether the intention of an act is good, and "even if we wear amulets [*koz munchik*], we do it with some kind of hope that God will keep us from evil things" (2017, 94). However, young men, his students, opposed this view. Based on my observations, I would say that amulets are less visible in the urban space than they were in the second half of the 1990s. During that period, amulets of various types were easily available at the bazaars and in many shops and department stores, both in Almaty and Bishkek. When I did research in Bishkek between 2011 and 2013, I could hardly find amulets on sale, except for souvenirs in the shop at the State History Museum.

As for spiritual healing, including shamanic practices, some researchers tackle the question of healers' relations with the representatives of the "new" Islam. Pelkmans notes that in Kokjangak "the imam was one of the active agitators against what he described as 'national customs'" (2017, 168). He strongly condemned the local *bakshi*s as swindlers "who had placed themselves outside of Islam by going against the Koran" (2017, 153). As Biard states with regard to *köz achïk* in Kyrgyzstan:

> the symbolic world specific to the *köz achïk* is violently denounced today as non-Muslim, even more than Sufism and the cult of saints, by the representatives of orthodox Islam. Such practices as the cults of ancestors and saints and visits to sacred sites (*mazar*) are loudly decried by some new social and religious actors (new mullahs, local preachers (*davachi*), "missionaries", tablighis, etc.).
>
> (2013, 89)

The author points out that although many "institutionalised" mullahs are hostile towards healer-diviners, relations between them and healers are complex. She mentions examples of negotiations, compromise and even cooperation, when some mullahs give a future diviner-healer their blessing (*bata*), or "quite often the *köz achïk* send the person who has come to consult them to the mullah, and the reverse also happens" (Biard 2013, 91).

Aitpaeva shows contradictions between "old" and "new" mullahs and relates the attitudes of "unofficial" mullahs, who expressed positive opinions about *kyrgyzchylyk* and traditional healers. One of her interlocutors said: "*Kyrgyzchylyk* and Islam are interconnected. Why? Islam is our religion. When *tabyp* [a traditional healer] cures the people, he turns to God and asks him for help in healing" (2009, 249). In the author's opinion, the strongest conflict between the two types of mullahs concerns the practice of visiting sacred sites and healing at the *mazar*s (2009, 251–252). According to Aldakeeva's relation, based on the survey in Talas region in Kyrgyzstan, the majority of people believe that there are persons who have close contacts with spirits, among them traditional healers. However, she adds that "together with the spread of the 'pure' Islam, condemnation of people who have the abilities to contact spirits increases" (2009, 261). What is striking is that healers often

strive to prove their Islamic identity by claiming that their spirit helpers are Muslims. Similarly in Kazakhstan, many healers I met, including a young shamaness – Rakhilyam's daughter – maintained that all their spirits were Muslims, and they could help only people of the same religion. But Rakhilyam's case was special – she had a whole army of spirit helpers representing various religions; therefore, she was able to heal patients of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In the urban setting, this was particularly important, as it helped to widen the circle of her clients (Penkala-Gawęcka 2014).

My research in Almaty revealed that in this urban environment, in the second half of the 1990s, the question of compatibility of spiritual healing with orthodox Islam was not discussed among the healers and their patients. However, it seems significant that Rakhilyam, while describing her experiences at the *mazar*s, said:

> We obviously sleep [there], I mean we do not sleep; I do not sleep in such places, but sit and ask God for him [the saint], and then ask him [the saint] to bless me, to help me with what I am doing for the people, so as I will continue on the right path; I ask him for a blessing. First I ask *for him* and then *from him*: please, help [me].

According to this narrative, the saint becomes a mediator between God and the healer, as if God were too distant and inaccessible. Rakhilyam's explanation may be understood as an attempt to justify practices of visiting *mazar*s from the Islamic point of view, although that was not openly stated.

In Bishkek, where everyday manifestations of Islamic life (marked, for example, by wearing *hijab* by more and more people, usually young women) were much more visible in 2011–2013 than in Almaty of the 1990s, the majority of my interlocutors did not bother about the possible incompatibility of spiritual healing with Islam. Although some doubted today's shamans' and other healers' strength and moral conduct, they usually did not evaluate their practices in relation to the "proper" Islam. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned earlier, the healers themselves stressed their Muslim identity and credibility.

However, a growing influence of the purist trends in Islam may lead to the gradual rejection of some traditional healing practices, as examples from Baktygül Tulebaeva's (2017) research in Kochkor (northern Kyrgyzstan) show. She thoroughly analyses changes in the religious life of the inhabitants of Kochkor and an impact of the "new" Islam (which is locally termed *musulmanchylyk*) on people's choices regarding healing practices. According to Tulebeva's findings, a shift towards ("real") "Islamic ways of healing" is observed, and some traditional healing rituals connected with children's health performed by *apalar* (old, experienced women – folk healers) have been abandoned (2017, 71–72).

Recent anthropological scholarship on contemporary religiosity in Kyrgyzstan (Montgomery 2016; McBrien 2017; Pelkmans 2017; Tulebaeva 2017) and Kazakhstan (Dubuisson 2017) reveals the diversity, complexity

and dynamics of people's attitudes to Islam and understandings of what it means to be a Muslim. Researchers emphasise great variation in religious ideas and practices, uncertainties and unease caused by conflicting convictions;[31] they observe and relate how people negotiate and create their Muslimness in the ongoing process of practising Islam (Montgomery 2016).

It is difficult to predict what will be the future of everyday Islam, and spiritual healing in particular, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, the influences of the Muslim "purists" become stronger; on the other, there are many reasons to think that a good part of local traditions, perceived as Islamic, will be preserved. These processes are highly diversified. In this context, it seems instructive to refer to Rasanayagam's (2006a) observations on spiritual healing in Uzbekistan, which present people's ability to integrate apparently diverse visions of the "real" Islam. He shows in examples of particular healers how "individuals creatively combine multiple, often contradictory, ideas of correct Muslim practice" (Rasanayagam 2006a, 391). Similarly, Dubuisson points out that in Kazakhstan, through the use of the Qur'anic prayers in *bata* (blessing), "the Koran itself is reclaimed from within an ancestral worldview" (2017, 53).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and discussed complex relationships of spiritual healers, including shamans, with the state and Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Spiritual healing, together with other, diverse forms of non-biomedical treatment, was already visible in the Central Asian "medical landscape" in the period of late socialism and *perestroika*. However, in the newly independent Central Asian states, traditional/folk medicine has not only gained popularity but also received governmental support as an important part of the cultural heritage of the titular nations. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the process of healers' professionalisation and licensing started in the beginning of the 1990s, and the dramatic situation of healthcare systems in these countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union undoubtedly contributed to the positive official attitude to complementary methods of treatment. As I showed, this approach has been gradually changing along with the political stabilisation of the states and their legitimisation and the efforts to develop modern societies. An increasing "anti-charlatan" discourse and associated changes in medical policy have led to the interruption of healers' professionalisation in Kyrgyzstan and tightening of the procedures of healers' selection and control in Kazakhstan. Despite these changes, the popularity of complementary medicine and traditional healing in particular has increased since the 1990s due to many factors, especially the still-unsatisfactory effects of healthcare reforms in these countries.

I examined local perspectives on spiritual healing and varied practitioners, including very rare, but particularly respected, shamans, and presented how

they construct their identity themselves, referring to traditional sources of authority (mainly shamanic or other healer's calling and gifts from ancestor spirits) but at the same time exposing their Islamic embeddedness. I paid particular attention to female healers, who create their agency through entering the "healing profession" as very special individuals "chosen by spirits" and often enhance it thanks to developing good social relations and gaining credibility. Significantly, they may largely transcend the rules of patrilineal and patriarchal social order.

It is arguable whether the increase in the influence of purist trends in Islam has somehow contributed in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to changing attitudes of the authorities to traditional spiritual healing, which from the common perspective belongs to the local, everyday Islam. It seems that the governments of these countries rather ignore this phenomenon as harmless, and their securitisation efforts are directed towards particular Islamic groups and movements. However, struggles between different versions of Islam intensify, and there is evidence of the significant impact of the "new", "pure" Islam, although the "old" Kazakh or Kyrgyz traditions, such as visiting sacred sites or spiritual healing, treated as emanations of local Muslimness, still hold significant social support.

It seems that the flexibility and adaptive abilities of Islam, historically proved, would help to combine different forms and expressions of Muslimness in the individual practices of the people who describe themselves as Muslims. As Rasanayagam argues: "Rather than taking a position as to what constitutes 'real' Islam ourselves, we need to explore the conditions under which Muslims themselves are able to ask this question, and the different answers they are proposing" (2006b, 231).

Notes

1 The word "traditional" should be written in quotes, because healers' practices are hybrydised, for example, the use of "bio-energy", borrowed from the so-called extrasensoric treatment, is quite popular. However, for convenience, I will omit quotes in most cases.
2 The latter author sets together Tengrianism, Manichaeism and Shamanism (written with capitalised "s") as "belief systems" (Sultanova 2015 [2011, 2014], 1).
3 My research in Kyrgyzstan was supported by the Narodowe Centrum Nauki (National Science Centre, Poland) under the grant N N109 186440.
4 However, Russian doctors expressed their approval for some "rational" methods and medicines used by traditional practitioners. For example, kumiss (*kymyz*) – fermented mare's milk, particularly valued for treatment of lung diseases – was adopted by Russian medicine (see Afanas'eva 2008, 130–132; Michaels 2003, 34; McGuire 2017).
5 Privratsky states that shamans were "an easy target of the Soviet anti-religious activists", because of their "ecstatic trances that could be ridiculed" (2001, 217). In Michaels' opinion, shamans "often eluded arrest because of the informal nature of their activities" (1998, 505); she points out that the main purpose of medical propaganda was to make people distrust healers (2003, 53).

6 Kazakh and Kyrgyz words are romanised in accordance with the ALA-LC standard. If other standards are applied by the authors, they have been preserved in quotations.
7 The term "complementary medicine" is justified in this context, because such practices are generally treated here as a complement to biomedicine not only by its users but also by the authorities (although the official stance towards some of its branches undergoes fluctuations, which will be shown later).
8 *Qoja*, recognised as the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, are a special category of Kazakh society, privileged and highly respected, especially for their innate religious virtues.
9 I have not changed her name. She died, unfortunately, several years ago, but I am sure that she would like to have her name popularised, since her dream was to become "a world shamaness". Similarly, I leave the names of some other renowned healers who are "public figures". However, I have changed the other names to preserve my interlocutors' anonymity.
10 In addition, I saw the performance of a respected Kazakh shaman for the participants of the 1st International Conference of Traditional and Folk Healers in Almaty in 1997.
11 Self-proclaimed shamans (or other healers), who have not followed the accepted rules regarding the proper path of the healer, do not receive social recognition and are treated as usurpers, as Bellér-Hann's (2001, 91–93) illustrative example of an Uyghur woman healer from Almaty shows.
12 A very similar pattern of "initiatory illness" and dream revelation is quoted by Kehl-Bodrogi (2008, 209–219) in reference to Khorezm healers and by Aurélie Biard (2013), who writes about *köz achyk* in Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted that in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, dreams and visions (*ayan*) play an important role not only in the healer's initiation but also as revelations of ancestors' messages and signs for their descendants (Privratsky 2001; Louw 2010).
13 According to Gulnara Aitpaeva and Elena Molchanova, *kyrgyzchylyk* may be understood in its wider or narrower meaning. In the latter case, it means "folk medicine in its most various forms", and the authors claim that this is the perspective of the visitors of *mazar*s (2007, 398).
14 One of the healers from Bishkek showed me a notebook where her patients signed up for attending pilgrimages.
15 There are also studies on the role of women within the family and kinship group. Aksana Ismailbekova (2014) notes the relatively high status of women in the nomadic Kyrgyz society, described in 19th-century Russian sources, and points to the recent social changes in the patriarchal order caused by massive economic migration of men. As a result, women have gained more agency; however, they "maximize their power and choices within a patriarchal structure" and reinforce the patrilineal kinship system (2014, 377).
16 *Otin*, *otun*, *bibi-otun*, *otincha* and other terms are used to describe women who serve as teachers of religion for women and sometimes children; they also perform rituals and prayers for the female part of the community.
17 As Roche (2015) shows in her interesting article about a Tajik female healer/fortuneteller and her clients, it is not only she who exerts agency but also young women who come to her trying to secure a good future.
18 In addition, shamanism was sometimes treated, in the elite's discourse, as an authentic old religion of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz; however, more visible in this role is Tengrism, which has gained some resonance in the nationalist movements (Laruelle 2007).
19 In fact, the Republican Centre of Folk Medicine was founded in Alma-Ata (then Almaty) as early as 1990 and later renamed the Republican Centre of Eastern and Contemporary Medicine. A similar institution came into existence in Frunze

(then Bishkek) in the same year, based on the former Centre of Balneology and named the Republican Scientific and Production Centre of Folk Medicine "Beyish" (which means "Paradise").

20 However, some complementary therapies, especially acupuncture and extrasensoric treatment, were already allowed on the margins of healthcare in the Soviet Union during the late socialism and perestroika, which fostered – as Galina B. Lindquist (2006, 30) pointed out – the development of medical pluralism.

21 During that time, several branches of the Centre were founded in other big cities in Kazakhstan.

22 I discuss in detail healers' professionalisation and complex relationships between doctors and healers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the other article: Penkala-Gawęcka 2018.

23 It is worth mentioning that near the end of 2017, the Academy was expelled from the prestigious building inherited from "Beyish", despite the strong protests of its director, Omorbay Narbekov. It seems that the position of the Academy has weakened, although it has been presented as a scientific institution.

24 Getting certificates was treated as a formal requirement, and while it might sometimes be necessary in the city, healers working in villages or small towns did not bother about such legitimisation (Pelkmans 2017, 162).

25 Nevertheless, despite the great popularity of healers, an increase in scepticism about their abilities and honesty has been observed in recent decades (see Pelkmans 2017, 154–155).

26 It should be remembered that, as Rasanayagam aptly reminds us, "the term 'traditional' is not value-neutral. It is used as a weapon in the ideological and theological debates of different groups in their struggles to define and promote their own versions of Islamic orthodoxy" (2006b, 224). This will be shown in further discussion.

27 For example, the Tablighi Jama'at movement, apolitical and non-violent, has been banned in most Central Asian countries, except for Kyrgyzstan, although it is subject to constant surveillance there (Artman 2017; Balci 2018, 145–155; see also Pelkmans 2017, 102–123 for a thorough ethnographic analysis of this movement in Kyrgyzstan).

28 This list was issued by the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Civil Society, http://dinvko.gov.kz/rus/deyatelnost-upraleniya/religioznye-obedineniya/spisok-okkultno-misticheskih-organizatsij-deyatelnost-kotoryh-zapreschena-na-territorii-rk/ (accessed 15.05.2019).

29 Interestingly, Julie McBrien, who did research in southern Kyrgyzstan, tries to adopt the local terminology (or rather longer descriptive phrases, due to the lack of accurate terminology) and writes about "those interested in Islam", "those who are close to Islam" and women who "wear their headscarves like this" (the phrase combined with a specific gesture) (2017, 49–51, 117).

30 Aigine Cultural Research Centre, https://aigine.kg/?page_id=11262&lang=en (accessed 29.05.2020). They also published many books (https://aigine.kg/?page_id=4820&lang=en).

31 In Tulebaeva's words: "In comparison to the 'old Islam', which was in harmony with Kyrgyz traditional folk practices, at least on the mass level, the 'new Islam' among a certain group of people in Kochkor creates the notion of a totally different religion" (2017, 81).

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7 From clanic shamaness to Burkhanist messenger

Transformations of religious roles of Altaian women (19th–21st centuries)

Clément Jacquemoud

Introduction

Altai is a mountainous territory of the Russian Federation, located in Southern Siberia.[1] Historically, Altaian indigenous people are mainly shamanists. Since the dawn of time, however, the region has been home to such religious diversity that American historian A. Znamenski characterised it as the "Palestine" of Inner Asia (1999, 193). After the fall of the USSR and the withdrawal of its anti-religious policy, Altaians reconnected with practices considered "traditional", like shamanism or Burkhanism, or enrolled in Orthodox and evangelical Christianities, Buddhism or Russian New Age. Altaian women have always been intensively invested in the religious sphere. For a little while, however, some of their ritual roles and practices have been innovative. This is especially the case in the post-Soviet version of Burkhanism, or neo-Burkhanism, where some women assert that they receive messages from spiritual entities. Consequently, the question is to understand to what extent Altaian women, getting out of their traditional role of hearth keepers in the patriarchal Altaian society, featured their religious skills and knowledge in order to gain these positions in neo-Burkhanism.

From this perspective, on the one hand, it appears suitable to examine the margins of freedom that women possess in the organisation of a society which traditionally put men forward and at the same time allowed some women to become shamanesses. On the other hand, it seems necessary to interrogate the recent transformations of this society. Those transformations have mainly been caused by interactions with Russia between the 19th and 21st centuries. I propose to particularly focus on the improvement of women's rights, perceived as a symbol of social progress and modernity during the Soviet period, and on the recent influence of Russian New Age.

In order to do so, I will first look at the "traditional" social position of women in Altaian society. I will also present the features of Altaian shamanism and the way a woman could embrace the role of shamaness. Then, I will discuss the transformations that occurred over the 20th century, first with the advent of Burkhanism and second with the Russian Revolution, and led women to hold new positions in Altaian Soviet society. In a final part,

I will focus on contemporary Altaian women. I will explain the way they could become the "scriptural prophetesses"[2] of the neo-Burkhanist movement. From this perspective, I maintain that alongside a scope on women's religious capacities, a glance at the symbolic signification of the writing technique is required. Indeed, both are profoundly bound, and only a concomitant analysis will reveal the political and sociological stakes the region nowadays faces.

Women in traditional Altaian society

Some facts . . .

Traditionally, the social role of Altaian women was close to those of women in Central Asia and Mongolia in general. The spheres of activities of men and women were strictly separated: men worked outside, while women were considered hearth keepers. They were responsible for the well-being of their families and cooked the dishes, sewed clothes and looked after the animals that each family used to keep close to the dwelling (especially milking them) (Radlov 1989, 180). Numerous statements maintain that Altaian women have always held equivalent social status as their husbands (Radlov 1989, 175; Anaiban 2005, 34). Nevertheless, Radlov felt that Altaian women were considered "an inferior race" by men (op. cit.: 175). The first years of their marital life were pretty harsh. As Altaians were (and still tend to be) exogamic and their marriages were patrilocal, the young woman came to live with her husband close to his parents' home after marriage (Halemba 2006, 22; Shatinova 1981, 60–61; Tadina 1995, 70, 113). She was supposed to visit her parents only after the birth of her first child, which generally occurred after one year, in order to prevent her from staying with her parents. Her life was full of prohibitions, especially towards her in-laws. For example, she had to take care that no part of her body was visible in the presence of her parents-in-law.[3] She had to address them (and even her husband) not directly with their names but by periphrasis, and she could not give them anything hand to hand (Anokhin 2013, 217; Radlov 1989, 175; Shatinova 1981, 110; Tadina 1995, 77–79).[4] Submitted to her husband, a woman had to obey any of his desires (Anokhin 2013, 217).[5]

. . . and fictions

On the contrary, oral epics tend to depict women (the hero's mother and spouse in particular) as good advisors, much more clever than the hero himself.[6] Without them, it seems he would not follow his quest to an end. Furthermore, these women master powers and/or own artefacts that make them able to see the future or bring somebody back to life.[7] Thus, it is not rare that the hero's fiancée saves his life or resurrects him.[8] Such a positive portrayal contrasts sharply with some other women pictured in a negative way:

tempting, miserly or jealous, they do not hesitate to betray the hero and to ally with his enemy (Ulagashev 1941). An interesting point is that shamans in Altaian epics are usually women of this kind, firmly opposed to the hero (Surazakov 1985, 46). In the epic Maadai-Kara (1973), the shamaness Kara-Taady ("Black Sovereign")[9] is married to the hero's enemy Kara-Kula.[10] She is also the daughter of Erlik, divinity of the Lower world, considered harmful. First she helps her husband in his fight against the hero, and then proposes to the latter to marry as he defeats Kara-Kula.

Femininity as pollution and danger

This negative presentation of women is in accordance with their characterisation as *piier/piiiar kizhi* "impure people" in everyday life (Anokhin 1924, 33). As they can potentially "pollute" men's paraphernalia (hunting tools and harnesses), it is strictly forbidden for them to touch it.[11] Following Roberte Hamayon's analysis, one could note that the values in relation to the feminine faculty of potential "blood flow" lie behind these prohibitions or "pollution taboos". From an exogamic exchange perspective, women are used for bartering between clans. Their menstrual blood flow relates to their capacity to birth children in order to perpetuate the clans. The hunt is considered men's realm and is also based on exchange, and alliance, with the supernatural world. That is the reason blood, as "a sign justifying alliance, has to keep up an exclusionary relationship with the hunt" (Hamayon 1990, 392–394).[12]

Last but not least, in this exchange system, married women still belong to their father's clan, not to their husband's. They are thus strangers in their husband's clan.[13] Here lies the reason they are excluded from the collective rituals, as they would not worship the same entities (Radlov 1989, 370; Verbitskii 1993 [1893], 97).[14] Unmarried young girls (who have not left the clan yet) or women after menopause are beyond the socially required feminine position of "progenitor". Their social status authorises them to take part in these rituals or, during the post-Soviet years, even to conduct them (Dyrenkova 2012, 180; Tiukhteneva 2005, 158). Thus, we can consider that they become a kind of "undefined sex".[15]

Such a situation, where women were regarded as "in-between persons" for rituals,[16] were associated with "pollution" and bore many prohibitions, leads us to consider that women lie at the margins of Altaian society. Following M. Douglas, whose point of view states that "to have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power" (1966, 98), I consider this situation an "entrance door" for women to reach a higher social status, namely that of shamaness. As R. Hamayon argues, "the pastoral conditions favour masculine privileges. Shamanic exercise is then the only way for a woman [to gain] public expression and power, as limited it could be" (1990, 650). Before looking at the particularities of feminine shamanism in the Altaian society, it appears first necessary to define the features of pastoral shamanism.

Shamans and shamanism

Altaian pastoral shamanism

The Altaian ethnic groups perceive the world around them as inhabited not only by human beings, animals and plants but also by "invisible entities", or "spirits" (alt. *ee*). This perception is common to all the other ethnic groups of Siberia and North Asia, who attribute to natural beings and some non-living things a "soul" akin to the human soul (Hamayon 1990, 331; Lot-Falck 1953, 173–174). Above these entities remain divinities that are, most of the time, indifferent to the fate of human beings. Russian missionaries were the first "ethnographers" to detail Altaian cosmology. It generally displays three worlds: the Upper world, with spirits considered benevolent (clanic deities such as Ülgen, or supreme divinities such as Kudai, Üch-Kurbustan or Burkhan); the Lower world, ruled by the "harmful" divinity Erlik and the Middle world, where humans live together with many different spirits (such as "master of places", *eezi*, or harmful wandering souls of dead people, *körmös*). This worldview is obviously affected by Christianity, as in the past no spirit was considered only positive or harmful.

Some individuals, who are supposedly endowed with special knowledge or unusual abilities, such as shamans or other "ritual specialists", are able to enter into contact with these entities and to intercede with them in favour of humans. They perform collective rituals to obtain good conditions for the upcoming season (good climatic conditions, in order to have abundant and green grass in the pastures, no epizooty or scarce attacks on herds by predators, good fortune in the hunt, a mild winter with little snow . . .). During these collective seasonal worships, prayers and offering are made to the entities of the Upper and Middle worlds and to clanic entities. According to Roberte Hamayon (1990), the distinction between pastoral and hunting shamanisms lies in the marginalisation of shamans: while elders or clan leaders tend to lead the collective ceremonies in pastoral societies, shamans are relegated to individual therapeutic rituals.[17]

The progressive ousting of shamans from collective rituals in Altai leads us to compare this situation with neighbouring Mongolia, where C. Humphrey distinguishes two different kinds of landscapes: chiefly and shamanist. Each one "engages different notions of energies-in-nature and the social agencies by which such powers may be harnessed to human benefit" (1995, 135). The rituals performed by elders or clan leaders exclusively address the entities of the Upper world, considered strictly "pure" and "benevolent". This could be an additional reason to explain why women, considered "impure" and "soiled" beings, were not allowed to attend these rituals.

Shamans and shamanesses

In Siberian pastoral societies, women and men could be shamans (Anokhin 1924; Radlov 1989, 224, 367; Hamayon 1990, 649). References to shamanesses are, however, rare in the Altaian ethnographic literature.[18] At the end

of the 19th century, Radlov is the first to mention shamanesses in the Altai (1989, 224, 367).[19] There was globally no difference in the presentation of male and female shamans, and the term *kam* is employed to speak about both of them.[20] The mode of election was the same: the spirits of the ancestors (*tös*) "pressed" (*tös bazyp t'at*) on the neophyte at different moments of his/her life, so he/she was subject to a "shamanic crisis", characterised by illnesses, escape into the forest and so on.[21] The spirits acted this way in order to convince the novice to accept his/her fate.

The shaman's costume (*mant'ak*) and paraphernalia (drum *tuŋur*, drumstick *orbu*) were quite similar for both sexes, although the women's costume was more embellished (Anokhin 1924, 33). According to Anokhin (ibid.), there were two kinds of shamans: shamans "with a costume" (*mant'aktu kam*, or *kara kam* "black shaman") and shamans "without costume" (or *ak kam* "white shaman"). Only shamans "with a costume" were able to address both the entities of the Upper and Lower worlds, while shamans "without costume" could only perform rituals to the entities of the Upper world, especially Ülgen. Ülgen was a clanic deity;[22] would that mean that "white shamans without costume" were elders and clan leaders? The question remains open.

Moreover, Anokhin states that only male shamans could accomplish the path to Ülgen during their rituals (op. cit., 9). As "impure beings", female shamans were not allowed to perform rites to the entity of the Upper world (op. cit., 33).[23] They were consequently compelled to worship Erlik and, in all likelihood, to wear a shamanic coat. These two points match with the Altaian epics in general, which, with rare exceptions, display only shamanesses belonging to the enemy's camp, that is to say the Lower world (Surazakov 1985, 46). For instance, the shamaness Kara-Taady in the epic Maadai-Kara is, as I previously said, the daughter of Erlik. The bard A. G. Kalkin depicted her shamanic coat and drum in as much detail as the hero's paraphernalia (1973, 332).

Shamanism as a feminine practice?

The rituals performed by shamans to Erlik or to the entities of the Lower world could be therapeutic. Indeed, illnesses are said to be due to harmful spirits, linked to the Lower world, who "grasp" one person's soul.[24] In many epics, Erlik is said to catch children's souls (Surazakov 1985, 51). An Altaian legend tells the story of a shamaness "eating her own children" (Iamaeva and Shinzhin 1994, 167–168), which is a euphemism for grasping their souls. These narratives echo the harmful entities' behaviour and once again bear the idea of a close relationship between shamanesses and the Lower world.

Another fact illustrates this link. According to Khlopina's Shor informants, the spirits of the shaman's ancestors (*tös*) went to the Lower world after his/her death (1992, 138).[25] They waited in Erlik's realm for the right time for the future shaman(ess) to perform rituals. Then Erlik sent the spirits back



Figure 7.1 The shamaness Tyndu (1920), by Grigori Ivanovich Choros-Gurkin (1870–1937).

Source: Courtesy of the A. V. Anokhin National Museum of the Altai Republic.

to the Middle world to elect the neophyte. This assertion suggests that Erlik stands at the beginning of shamanism.[26] Furthermore, according to many legends among neighbouring peoples of the Altaians, the first shaman was in fact a shamaness (Hamayon 1978, 20; Potanin 2005, 288). One has to note that these statements question the very notion of shamanism. Indeed, if shamanistic practices were closely related to the entities of the Lower world and had a feminine origin, to what extent can the rituals conducted by elders and clan leaders (or "shamans without costume") to the entities of the Upper world be considered "shamanism"? The question needs to be asked. We will see subsequently that by the beginning of the 20th century, the preponderance of practices to the entities of the Upper world led to the reprobation of shamanism and to the merging of the Burkhanist movement.

Ethnographic literature declares that both young and old women become shamanesses. In Siberia, many shamanesses are widowed, infertile or have lost their children (Hamayon 1990, 448). Feminine shamanism seems, then, to be firmly linked to women's fertility potential, unrevealed or lost.

It is corroborated by the fact that in Siberia, "a woman accesses the function later than a man, more easily as she accomplished her maternal task" (Hamayon 1990, 651).[27]

In my opinion, Roberte Hamayon's assertion that the shamanic status could be an "object of desire" for women in these situations (op. cit., 649) relates to R. S. Kraemer's analysis of women's practices in Dionysus' cult in Ancient Greece (1993). Starting from the point that "in most of the societies, there are few or no activities considered as convenient for both of the sexes", Kraemer apprehends the feminine worshipper's role as a way to find a "compensation" for the socially deprecated position of women, in particular when the latter face privations in their reproductive capacities: "non-married women after a certain age, childless women, and often widows – are by definition marginal. One can observe that the 'frustrated' men as well as women look for compensation in the religious domain" (1993, 102–103).[28] In the Altaian context, this assertion means that feminine practice of shamanism would fill a lack in women's fertility potential, and that women would especially become shamanesses at an age when this potential is lost. According to Altaian anthropologist S. Tiukhteneva, most contemporary Altaian religious specialists received their gift after 40, an age when "the person already accumulated life's experience, *sanaa-ukaa* ('intelligence-reason'), reached a social status and has his/her children independent" (2005, 155).[29] One also has to consider that during the Soviet period, traditional religious practices were kept alive inside the household (Tiukhteneva 2009, 107). This would explain why the majority of Altaian religious specialists are today women (Halemba 2006, 155, 173).[30]

Nine daughters of Upper world divinity are represented on the back of the Altaian shaman's costume, between the shoulders (Anokhin 1924, 12, 35, 36, 40). According to Anokhin, they are called *ak kystar* (white, which means "pure", young women),[31] and they inspire the shaman while he makes a sacrifice to the entities of the Upper world (ibid.). They can also figure on the shaman's drum.[32] Shor people say that Ülgen gives one of his daughters to the owner of the drum.[33] The shaman "marries" this spirit, who becomes his celestial wife (Dyrenkova 2012, 346).[34] This marriage becomes problematic when the shaman is a woman.

Indeed the shamaness does not, and should not, marry a spirit. Once more, the reason lies in the exogamic exchange of patrilineal societies, where every man is a "wife taker". For hunting groups, Roberte Hamayon stated that the shaman who marries a "spirit donor of the game" is perceived as a "taker". The daughters of the divinity in pastoral groups, as avatars of this married animal spirit, can be married. But a woman shaman anyway remains a woman and cannot assume the social role of "taker". In this situation, then, the "electing spirit", called *tös*, is considered a spirit of a dead person, generally a shaman, and is said to assume the role of "taker". Also, the woman cannot marry the spirit; otherwise, he would "take" her with him. That is the reason women shamans are submitted to *tös*, and that explains

possession, incorporation or incarnation of spirits (Hamayon 1998, 34, 38, 1990, 451–452).

Dyrenkova characterised the representations on the costume as "*emegender* (or *enekeler*) – spirits ancestors of the maternal clan" of the northern Altaian ethnic groups (1937, 143).[35] According to Dyrenkova, these spirits were "in an agnatic regime, diminished to the rank of subordinate spirits and dependant of the agnatic clan's main spirit Ülgen" (ibid.). This interpretation and many others elements[36] allow the author to assert that "shamanism is genetically linked to cognation, and that it is possible that the first shamans were women" (ibid.).[37]

As we have seen, shamanesses could escape from women's marginalised social status of "persons of the household", "progenitors" and "individuals used for bartering" in an exogamic and patriarchal society and gain a new position within the group. Following C. Humphrey's distinction between chiefly and shamanist landscapes (1995), where two different perceptions of the environment confront each other, shamanesses would stand at the threshold between these two worldviews, another position that offered them more freedom and control over their destiny.

We have seen that shamanesses were mainly associated with the Lower world and its harmful spirits. In Altaian representations, but more generally in Siberia and Central Asia, illnesses are said to be caused by this kind of entity. That would explain why feminine shamanism (in a broader sense of the word) remains associated with cure or divination (Anokhin 1924; Fathi 2004; Garrone 2000; Hamayon 1990, 651). Another important point concerning Central Asia deals with the fact that the more settled the ethnic groups, the more "traditional" religious practices like shamanism tend to be relegated to the feminine sphere of activities (Stépanoff and Zarcone 2011, 64).

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, significant transformations occurred in society that led to the demise of Altaian shamanism in favour of a new religious movement called Burkhanism. Soon, the shifts were followed by the promises of the Russian Revolution, which deeply modified women's role in society. I propose to look at the chronology of these events in order to understand in which context the contemporary neo-Burkhanists engage their particular writing skills.

Transformation in Altaian society in the 20th century

Burkhanism as a new set of representations and practices

From the first part of the 19th century, orthodox missionaries started to evangelise Altai's inhabitants. Then many colonists arrived, freed from serfdom in European Russia and seeking virgin and fertile lands. For them, Altai represented a paradise. Nevertheless, as they went further and further, indigenous people had to withdraw deeper and deeper in the mountains. In this context, the resentment of the Altaians toward the colonial situation gave

rise in the early twentieth century to Burkhanism, a large-scale millenarian movement that was profoundly anti-Russian and anti-shamanic. Indeed, its vernacular name, "Ak T'ang" ("white way of proceeding"),[38] emphasised the pure aspect of the ritual practices, as opposed to those of shamanism, or "black faith". The term "Burkhanism", used to name the movement in Russian ethnography, came from the new venerated deity Ak-Burkhan ("white Buddha").[39] The movement's messianic expectations may have originated in large part in the epics (Znamenski 2005, 31, 26), whose heroes were sometimes deified during this period.[40] The shamans were considered inefficient in the struggle for the land. They were also accused of having dealings only with the harmful spiritual entities of the Lower world, and so they were forced to burn their drums and costumes and to give up their practices (Klements 1905, 156–157). A clergy was set in place, headed by men called "messengers" (alt. *t'arlykchy*).[41] Women were not allowed to be messengers.[42] Animal sacrifice was abandoned, and only beneficent entities of the Upper world were called upon.

Very soon, Russian authorities decided to intervene in order to avoid both the growth of the movement and a potential massacre of the indigenous by scared Russian peasants. On the 4th of June 1904, they arrested the leaders of the movement. After their trial in 1906, the Burkhanists were acquitted. During this span of two years, the movement started to split into different branches. Some epic singers, called *kaichy*, some ex-shamans and some women became "messengers" (Danilin 1993, 114, 124). Most of the time, however, women remained messengers' assistants (*shabychy*). Moreover, they had to fill this role before their marriage (ibid.). By the end of the 20s, the movement had been challenged by the return of shamanic practices. Finally, it was repressed in the 1930s.

During the Soviet period, the preservation of traditional practices hidden inside the household explains why, in contemporary Altai, most of the ritual experts (alt. *neme biler ulus*: "persons who know something") were women and why some rituals performed by men were anyway supervised by women. The majority of the practices draw from ethnographic sources. As a matter of fact, Burkhanism rises again under multiple forms, but all these new movements are different from the original one. Altaian ritual specialists even tend to present themselves more as "messengers" than "shamans" and put forward the "purity" of their practices.[43] One of the Burkhanist branches focuses on the original movement and has taken its vernacular name, Ak T'ang, as if the latter has resurfaced. It is strictly Altaian and well organised and tries to unify the practices and representations of its members. The movement is localised in a dozen villages at the centre of the Republic. This group performs collective rituals twice a year. Women are allowed to participate but not to play any ritual role. Nevertheless, they are invited to receive "information" from the spirits. Then they write it down and diffuse the texts among the movement and beyond. The "sexualized" mobilisation of the writing technique reveals how women became the main actors in

the construction and propagation of a "believing knowledge". I argue that this new religious function, exclusively feminine, is due to an increase of their skills, competencies and knowledge in relation to the Soviet period, when Altaian women managed to get out of their traditional role of hearth keepers.

Women's emancipation during the Soviet era and beyond

Women's emancipation went hand in hand with many socioeconomic processes engaged during the Soviet period. Author E. M. Toshchakova presents social progress at its best. For example, the end of nomadism resulted from the settlement of families close to the first state farms (*kolkhoz*) (1973, 38). The opening of nurseries in 1928 guaranteed the possibility for women to work as freely as men (op. cit., 26, 37–38). Women received salaries and pensions, which decreased their dependence on their husbands (op. cit., 27, 47). Cultural transformations went along with these processes.

The end of illiteracy was proclaimed in 1937 (Potapov 1973, 323), but at this time, many Altaian women had already received diplomas (Toshchakova 1973, 35). Concerning marital traditions, the dowry system was abolished in 1927, and arranged marriages tend to disappear about the same period (op. cit., 19, 48). From 1925–26, nomadic tents with government personnel seasonally crossed the Altai to display information about the new regime but also to diffuse notions about hygiene and medicine and to promote political commitment (op. cit., 28–36). In 1930, the first "Houses of culture for Altaian women" were opened (op. cit., 31–32). Finally, women became more involved than ever in the new society during WWII, when they formed 90% of the *kolkhoz* workers (op. cit., 40).[44] After the war, transformations in women's situation were maintained by the latter's strong involvement in administrative work and by the large diffusion of feminine magazines, presenting a positive vision of the emancipated Soviet woman.[45]

Since the fall of the USSR, there is little work in the Altai Republic. According to the Statistics Department, 70% of the population is rural, and only half have jobs (Tiukhteneva 2009, 56, 2011, 312). In the villages, state farms have closed, and only administrations and shops remain. There are no men in these jobs, except for rare key positions as mayor, school director or district governor. Women work, then, as teachers, secretaries or sales assistants. Their low wages are not sufficient for an entire family, but they are, however, regular, whereas men tend to work only seasonally (as agricultural or construction workers). Women appear, then, as the main providers of the family's means, and this situation is comparable in all regions of South Siberia (Anaiban 2005, 147; Enchinov 2016, 151). In other words, the reconfiguration of family roles in this strong patriarchal society has been underway for almost a century. This situation indubitably has consequences for religious practices.

An endangered indigenous language

The end of illiteracy among ethnic groups during the Soviet period has been associated with the acceleration of their "russification". In contemporary Altai, the Altaian language is considered an official language, as well as Russian. Nevertheless, administrative texts are not produced in the indigenous language. Another point is that this language is understood only by two of the five ethnic groups of the Republic constituting the Altaian people. Altaian language, which is optionally taught at school, is thus a foreign language for many pupils. Many young Altaians who were born in Gorno-Altaisk do not speak Altaian at all. The region is also very attractive, and many Russian-speaking people who come for tourism decide to stay and live in Altai. All these factors lead to a situation of linguistic peril, which is particularly worrying for partisans of ethnic identity. Indeed, for them, the indigenous language is one of the main markers of this identity.

In the villages, teachers of Altaian language are the first persons engaged in the conservation of the ethnic language, traditional knowledge and practices. More generally, women are involved much more than men in the conservation and improvement of the Altaian spiritual and cultural heritage, especially through the work of Houses of Culture. Many women mediums of the neo-Burkhanist movement are also teachers or cultural workers.

Neo-Burkhanist mediums as ritual specialists

Women mediums as indigenous missionaries

Teachers appear to be the ideal representatives for the spiritual entities of neo-Burkhanism. Socially speaking, they are go-betweens and mediators for the transmission of knowledge in villages. As mediums, they play on the heritage of the Soviet period, which links writing technique with "scientific knowledge". In Russia in general, writing still benefits from a dominating status, and in their texts, mediums often associate Altaian representations with scientific references (like DNA, genetics, and the cosmos, Marx or Einstein). As D. Arzyutov writes, esoteric knowledge is then overtaken and texts gain authority (2014).

Invitations to protect the environment and respect nature closely relate to contemporary ecological and global concerns. Written in Russian, they are addressed to a larger audience than only Altaian-speaking people. Some texts are even directly addressed to the administration. That helps the export of the ideas beyond the movement and the borders of the Altai Republic. The movement counts more than 2,000 followers on VK.[46] A glance at the movement's VK page demonstrates that indigenous Altaians are not the only ones who agree with the movement. According to neo-Burkhanist adepts, the texts spread their worldview.[47] In doing so, the texts are supposed to supplant other sacred texts, which contributes to reverse the registers: texts play an "indigenous missionary role" (op. cit., § 53), while women mediums become "indigenous missionaries".

Women mediums as New Age shamanesses

The women mediums I met with were often in their late fifties or older, single or widowed and without children at home, in other words, in those familial configurations that typify shamaness status. They told me that most of the time, they received messages during the night, while sleeping. The spirits obliged them to get up and write the texts straight away. This focus on improvisation and the impossibility of resisting the spirits' will is similar to shamanic incantations, which have to be improvised to be efficient, or to epic recitation, when the bard is so inspired by the spirits that he cannot stop his recitation.[48] It is also interesting to observe that the leader of the movement invites women to "feel the call of the spirits during the rituals", as if they were "elected" like shamans. On the contrary, the masculine ritual specialists are appointed by the leader. Apart from their "spiritualistic" activities, these women often perform divination or purification rituals for locals and tourists and are called "shamanesses".[49] To my point of view, all these elements tend to position the women mediums in continuity with the shamanesses of the past.



Figure 7.2 An Ak T'ang adept presents the felt rugs where she embroiders the visions she receives from the spirits. The written texts accompanying the visions are on her knees (Elo, Altai Republic).

Source: © Clément Jacquemoud 2014.

Their capacities as mediums are related to those called "automatic writing" or *channelling* in the New Age movement. One has to say that many of these women are influenced by Helena Roerich's experiences in *channelling*. This pioneering figure of the (Russian) New Age was the wife of the mystic painter Nicolas Roerich, and she received messages from mysterious entities called Urusvati. With her husband, she came to Altai during the 1920s, seeking Shambhala, a mythical realm of Tibetan Buddhism. By the end of the Soviet period, her writings had become very popular in Russia. They especially influenced the Altaian region and its inhabitants and visitors.[50] It is not surprising, then, that some of the neo-Burkhanist adepts told me they had been inspired by E. Roerich and Urusvati (E. Roerich's mystical name). Their "spiritualistic" capacities also allow us to compare the neo-Burkhanist adepts with women who manifest the signs of election by the Holy Spirit in evangelical Christianity.[51] In a way, their capacities could be characterised, then, as "written glossolalia". This comparison also implies the fierce struggle that nowadays takes place in the Altai Republic between the different religious movements.

Finally, we can consider that women mediums act at the same time as representatives of a rational and scientific knowledge interacting with the Administration as well as persons linked to the spirits. They also occur as New Age shamanesses as well as indigenous missionaries and as women in a strongly patriarchal society, as well as persons freed from the patriarchal yoke. All these positions in society require contradictory modes of relationships: to the inherited Soviet rationality and to the traditional worldview, to an idealised past and to a precarious and uncertain present, to the local and to the global. These antithetic modes of relationships allow us to apprehend women's situation through Houseman and Severi's analytic framework of ritual (2009, 201–209). I believe that the condensation which results in of all these antithetic modes of relationships renews the position of these women in Altaian society: it emphasises their role as spokespersons and empowers them as guardians of traditional knowledge. They benefit from a charismatic authority, according to the Weberian sense of the word, one reason I suggest considering them as "scriptural prophetesses".

Conclusion

As shamanesses, Altaian women were able to transgress the "categorical boundaries" of the patriarchal society (Hamayon 1978, 24). However, as feminine shamanism tended to abolish the strict sexual division of tasks, it could be understood as compensation for social frustration. Shamanesses thus stood at a "threshold" of practices in the social and religious systems. They tried to enlarge the margins of freedom in their lives, while at the same time, they submitted to the spirits. During the Soviet period, women's commitment to the construction of socialism granted them equal status with men. Nowadays, the difficult socioeconomic situation in Altai strengthens

the importance of women in families' economies. Women are also the most active partisans of a revival of the indigenous culture.

The women involved in the neo-Burkhanist movement are part of this process of cultural revitalisation. Their use of the writing technique within a religious framework allowed their categorisation as "scriptural prophetesses". Nevertheless, as J. Bonhomme already stated for a case study in Gabon, the writing technique cannot be separated from the ideology it comes from (2009, 20), that is to say Soviet ideology, and it also reflects Altai's colonial history. The writing technique has been appropriated and "takes place in a social, cultural and historical context that gives it a form" (ibid.), namely that of shamanic incantations. As we have seen, writing is a technique of knowledge as well as a form of power and "allows new ways to show ourselves for others; it is a way to elaborate original forms of subjectivity" (op. cit., 2). Thanks to its appropriation, women mediums actually managed to renew their social positions in Altaian post-Soviet society.

Finally, if some of the contemporary writings of the neo-Burkhanist mediums contain a heavy protesting load, they nevertheless do not openly defy the authorities. But the latter consider the texts subversive anyway and have already proceeded to censorship. Recently, some leaders of Ak T'ang have been condemned and the movement, considered a "sect" in Russia, is now forbidden.[52] This reminds us that speculating on a revitalised past in contemporary Russia often hides a political process, which deserves to be questioned.

Notes

1 I am grateful to the editors and to my colleagues for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. All conclusions and any mistakes are my responsibility.
2 Amselle (2001, 65).
3 Tuvan women (a Turkic ethnic group neighbour of the Altaians) even had to cover their faces in these circumstances (Anaiban 2005, 36).
4 This abundance of periphrasis in women's speech led some authors to consider that there existed a specific "women's language" (Sagalaev et al. 1990, 155).
5 See also Anaiban (2005, 36, 39) for neighbouring regions of Tuva and Khakassia. According to Ducloux (2015), women in Islamic countries of Central Asia are much more submissive to their mothers-in-law.
6 Maadai-Kara (1973) and Potanin (2005 [1883], 369–371, 427–429).
7 Such artefacts can be a *sudur bichik* (a "book of sutras"), a scarf or a ladle.
8 For neighbouring regions, see Anaiban (2005, 30) and Hamayon (1990, 240, 284–285).
9 In all probability, this word comes from the Mongolian *taady* "lord, sovereign" (Sagalaev 1984, 94).
10 In all probability, this name is connected to Kharkul, the other name of Baatour khongtaidji, a Choros-Oirat prince of the Choros tribe during the time of the Dzungar Khanate (died 1634) (Courant 1912, 19, 39; Grousset 1941, 605).
11 Women are also not allowed to touch the shaman's paraphernalia (Anokhin 1924, 37–38) or to feed their father-in-law's dog (D'iakonova 2001, 154–155; Shatinova 1981, 111).
12 Before the hunt, men wish to dream about a sexual relationship with the feminine spirit of the forest (Dyrenkova 2012, 143; Hamayon 1990, 393). We will

see that the shaman in hunting societies marries a spirit "donor of the game". Other authors have linked women's blood flow with rivers (L'vova et al. 1988, 18–19). The aquatic world in Central and Inner Asia is often seen as feminine. In Mongolia, some rites to spirits of the river were conducted exclusively by women (Humphrey 1995, 150; Humphrey and Onon 1996, 155). For a more general analysis of "pollution", see Douglas (1966, 152–154).

13 During the wedding, the woman quits the protection of the spirits of her father's clan and goes under the protection of the spirits of her husband's clan. This process is symbolized by a procession between the house of the fiancé's mother's brother (*taaǐ*) and the fiancé's parents' house. During this especially dangerous time, when the young woman is outside without any spirit protection, two young boys walk ahead carrying a white fabric in order to "purify" the path, and a group of women sing blessings (Jacquemoud 2015, 113–114). Potanin nevertheless claims that when a shaman gets married, he can invoke the spirits that his wife brought with her (2005, 63).

14 To receive protection of the spirits of the husband's clan does not mean the possibility of worshipping them (see note 13). Thus, the interdiction of participation seems to be general for all clanic rituals of the South Siberian Turkic tribes (see, for example, the ritual *pozo kochazi* among the Kumandins [Lot-Falck 1977, 79]). In Mongolia, the situation is comparable: in Urgunge's village, "all the men would go up the mountain for a sacrifice. No adult woman could be present, as it was thought that they were unclean" (Humphrey 1996, 147). Even old women were not allowed to make a *t'aiik*, the clanic spirit's material representation, for the reason that they have "impure hems" (*edekte kirlu*; Chanchibaeva 1978, 101). Finally, the authors do not systematically specify if women are allowed to attend rituals of their father's clan after their marriage or not (for example: forbidden in Anokhin 2013, 217).

15 S. Tiukhteneva speaks about Altaian women shamanesses as a "third gender" (2005, 161), while B. Saladin d'Anglure introduced the notion of "troisième sexe social" (third social sex) in order to characterize Inuit healers in general (2004).

16 I am indebted to M. Strathern (1972) for this expression.

17 In forest hunting societies, shamans perform collective rituals mainly in order to obtain luck for the hunt.

18 Radlov mentions the scarcity of a shamanic gift transmitted from a father to his daughter, while his Russian editor S. I. Vainstein contradicts him (Radlov 1989, 620). As far as I know, Radlov is the only one among the authors of the 19th century who (briefly) describes a shamanic ritual conducted by a woman in South Siberia (*op. cit.*, 224).

19 Potanin met earlier with a shamaness in Mongolia and gave a description of her ritual (1881, 83–87). According to Potapov, Chinese sources speak about shamanesses among the Uyghurs in the 8th century, at a time when Manichaeism was a State religion (1953, 96).

20 In the whole of Siberia, male shamans have many different names. On the contrary in Altaic Siberia, only the term *udagan*, with phonetic variations (as *idakon, otogon, jaragan, ut[a]gan*), is employed to indicate female shamans (Lot-Falck 1977, 18; Roux 1958, 135). In Altai, female shamans do not have a special name.

21 Other symptoms include epilepsy, headaches, great fatigue, dreams where the neophyte sees his/her body dismembered by the spirits and so on (Verbitskii 1993, 63; Dyrenkova 1930, 269).

22 Many contemporary sources present Ülgen as the supreme heavenly creator-god. According to G. N. Potanin (1883, 62), Ülgen and Erlik are divinities of all the Altaians. Nevertheless, the ethnograph also states that people from clan Dzhabak do not venerate Ülgen (*idem*). Later, V. A. Muitueva argues that Ülgen is only

a *tös* (spiritual ancestor) for a number of Altaian clans (2004, 18). That would explain why Anokhin uses the plural when he speaks about "Ülgens" (1924).

23 According to Potapov (1949, 197), Teleut shamanesses could perform rituals to Ülgen.

24 Only shamans with a costume could make sacrificial rites to purchase the soul. They performed it at night, after the full moon, a period particularly favourable to get in touch with harmful entities.

25 The Shors are a Turkic-speaking group culturally and geographically close to the Altaians. They mainly live in the Kemerovo Province (Ru. Kemerovskaia oblast'), a region neighbouring the Altai Republic.

26 In the epic Kan Altyn, Erlik himself acts like a shaman (*Altaiskie geroicheskie skazaniia* 1997, 438–441).

27 Nevertheless, the election generally happens during adolescence (Hamayon 1978, 30). According to S. Tiukhteneva, if a woman becomes a shamaness too young, for instance, during her adolescence, she will be doomed to stay unmarried and childless and to live a short life (2005, 154).

28 Comparable stances can be found in I. M. Lewis (2003, 71–87) (I am grateful to the editors for their notification).

29 Many Altaian women still birth children at about twenty years old.

30 The predominant role of women in conducting marriage rituals illustrates their importance in the conservation of the traditional practices (Arzyutov and Tadina 2010, 225–226; Jacquemoud 2015, 109–116).

31 Among other names, Anokhin proposes *Ülgeniŋ aky t'en kys* (Ülgen's older brother's young fiancée) or *Kyiandar*. The latter name has no acceptable signification. Should we understand *kaiyndar* as "parents-in-law and their relatives"?

32 Shaman Enchu from Ongudai called them *Teniridyng kyz*, "daughters of the Sky" (Potanin 2005 [1883], 43).

33 The Shors are an ethnic group culturally close to the Altaians, living in the neighbouring region of Kemerovo. Here the spirit is called *tös-kys*: "young women ancestor".

34 Actually, in this situation, the other daughters would be considered *kaiyndar*, "parents-in-law and their relatives" (see note 26).

35 After their marriage, women received doll *emegender* from their mother. They took it with them to their husband's dwelling and had to regularly feed it.

36 Many elements of the costume are linked with feminine activities or clothes (Dyrenkova 1937, 143).

37 This point of view is nevertheless not shared by M. S. Czaplicka (1914, 244).

38 *T'aŋ* is often translated as "faith" or "law".

39 According to B. Laufer (1916, 393), *burhan* is a spirit with whom shamans of the Turkic peoples of Altai are in contact. But in Mongolian, the term designates the Buddha or a completely different deity, as confirmed by Krader (1956, 283). According to Znamenski (2005, 37), *burhan* has been the "image of Buddha" ever since Buddhism became the state religion of the Oirat Empire in 1616 (*op. cit*., 32). The term, having originated in the Buddha, is now general and generic, designating deities in Mongolia, as attested by the name for Ursa Major (Mg. *doloon burhan,* "seven gods") and of the destination of the souls of the dead (Mg. *burhany oron,* "land of the gods") (Ruhlmann 2009, § 8–16).

40 For the burkhanists, Altai is the region where Oirot-Khan, White Burkhan's messiah, will come from. This messiah will save the indigenous people from Russian's yoke and preserve them from the upcoming end of the world. Very quickly, the adepts perceive themselves as a group of elects. Altai is not only apprehended as an elected land, where Oirot will come, but also worshipped as a divinity. It is also perceived as a protective fortress where adepts will live in peace and abundance (Jacquemoud 2019).

41 Leaders of the movement appointed the messengers and regularly organized reunions, during which they transmitted their "commandments".
42 Messengers were exclusively men and not shamans. This calls into question the possibility that most of them were elders or clan leaders.
43 Indeed, shamans are perceived as persons dealing with harmful entities and likely to bring misfortune more than to cure.
44 In 1957, women still formed 62% of the kolkhoz workers (Toshchakova 1973, 42).
45 For example magazines *Soviet Woman* or *Rabotnitsa* often displayed the representation of a "captive occidental housewife" in parallel to the freedom offered by the socialist way of life.
46 VK is a very popular social network in Russia, whose configuration is comparable to Facebook. The VK page of the movement: https://vk.com/club47031643
47 One of the main texts is called "What does Ak T'ang signify?" It serves as a basis to develop the ideas of the movement and to retrieve an indigenous translation of the terms, in contradiction with those given by Russian ethnography.
48 Improvisation is a *sine qua non* criterion in order to characterise a shaman as efficient: his mode of expression has to be personal, original and constantly renewed. A renowned bard can also improvise if it is the spirit who speaks through his voice.
49 See, for example the documentary film *Novogodnie gadaniia* [New Year Fortunetelling] (Astra Media, 2016). Online: https://dok-film.net/novogodnie_chudesa_2016_2970e128.html
50 For more information about N. Roerich's influence in Altai and in Russia in general, see Lunkin and Filatov (2000), McCannon (2002, 2012) and Savelli (2019).
51 Former adepts of shamanism generally reinterpret the signs of the spirits as omens sent by God after their conversion to evangelical Christianity (among others, see Burelle 2011; Csordas 2002; Gunther Brown 2011; Meyer 1999; Robbins 2004; Vaté 2009).
52 Starting in 2008, some adepts of the religious movement have been condemned for publications that were considered subversive and nationalistic. Then, in 2013, an Ak T'ang adept was accused of sawing down an Orthodox cross standing along the main road, M52. More recently, in 2018, adepts of the religious movement filed a complaint against the forces of law and journalists for their accusation of extremism. The action led in February 2019 to the interdiction of the movement by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. Moreover, some adepts are suspected to have destroyed a Buddhist stupa erected in the Karakol valley in the 1990s (Halemba 2008, 148).

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8 "Let me take your pain away"

Female shamanism in a Central Asian soundscape

Razia Sultanova

Shamanism in Central Asia

Early religious practices and beliefs

At the dawn of Central Asian civilization, the sun was considered a god, and people worshipped it every single day.[1] Sun-worshipping rituals developed into other rituals, and people celebrated every important event with praying, singing, and dancing to please the divinity at sunrise.

According to scholars, at the very beginning of human history in Central Asia, the sky was mythologically associated with the "mother goddess", the giver of life, representing all time and space. So, in general, spiritual practices were based on local beliefs that god is a woman. Female gatherings in Central Asian area were related to the system of celebrations based predominantly on the solar/lunar calendar or on different religious beliefs, such as Tengrianism, Manichaeism and shamanism. In Zoroastrian belief, an Indo-Iranian cosmological figure, Anahita (Aredvi Sura Anahita in the Avestan language), was the goddess of water and rain. Associated with fertility, healing, and wisdom, she looked after the wellbeing of women, promoting fertility and safe childbirth and making the life of women a little easier. In the area of Khorezm (west of Uzbekistan), Anahita became known as Ambar-Ona, whose power comes from the Amu Darya River. Female shamans still invoke her name for the success of healing rituals. At *Navruz* (a pre-Islamic New Year celebration on 22 March), songs are performed in her honour during the preparation of the sacred meal, *sumalyak*. Women celebrate *Navruz* with singing, to the accompaniment of *doira* (frame drum) or clapping, featuring solo, duet, or chorus singing which is based on repetitive forms of blessings, greetings, or jokes. Singing is built on simple melodic patterns, short metrical and rhythmical structures that date back to the time when singing was intended to protect and to deflect the power of spells and the evil eye. *Navruz* is associated with the magical importance of the cult of Nature and the Earth. It is one of Central Asia's favourite holidays, associated with the renewal of nature and the arrival of the warm days of spring.

Apart from indoor celebrations like *Navruz*, there are also outdoor celebrations like the ritual *sust hotin* (call for rain, rain making). This ritual involves a procession of women who climb a hill nearest the village and appeal to the Goddess *sust hotin* with incantations. According to local traditional belief, the performance of these songs brings forth clouds and heavy rain.

Origin of shamanism in Central Asia

As Homayun Sidky argues, "In Central Asian culture Shamanism was an essential part of religious beliefs".[2] Based on cults of ancestors, stones, mountains, and the earth goddess *Otukan*, shamanism was shared by the Uzbeks of the Oxus delta and the Mongols and Turkmen.[3] Nineteenth-century Russian ethnographers reported the presence of shaman-sorcerers and exorcists in Tajikistan, who employed human skulls, drums, smoke, and animal blood in their rituals. Similarly, the Uzbek and Kazakh shamans, until the 19th century, beat sacred drums and were adept at divination and healing. Among the Kazakhs, these specialists were known as *baqshi*. They were said to have been able to communicate with Jinns (spirits, in Arabic), who acted as their familiars, helping them to cure illness, foretell the future, and combat the malicious influence of evil spirits.[4] The Turkmen also had shamanistic beliefs, several of which persist in Afghan Turkestan. Among the Kyrgyz and Uighur people, shamans were also known as *bakshi*. While curing illness and foretelling the future, they used to beat drums, enter into trances, and invoke Allah, Adam, Noah, and other members of the "Biblical-Qoranic pantheon".[5] Ancient Turks called shamans "*kam*". They are first mentioned in the "Tan'shu", Chinese manuscripts of the 10th century, which refer to Hakass and their *kams* (shamans). Some evidence of Central Asian Shamanism is displayed in the philosophical poem "Kutadgu Bilig" by Yusuf Hos Hajib (11h century) and the *Dictionary of Turkic Dialects* by Mahmud Kashgari (11th century).[6]

Today, in the very heart of Central Asia, in Ferghana Valley, shamans are mostly women. In Ferghana Valley, shamans are called *bakshi, parihan*, (*pary* – a spirit, *hondan* – to read), or *falbin* (*fal* – a destiny, *bin* – to see). Also, they could be called *taib* (*tabib* in Arabic) or *kinanchi* (the person taking evil from a patient). The predominant tool for shamanic healing rituals is a frame drum.[7]

The term "shaman" is derived from the Tungus–Ewenki (the ethnicity living in the forests north and east of Lake Baikal in Siberia, speaking the Altaic language) word *saman* or *vaman*,[8] meaning a magician, healer, priest, mystic, poet, and performer of miracles, or a shaman as "one who uses specific techniques of ecstasy".[9] These techniques include music, rhythmic dancing, seclusion, and, most frequently, *zikr* (i.e. *zikir*) – the repetition of mystical formulae, when the shaman "begins to pronounce his incantations and, holding a drum, strikes it forcefully against the ground".[10]

Shamanism and Islam

Islam and shamanism in the area are contrasting phenomena: Islam is a mass religion, whereas only rare individuals represent shamanism, and it was present in those lands which Islam conquered in the 7th century. Shamanism is usually associated with "marginal hunting cultures" based on agriculture and animal herding, which lack the complex technical and social organization of Islamic civilization.[11] Shamanism is represented by individual, personal communication with the spirits, whereas Islam and Sufism are meant to be communal, mass association with God. Indeed, shamanic beliefs in Central Asia have shown a remarkable ability to persist alongside major religious traditions; from Islam's point of view, shamanic traditional tolerance for *adat* (from the Arabic for "customary practices") has enabled it to accommodate shamanism as well as other indigenous cultural practices and beliefs.[12]

In Central Asia, shamanism took on a Muslim cast. Shamanism remained conflicting with Islam but became a "professional competition" rather than a collision of different ideologies. In their outlook, shamans did not differ from other orthodox Muslims.[13] When beginning a ritual, shamans appealed first to Allah, then to the various Muslim saints, and only afterwards to their helping spirits, who were considered a kind of genie (Jinn), so often mentioned in the Qur'an.[14] A typical synthesis between shamanism and Islam can be observed in Uzbekistan, where Uzbek shamans began a séance by singing bismilla (a shortened form of the Muslim formula busmillakhi-r-rakhmani-r-rakhim: "in the name of Allah, the merciful, the good"). It is to be uttered before beginning any undertaking; the shamans of the other Central Asian people also began their rituals singing with similar phrases.[15]

From healing rituals to protective songs

In Eski Noukat village (Osh district, Kyrgyzstan) in 2002, I saw two women whispering and talking rapidly, using sayings and tongue twisters, pretending they spoke in other people's voices, bending over a girl who had fallen ill. The two *azayimhons* (shamans or fortune-teller and healer women) continued in this way until the girl started vomiting and fell asleep. They said the girl had fallen ill because ghosts disturbed her as she went to see the ruins of a centuries-old house. They said that they had exorcised the bad spirits and now the girl would recover.

On another occasion, in Boisun village, an old lady cured her granddaughter by chopping off a hen's head. She then soaked her fingers in the hen's fresh blood and spread it inside her granddaughter's throat. "It's the best treatment against sore throat", she said. In Boisun village, the most famous shaman/bakshi was a man called *Turi Bakshi*. He practiced in a smoky room (the central room in his house), heating a knife over the fire preparing for the culmination of his healing ritual. Shaking his head, vibrating his lips, emitting louder and more forceful eerie sounds, he twirled the knife

around the head of his patient, who was sitting on the floor. The increasing smoke, when finally his patient started to move and, crawling slowly, left the room, obscured the visibility.

Shamanism in Central Asian traditional culture

Shamanism in Uzbek folk culture

Although there are numerous examples of the relationship between shamanism and music in Uzbek culture, we focus here on the most common form: music of celebration and, in particular, a wedding song performed by women. This female song, which has been handed down from ancient times, is sung all over Uzbekistan and is heard at every single wedding throughout the nation, called Yor-Yor ("Beloved, beloved"):

Yor-Yor, Uzbek female wedding song

Hello riding woman, horse woman,
You didn't keep your promises you deceiver-woman.
A foal is in the meadow and thinks he is already a horse
At home the new bride is crying saying she is a stranger here.
Don't cry girl, don't cry girl, it's your wedding
The golden threshold of the house is yours.
In the sky there are stars, they say you are the eight stars
The eight star girls have come.
We will be the head of the eight girls
As sight in the garden we will be like open flowers.
In the middle of the garden there is a fig tree
Under the tree there is a golden chest.
Let the hinges of the chest not be broken
Let the bond of the bride and the groom not be broken.[16]

The tune and rhythm are simple and are said to have protective meaning. However, in analyzing the song's poetry in a more detailed way, one can find that the sacred symbols of local beliefs are present here in the most dynamic way. Why are the words and phrases, "threshold", "house", "eight flowers", and "eight stars" so widely used here?

To answer the question, we should turn our attention to Uzbek decorative art and particularly to its special example – *suzane* (large decorative wall-hanging silk embroideries) – *suzanis* were made exclusively by women. These embroideries were popular only in the Central Asian region, where different *suzane* designs developed in different areas. By the mid-19th century, the art of *suzane* was formed as a standard system of patterns and developed its traditional styles. The composition, colour, and ornamentation based on floral motifs and vegetative-style images were the supreme manifestation of the harmony of universe. A professional craftswoman,

known as a *kalamkash*, designed each *suzane*. These skills were passed down from mother to daughter or between other female members of the family. Though *suzane* embroidery was primarily designed as domestic articles, the ornamentation was intended to give protection from the evil eye. Behind every conventional sign, there was a meaning. It employed a space-related symbolism where each element of ornament went back to astral motifs, whose source was probably in religious belief. Embroideries played the part of protective objects. Some decorative motives of the *suzane*, expressed in ornamental details and floral roundels, symbolize a house and a threshold, pointing to the hidden meaning of a protected space where no evil eye can reach and affect you. For example, "a door as a threshold possesses a deep symbolic meaning, bringing the image of the frontier between good and evil, light and dark, new and old, associated with sunrise and sunset. As archaeologists found out in the seventh–eighth centuries in Afrosiabe and Pandjikent areas, sacred rituals occurred on the thresholds of Sogdian shrines".[17] One of the most popular motifs in Uzbek *suzane* is certainly the floral roundel in the shape of an eight-cornered star, emerging very often as an eight-petalled flower. Originating in the shamanic past, the symbol of the eight-cornered star, numerously mentioned in the popular Uzbek wedding song "Yor-Yor", symbolizes the cosmos, the power of universe. So, here in the *suzane*, those shamanic symbols are combined with later Islamic decorations: the eight-cornered star, the astral shamanic symbol, sign of the universe, later became a popular symbol of Sufism.[18]

The Kazakh shaman – Galeke

Music can be used specifically for its healing effects, as in the case of a woman, Galeke, famous in Kazakhstan for her unique ability to heal people using song. When her tender and pure voice starts flowing over the audience, people forget all their troubles. Her voice brings such a memorable joy that people ask her to sing again and again. At the age of five, Galeke acquired the power of prophetic prediction, acting only through intuition. She senses immediately what problems are affecting your body from the first time she sees you and during her singing sessions helps people to balance their health. The basis of her repertoire includes such genres of Kazakh traditional musical culture as *kara olen*. But she also sings Tatar, Russian, and Kyrgyz folk songs with or without accompaniment.

> Galiya's birth was preceded by amazing and memorable events. The wolf is a common ancient totem of the Kazakhs and, more widely, of the Turks. The she-wolf, who legendarily reared the Turkic Prince Ashin, is the heroine of many ancient Turkic myths. Well, a large pack of dark blue wolves had overwhelmed the small settlement in the north of Kazakhstan at the time when Galiya Kasymova was born. For days people could not venture out for fear of the wolf pack. The nurse who had to help

> deliver the child took an axe for self-defence and went to Galeke's parents' house ignoring the danger of wolves around the village.[19]

No doubt that was the moment to mark the arrival of, in Basilov's term, "*the chosen one of the spirits*".

The sound of music in Galeke's performance impacts the listeners in a manner similar to a Baqshi's healing séance. According to Galeke, sound is a channel of energy.

> All folk songs have extreme magic power. It doesn't matter what language they are sung in or what ethnicity they represent: Kazakh, Tatar, Kyrgyz, Russian. These folk songs are energetically active and are supposed to have healing effects on ill people. The same happens with traditional instruments. Music played on those instruments possesses healing power. Classical music is also available for healing. Prayers, casting spells and chanting are also effective means for the healing process. . . . Not only sound but also water is a substance with strong healing power. . . . Seventy per cent of the human body consists of water. Music can change the code of water, as water remembers the information and can acquire sacred or healing features. No wonder that there is sacred water, Holy water. If prayers and sayings are said to the water, imbuing it with the spells' effect, it can be used afterwards for the healing process. . . . I have healed intuitively from the very beginning using non-contact therapy. In my childhood I could call for rain. I can foresee people's destinies. They come to me as a picture of colours or a code of digits.[20]

Turkmenistan

Shamanism has always been part of Turkmen culture. The shamanic idea of the upper, the middle, and the lower worlds is present in Turkmen arts, primarily in the decorations of rugs, carpets, and kilims. Skilful Turkmen female weavers in ornaments that symbolize the Turkmen view of life, as well as their philosophy, depict two main elements of Tengrianism – earth and sky. A linguistic approach shows that the archaic word for the carpet in old Turkmen and Turkic languages is *kowuz* or *kowur* (this word has become *kovyor* in Russian), derived from the word *kopuz*. *Kopuz* is considered the oldest Turkic musical instrument.[21] In the remote past, the *kopuz* was a long-necked bowed lute, which was widely used in shamanic practice. It is believed that the sound of *kopuz* helps to attract good spirits and to repulse demons.

The principal design of Turkmen rugs and carpets, which has been used for centuries, is called *göl*. Literally, this means a lake, symbolizing the cult of water, over which birds are flying. But it is also believed that it was originally a reflection of sky on earth, or stars on water on the earth beneath.

Zikr, among the Turkmen, is a recital of Sufi poetry with dance rituals, performed by men as well by women, until they reach a state of ecstasy.

However, the poems of Yassavi (12th-century Sufi poet, the founder of the Yassaviya Sufi order), widely used in *zikr*, contain many shamanistic motifs and elements. While singing and dancing, shamans and the crowd very often produce guttural sounds, which correspond to "*hu*", meaning "God" among the Sufis, with an Islamic connotation. However, it is believed that the ritual and the repetition of a guttural sound similar to the Sufi "*hu*" is related to the legend of a spiritual leader who, while preaching vegetarianism, was caught eating meat. As a punishment, he was wrapped in tree bark and cut with a saw. Therefore, the guttural sound in the Sufi ritual is said to be the sound of the saw cutting the bark, which, in time, has turned into the sound of "*hu*" – the repetition of the name of God. The guttural sound is present in Turkmen music even today, bringing a mystical property to the song. It is interesting that it is used in both male and female performance.

One can find shamanistic elements in Turkmen female folk songs. Women improvise the lyrics for eulogies which praise the deceased and define his or her virtues. In the villages and in the countryside, young girls in groups under the moonlight sing "*laleh*" in the form of quatrains to express their feelings towards their beloved or to complain about social obstacles which obstruct their meeting with their loved ones. No wonder that in matriarchal society there were female musicians and even female baqshi. Today, in Turkmenistan, a broad range of folksongs are performed in connection with shamanism, for example, the popular *syut-gazan* – a song calling for rain. The call for rain, for instance, is addressed to *syut-gazan*, protector of animals, who was able to bring rain using magic rain stones, "*yada*". That genre reflects both the ancient agricultural, shamanic cults of Turks-Oghuz and Islamic influences. Nowadays children sing this song as a game.[22] *Zikr* (*zyakir, zykyr* in Turkmen) performances are commonplace at Turkmen weddings. Together with wedding songs, with the exclamations "*alla*", *huv-hu*, "*eh-ha*", it is based on dancing forms. *Zikr* for weddings play an important role as a form of protection for the new family.

Tajikistan

Khojent is a city in the Ferghana Valley where the Uzbek and Tajik populations are mixed together. In 1997, I recorded a healing ritual which involved a huge crowd of people. People gathered in the Central Square around a small house (the former Club of Culture), forming a long queue. Waiting patiently in line to experience the cures of well-known Sitorabanu-Otin were people from different parts of Tajikistan. She turned out to be a magician who helped everyone free of charge. People said she was able to cure not only different kind of illnesses and disease but even some neglected conditions such as alcoholism or the behaviour of bad-tempered husbands. The story of her healing power went back to six years ago, when one day both of her children disappeared. She desperately looked for them everywhere, and then, people said, she had a dream where the Hazrat Ali advised her to start

helping people, to heal them for twelve years, and then her children would safely return. When I met her, she looked deeply depressed but was performing her duty with an astonishing devotion. She spent long hours trying to cure people, gaining enormous respect. People consider Sitorabanu-Otin an angel who has come to the city to rescue them.

Those who joined her practice were asked to attend ten sessions of twenty minutes each. Every person had to be covered by white headscarf. Nearly everyone had a jar of water in front of them. A session would start with a prayer followed by a collective prayer, her speech (which has very much religious content), and a long musical meditation during which people sat on the floor, sinking into a deep trance, after which the session was over. People said that her cure came from her image, her appearance, and her way of praying over their heads. All kinds of music were used for these sessions, though all the music was heard in the background. Her prayers were recited in very genuine beautiful voice with dynamically wavy structure; tapes were played in musical sessions, during which she continued slowly walking around, touching each head during the session and making gentle gestures with her arms. Not only the patients themselves but even those people who could not make a journey to see Sitorabanu-Otin but whose photographs were displayed got restored to health. Many people told me that they were saved by this inexplicable experience.[23]

Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, women perform old Kyrgyz epics for the purpose of healing and entertainment. Usually, they use their own preferred style for epic performance. One remarkable Kyrgyz female musician who works in the old epic style today is Roza Amanova. Coming from a traditional musical background (her mother, Chonmurun Kyzy Marjankul, was a famous singer), Roza Amanova sings little-known genres, but her powerful voice captures you, and the sounds stay with you for a long time. Her performance recreating the centuries-old epic Kurmanbek (the national hero of the 16th–17th century) could, owing to its universal content, be of widespread interest today.[24]

Kyrgyz epics and songs are moving and impressive. The celebrated Kyrgyz writer Tchingiz Aitmatov, in his novel *Jamilia*, spoke of the tender, penetrating, yearning loneliness expressed in Kyrgyz songs, when the voice wavers and rings out with increasing power. These songs are able to evoke everything – mountains, steppes, grass, clouds, rivers, and people's feelings.[25]

Musical instruments

Dutar

Central Asian musical instruments are historically associated with extreme power related to shamanic spirits, for example, the Uzbek-Turkmen *dutar*,

which is also widespread in the Uyghur province of China. According to local beliefs, it has deep symbolic protective meaning. Among the large group of Central Asian musical instruments, the long-necked, plucked, fretted lute *dutar* is famous for its "feminine" image and commonly used in female performance.

The evidence for the mystical origin of the *dutar* is reflected in local myths and legends. Once upon a time, Hazrat-Ali (a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad) noticed that his favourite horse, Dyul-Dyul, was gradually getting sicker and sicker, and he became increasingly worried. One day, entering the stables, he noticed that his groom Baba Kambar was playing a strange instrument – a long-necked lute. Seeing that he had been caught in action, Baba-Kambar was so frightened that he wanted to break the instrument into pieces, but Hazrat-Ali stopped him and asked what kind of instrument it was. Baba-Kambar told him that he had made the *dutar* out of the mulberry tree but that the instrument was voiceless. Then Baba-Kambar called for the help of the devil, who had given the *dutar* this beautiful voice. After that, the *dutar* acquired the intriguing/evoking/haunting voice that had made the horse sick.[26] In different sources, Baba-Kambar also appears as the inventor of *dutar* or even as a female saint (Kambar-Ana).[27]

According to another legend, Plato wanted to invent an instrument with sounds like a peacock wings. He made the *dutar*, which sounded amazingly mysterious, similar to the sounds of the wings of peacock, the bird which due to the beautiful, eye-shaped markings on its feathers is associated with the image of paradise.[28]

Kobuz

Central Asian musical instruments are historically associated with extreme power related to shamanic spirits, for example, the Kazakh instrument, *kobuz*, or from the Sufi concept of divine power. Some of these are discussed here.

Kobuz is the most ancient Central-Asian bowed lute. In Kazakh myths and legends, the creator of the first musical instrument, *kobuz*, was Korkut, the first musician and the patron of the *bakshi* (shaman). The first musical instrument of the baqshi, *kobuz*, preserved its archaic features up to the middle of the 20th century. The form of this musical instrument and the way it is held during performance represents for Kazakhs the trinomial structure of the Universe: the High World, inhabited by gods, divine spirits, and birds; the Middle World, which is the abode of human beings and warm-blooded animals; and the Lower World, where evil spirits live, as well as those that creep and float, such as fishes, snakes, and lizards. The shovel-like head (*bas*) of the *kobuz* is decorated with metal pendants in the form of rams' horns (the creatures of the High World) and birds' feathers (inhabitants of the High World). The case of the instrument, in the form of an open ladle from which, it is believed, the spirits rush out after the *bakshi*'s appeal, symbolizes

the Middle World. The Lower World is embodied by a mirror placed inside the case. It represents the World Ocean, or as the Kazakhs say, "the lower sights". The sound of *kobuz* – dense; rich; and with pre-sounds, harmonics, or overtones – is the signal for the appearance of spirits.

Pre-sounds (overtones), which play an important sacral role in the timbre of the *kobuz*, are produced because the strings and the bow of this instrument are made of bunches of straight horsehair (strings have 40–50 hairs, the bow 30–40 hairs). The friction between the bow and strings involuntarily produces partial tones – overtones and adjoining tones. Legends, widespread among the Kazakhs, testify to the belief that the *kobuz* is an animated creature. It participates and wins in *baiga* – a horse-race – and is capable of producing sounds without human input. The task of the *kobuz's* participation in *baiga* is complicated by the fact that this instrument is tied to the mighty oak. Nevertheless, the *kobuz* pulls the oak from the ground and brings it together to the finish.

The *kobuz* also has deep symbolic protective meaning: Russian philologist Victor Zhirmunsky wrote that the Kazakhs hang the *kobuz* in the *yurt* (Kazakh nomad's tent) to provide relief for a woman during childbirth.[29]

Alektorov wrote about Bakshi Suimenbai, to whom genies declared that they chose him as their master, that is, *bakshi*. "At that time, the father's *kobuz* started to play by itself and approached me from the wall near which it lay".[30]

According to Basilov's reports, shamanism is most deeply entrenched among the people of Kazakhstan. Describing a visit to the 80-year-old Kazakh shamaness, Balbike-bakshi (Southern Kazakhstan), Basilov mentioned that she told him "how she cures patients by playing on the *kobuz* and summoning the Muslim saints and spirits, the peri. At times she puts aside the *kobuz* and takes up a knife". Recounting the names of the saints, she touches the patient's body with the knife.[31] If the illness is grave, it is necessary to perform a *zikr*, and those attending the ritual, along with the shamaness, shout the names of Allah or phrases such as "There is no God but Allah!"

Traditional forms of shamanism are preserved among the Tajiks and Uzbeks. Their shamanism has long been distinguished by great diversity. Male and female shamans have different helping spirits and different healing and fortune-telling practices. Instead of the drum (or sometimes additionally), a lash, a sieve, a wooden serving spoon, a staff, a mirror, and a cup with water are used as ritual objects.[32]

Conclusion

So, one can see that shamanism relies on spiritual forces for a practical purpose: to heal or to solve a problem. Grounded in the belief in good and evil spirits, shamanism employs a sage-medium who establishes direct contact with the spirits without any mediators. This means a stronger link,

a go-between for both the physical and spiritual realms, having foretelling and healing powers, who actively seeks therapeutic and beneficial effects on behalf of others. As mentioned previously, no teachers are involved in a shaman's training, only the spirits themselves.

Upon closer examination of the present rich variety of forms of shamanism found in Central Asia, in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, one can point out that shamanism as a phenomenon is still practiced in both nomadic and settled populations of Central Asia and is most prevalent in women's circles. We can trace its varying forms occurring both in current music sessions and in various epic forms or old folk songs.

Based on a range of techniques including rituals featuring singing and repetition of mystical incantations, music accompaniment on national instruments, rhythmic dancing, and decorative design art, shamanism in Central Asia requires our further detailed scholarly investigation.

Notes

1 "Sun worship." Encyclopædia Britannica. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009.
2 Sidky (1990).
3 Krader (1963, 131).
4 Sidky (1990).
5 Krader (1963, 132).
6 Ashirov (2008, 23).
7 Ibid., p. 23.
8 Laufer (1917).
9 Eliade (1972, 4–5).
10 Basilov (1997, 43).
11 Hultkrant (1978, 52).
12 Krader (1963, 121).
13 Sultanova (2009).
14 Basilov (1997).
15 Ibid., p. 40.
16 Sultanova (2011, 99–100).
17 Ashirov (2008, 30).
18 Suharyeva (2006).
19 Elemanova (2009).
20 From my personal interviews: February 2006, July 2007, July 2008.
21 Azmun (2018).
22 Uspenskyi and Belyaev (1979, 10).
23 Sultanova (2011, 98).
24 Amanova (2004). *Kurmanbek Eposu*. Bishkek, 4 CDs, 8B4404.
25 Aitmatov (2007, 66–67).
26 Uspenskyi and Belyaev (1979).
27 Djumaev (2004, 12).
28 Uspenskyi and Belyaev (1979, 113).
29 Zhirmunsky (1974, 49).
30 Алекторов (1899, 34–35).
31 Basilov (1997, 44).
32 Basilov (1997, 45).

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9 Female shamanhood in Southern Siberia at the turn of the millennium

Revival of an ancient archetype, modernization or declining of "traditional" shamanism?

Galina B. Sychenko

The role of female shamanism in the history of humankind is not yet completely clear. First, this issue appeared in evolutionistic works, where it was typical to speak about its existence[1] prior to the emergence of male shamanism. This theory was based mainly on comparativistic methods. Now these arguments have been long dismissed as simplifications of a sort. As Roberte Hamayon writes, "some authors wonder at the pre-eminence in magic performances imputed to female shamans over their male colleagues" (Hamayon 1984, 307). The scholar, in her turn, scrupulously analyzing sources on Buriat shamanism, concludes that in developed patrilinear societies like the Buriat, female shamanism has become but a peripheral cultural phenomenon. Of course, it does not mean that the same applies to all cultures. For example, the prevalence of females is typical in Korean shamanism (Lee 1981). That is, the phenomenon can be found both in so-called "archaic" as well as in "modernized" societies.

Still, the number of studies on the phenomenon in question is not enough. Rare articles and books[2] have mostly descriptive characters and mainly propose excellent, but empirical, descriptions of the cases observed by the authors. In general, modern anthropology neither proposes any solid theory about female shamanism in the history of religious beliefs nor gives us any tools for understanding this phenomenon. Therefore, for the moment, the best way of exploring the topic could be accumulating a maximum of concrete information on this issue, revising previous materials from a gender point of view and generating theoretical suggestions.

From my opinion, the turn of the millennium is an important point of examining the situation. In Siberia, it is a moment when the generation belonging to the so-called "traditional culture"[3] was the last one that did not pass through systematic school education. Old people in remote areas born before WWII normally had primary education, a maximum of four classes, which at that time consisted of relatively simple matters such as the ability to count, read and write in Russian, that is, "foreign" language. More conceptual, scientific disciplines did not enter the schedule of that

level of education. The only media source was the radio, which was not yet present in the remote taiga, steppe and mountain areas. Although people of this generation already lived in a new socialistic context, their education was determined by traditional cultural concepts rather than by the newly established cultural matrix. Thus, for example, they could and did observe how great shamans acted within their local community;[4] they learned ritual poetry and music from them. They perfectly knew their mother language[5] in all its richness and complicity, they held a rich folkloristic heritage and they still shared shamanistic ideology and continued shamanistic practices: some of them acted as shamans, shaman's assistants and patients.

Needless to say, almost all of the Soviet period was not favourable for the continuity of traditional ways of life for peoples and ethnic groups involved in the construction of the newly established type of society. As is well known, religion, including all forms of traditional belief, was under suppression.[6] However, many such forms found a way to survive and, surprisingly, resist under extremely unfavourable circumstances. Moreover, I believe that although being reduced in complexity, they preserved some essential traits of traditions. Another fact is that the study of religious phenomena as living traditions actually was not too encouraged; therefore, we have but very few published documents representing them in the course of the 20th century. Both shamanic practice and studies of shamanistic beliefs reduced significantly in the 1930s, to be re-established only in the 1990s. Despite some – very few – scholars continuing to collect materials on shamanism in this period, a lack of information was central. That is why materials on shamanism since the turn of millennium are of great importance. This moment I regard as a turning point, because the next generation, as we saw in our last expeditions, represents a completely different type of cultural thesaurus and personalities.

In this chapter, I am going to give a general picture of shamanic traditions in Southern Siberia from a gender perspective and examine some interesting cases of female shamanic activity at the turn of the millennium. The main source for this research is my collection of field materials. These data were collected during 24 years (from 1985 to 2008) in Southern Siberia amongst Turkic-speaking populations, namely Altais (Chalkans), Khakasses (Sagays, Beltirs), Tuvats (Toju and South Tuvats) and Shors. I use also field, archive and published materials by other scholars from the beginning of the 20th century to now, particularly by A. V. Anokhin, N. P. Dyrenkova, L. P. Potapov, V. Diószegi, E. L. L'vova, N. A. Alekseev, E. P. Bat'yanova, D. A. Funk, V. I. Kharitonova, L. N. Arbachakova, R. B. Nazarenko and others.[7] Century-old historical data and their comparison with contemporary materials clearly demonstrate the process of transformation of the shamanic practice and its adaptation to adverse circumstances.

The main problems on which I am going to focus through the gender perspective are: ritual practice and paraphernalia of female shamans, transformations and some new development of "traditional" shamanism.

Traditional shamanism in Southern Siberia at the turn of the millennium from a gender perspective

During our expeditions to some remote corners of the South Siberian taiga, we met several – about two dozen – elderly men and women, who were called by the Turkic term *kam/kham*, that is, 'shaman'. They themselves usually used a different terminology. Marfa Kiskorova, a shamaness, called herself *alaschy*, because she performed only *alas* – the rite of purification (Arbachakov and Arbachakova 2004, 64–65; Arnau Muro 2000). Tadí Burnakova called herself *tag kizi*, 'mountain person', because she had dealt exclusively with mountain spirits (Kharitonova 2005a). All other specialists, regardless of their rank and ritual possibilities, called themselves *kam/kham*.

My attention was drawn to the fact that the number of shaman men and women among this generation differed (see Table 9.1).

In the earlier sources, quite a lot of data about male and female shamans in the area were found, although none of the authors intentionally reported their proportion. Further, I am making an attempt to gather approximate information from different sources.[8]

The earliest published information about the Altai-kizhi and Tubalar (*Chernevye Tatary*) of the river Katun basin appears to be the famous book by A. V. Anokhin (1924[9]). The author gives the names of all male and female shamans he met in this area. Moreover, he collected very valuable information about shamanic genealogies,[10] and this information can be studied from the gender point of view, too.[11] Anokhin's data and own observations about the number and gender of Teleut's shamans of the beginning of the 20th century were published by D. A. Funk (1997, 13–14). Anokhin also produced recordings of the singing of shamans on wax cylinders, including one Soyon (Tuvan) shamaness and Kumandin shaman. K. Hildén has published photos of two Chalkan shamans he met in 1915 (Hildén 1916). Finally, L. P. Potapov provides unic information taken from an official statistical report of 1924 about Khakass shamans (Potapov 1991, 163). The scholar himself mentions many names of the shamans he has met amongst South Siberian Turks.[12] He regrets not having exact statistical data but writes that the number of shamans of both genders increased in the

Table 9.1 The ratio of male and female shamans in Southern Siberia at the turn of the millennium (author's data, or recorded in our expeditions)

Region (Ethnic group)[13]	*Female shamans*	*Male shamans*
Northern Altai (Chalkans)	2	1
Khakassiya (Sagays and Beltirs)	3	1
Shoriya (Shors)	5	2
Tuva (Toju)	0	2
Tuva (South Tuvans)	2	2
Total number	12	8

Table 9.2 The ratio of male and female shamans in Southern Siberia in the first quarter of the 20th century

Region (Ethnic group)	*Female shamans*	*Male shamans*
Gorny Altai (Altai-kizhi, *Chernevye Tatary*)	2	21
Kemerovo (Teleuts)	4	4
Tuva (Soyons)	1	0
Northern Altai (Kumandy)	0	1
Northern Altai (Chalkans)	0	2
Khakasiya (Khakasses)	17	54
Total number	24	82

middle of the 1920s, when the government suppressed Orthodox Church activities, and the shamanism that the Church, in its turn, used to try to suppress for a brief period had flourished (Potapov 1991, 163). Combined data from these early sources (1900s–1920s) are given in Table 9.2.

As we can see, the sources differ in the completeness of the data. Of course, it is unlikely that Kumandins or Tuvans had only one shaman/shamaness.[14] However, the overall picture and proportion are in accordance with the opinion that male shamans prevailed at the time.

The next subject that was investigated and that will be discussed concerns the gender dimension of shamanic traditions in Southern Siberia and the surrounding areas of Mongolia in the early stages of its fundamental transformation, that is, in the 1950s–1960s. The main source of information of this time is the work of the eminent Hungarian researcher Vilmos Diószegi.[15] His works contain many names and information about the gender of active shamans, former shamans and assistants, as well as the names of recent shamans, which the scientist collected during his expeditions from 1957 to 1964. Sometimes the scientist carefully lists them; sometimes he gives the total approximate number and names only some of them. Nevertheless, a clear picture of the prevalence of the two sexes in the two interlinked areas shows that male shamans again constitute the majority, and their percentage – four times that of female shamans – remains roughly the same as in the previous stage (Table 9.3).

It seems clear that the predominance of male shamans was a rather steady factor throughout the last centuries until very recent times. This is quite consistent with the observation made by Hamayon previously: all the mentioned communities were patrilineal (Hamayon 1984).

At the turn of the millennium, the picture changed. Women began to prevail, at least in Southern Siberia. Several important questions rise in order to interpret such changes. Why had women become the "last shamans" in so many cases? Does it mean the transition of shamanism to a weaker position made this social role less prestigious for men? Did its existence under unfavourable circumstances reveal some archaic archetypes such as an "ancient female shamanism"?

Table 9.3 The ratio of male and female shamans in Southern Siberia and in the surrounding areas of Mongolia in the 1950–60s (V. Diószegi's data)

Ethnic group	*Female shamans*	*Male shamans*
Mongolia		
Aga Buriats	1	8
Hamnigans	0	1
Tunka and Selengin Buriats	0	3
Khalkha Mongols	0	3
Khotogoits	2	6
Darkhats	General number is about 40 shamans, but only 5 females and 3 males are mentioned	
Uryankhais (Mongolian Tuvans)	11	30
Total number in Mongolia	19	54
Southern Siberia		
Buriats	0	2
Khakasses (Sagays and Beltirs)	0	10
Taiga Tuvans	0	11
Tuvans	1	0
Tofas (Karagases)	About 30 in the first quarter of the 20th century of both genders are mentioned, and only 3 male shamans he met	
Kumandins	1	3
Total number in South Siberia	2	29
Total number in both regions	21	83

Answering these questions will only be possible after a more thorough investigation of all available data.[16] In the meantime, we will continue to examine some cases of female shamanism at the turn of the millennium. I will speak mainly about Chalkan, Kumandin, Shor and Sagay shamanesses.

Ritual practice of female shamans in Southern Siberia at the turn of the millennium

Chalkan tradition, a the time of my fieldwork, was represented by two female shamanic persons, two sisters[17] The data were collected during five expeditions: (1) January 1985, (2) July 1985, (3) July 1992, (4) June 2005 and (5) August 2007. The main set of information was gathered in 1992. Expeditions took place in the Turochak district of the Republic of Altai (former Gorno-Altaisk Autonomy *oblast'*), the first three in the small village of Suranash, where the Chalkan shamanic family Barbachakov lived at that time, and the last two in the district centre of Turochak, where one of the shamanesses has been living during the last period of time. The head of the family, the very powerful Chalkan shaman Kazakop Barbachakov, with

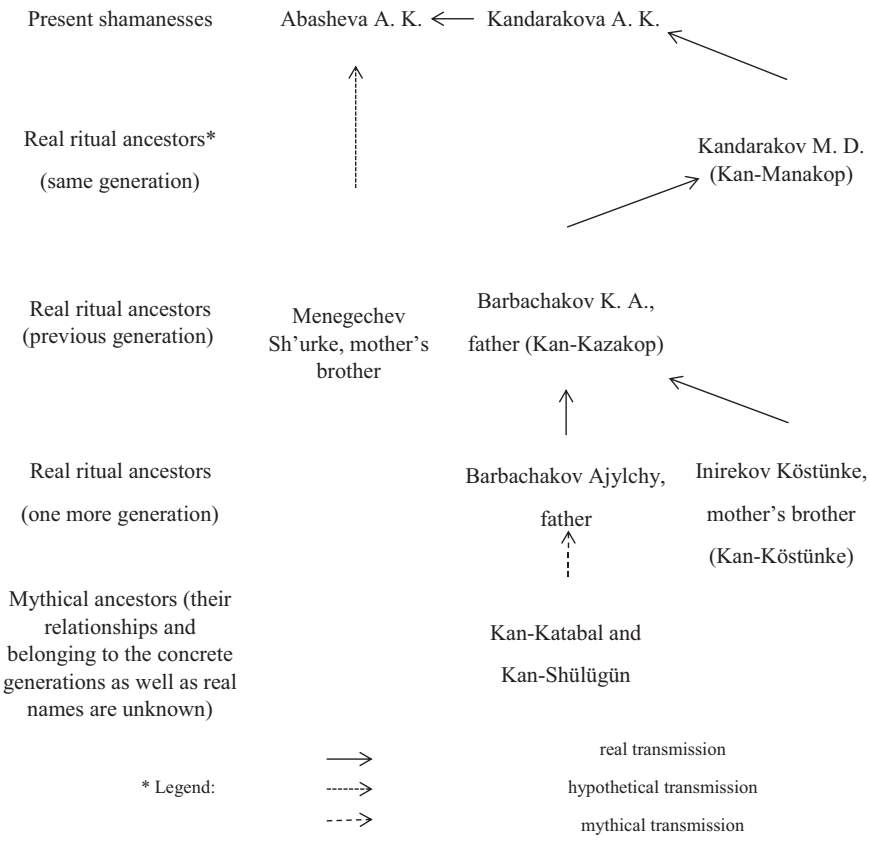
whom – I suppose – the famous Russian scholar L. P. Potapov worked in the 1920s and/or 1930s, had 16 children, but only 2 daughters were alive when I and my colleague Natalya Kondratyeva first met them in the winter of 1985. The elder sister, Kandarakova Aleksandra Kazakopovna,[18] was nicknamed "Shura". The younger sister, Abasheva Aleksandra Kazakopovna,[19] having the same full name as her sister, had a different nickname: "San'ka". They were not only the last descendants of the family but also of the whole Sert clan, which after their deaths no longer exists.

A.K. Abasheva, who inherited the shamanic power, lived many years outside her motherland, in the industrial regions of Kuzbass (Kemerovskaya *oblast'*). For this reason, after Kazakop's death in 1943, the second husband of the elder sister, Kandarakov Manakop Denisovich,[20] a shaman and famous epic singer (Photo 1), acquired Kazakop's spirits. After Manakop's death, Shura shamanized for several years, but she was just a temporary holder of the shamanic "post", as she stated. "I am not a real shaman", she said, when I asked her about some details of shamanic performing. "Go to San'ka and ask her. She is a shaman".[21] When the real shamaness, who in accordance with traditional beliefs had been chosen and called by the spirits, revealed herself and came back to Suranash in 1979, Shura stopped shamanising. The following scheme illustrates the case:



Photo 1 A.K. Kandarakova (Barbachakova) and M.D. Kandarakov.

Source: Photo from family archive, 1960s or beginning of 1970s (re-photographed by G. B. Sychenko in 2005).



This case illustrates several interesting concepts, already described in ethnographic works: 1) direct transmission from paternal line, 2) lateral transmission from maternal line, 3) transmission from wife's line. There is, however, something new: transmission of shamanic power within one generation. It happened twice: for the first time from a son-in-law to his wife, the elder daughter (temporal keeper of the tradition, "not real shaman"), and for the second time from her to her sister, the younger daughter (real hereditary shamaness). This complicated case demonstrates very clearly how elastic shamanic tradition can be under unfavourable circumstances.

Ritual practice of the "real shamaness", A.K. Abasheva (Photo 2), consisted of typical shamanic rites: catching the soul of a sick person, sending off the soul of a dead person and rain inducing/stopping, but very often, she shamanized without a particular reason, with the only purpose to communicate with her spirits and feed them.

She could not conduct clanic rituals, like the sacrifice of the horse, because, being a woman, she was not entitled to honour the upper god T'azhin. However, male shamans (M. D. Kandarakov and T. P. Krachnakov, another



Photo 2 A.K. Abasheva in the village Turochak against the backdrop of ancestral mountain Solop. 2007.

Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.

Chalkan shaman we met in Suranash) who were shamanizing without the drum were also not able to reach out to him. The conceptual difference was that male shamans *could* not, while female shamans *must* not do it. As Shura told me, "I heard that woman-shaman does not go up to the Gods. Father told: "It is not allowed, she won't get there. May walk like that [i.e. horizontally – G.S.], but not up" (Galina B. Sychenko 1992, 82).

On one occasion, A.K. Abasheva performed a classical shamanic rite in order to get hold of a soul. Thus, in 1992, in the village Suranash, I recorded two parts of such a ritual and filmed its first part.[22] At the second part, the shamaness put a white bandage around her head and tightened a leather belt (*kurchak*) around her waist with a knife (*pychak*) attached to it. There was no other special clothing.

The Kumandin shamaness Syrga Polikarpovna Pelekova was introduced to Hungarian researcher V. Diószegi by Kumandin scholar F. A. Satlaev during their expedition in August 1964. These materials are kept in archives[23] and for the moment are unpublished. I had a chance to work with audio recordings made during this expedition. Based on these materials, I may

state that the shamaness conducted a ritual activity similar to Abasheva's. From my analysis of such materials, it is evident that she performed the ritual of catching the soul.[24]

The modern authentic Shor tradition of shamanhood without a drum was discovered and studied by Shor philologist L.N. Arbahakova in collaboration with other scholars.[25] She worked with six *kams* and one *alaschy*. There were only two males among these seven persons. Arbachakova describes several kinds of shamanic rites which she observed: healing séance, purification *alas*, catching of a soul (*kut kabarga*), taking away a soul of a dead person, calling *vëdro* (Rus.) 'summer dry weather', and a journey to abandoned house (*eski churt*).[26]

Akulina Osipovna Kuspekova[27] was regarded by other people as *kam* (shaman). She started her shamanic practice already of mature age, after a so-called shamanic disease. The reason was that *töster*, 'spirits-ancestors', started to force her to shamanize, telling her that either she would have to accept it or die. In 2000, she was already famous and a well-established shamaness, very popular among people.

Shamanic rites were registered from her thrice. In August 2000, L.N. Arbachakova taped an *eski churt* ritual, and in June 2001, she taped a séance for a dead person. In August 2003, Romano Mastromattei and I observed in the village Aleksandrovka in the Tashtagol district of Kemerovo *oblast'* a healing and purification rite, which was recorded and filmed.

The rite of purification enjoys popularity in the Shor culture. It can be conducted by an *alaschy* as well as by a shaman, even by a novice. From my point of view, the rite that we observed was much more complicated. It had a structure typical of the shamanic tradition. At the beginning of the ritual, the shamanic spirits were called upon to help; in the main part of the ritual, the patient's soul and body were purified; in the final section of the ritual, the shamaness soothed and dissolved her spirits and blessed the customers of the ritual. The rite included the ritual procedure to catch a soul.[28]

Previously, before conducting a rite, Kuspekova changed her clothes for a white medicine dress and put on a light head bandage (Photo 3, published in Arbachakov and Arbachakova 2004; Arbachakova and Galina B. Sychenko 2013). In the case that we observed in 2003, she did not change, keeping the same clothes as she wore when we arrived (Photo 4).

Sagay *tag kizi* Tadí (Tatiana Semënovna) Burnakova[29] only dealt with the spirits of the mountains. She called them *tag kiziler*, 'mountain people'. From them, she received all the necessary information about the present, past and future. She communicated to them the requests of patients and received answers. She listened to her helpers, invisible to outsiders, all the time. She performed rituals of purification, protection, removal of spoilage and harm,[30] fortune telling and so on. I have never heard of her performing soul-catching rites. The methods of her work consisted of communicating with one single category of non-human beings, and she was not involved in making shamanic journeys; at least she did not mention it.



Photo 3 A.O. Kuspekova dressed in white medical clothes for the rite. 2004.
Source: Photo by A. Arbachakov.



Photo 4 Patient B.N. Tudegeshev, philologist L.N. Arbachakova and shamaness A.O. Kuspekova in front of the shamaness' house. 2003.
Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.



Photo 5 E.S. Burnakova in traditional winter clothes *khyskhy ton*, with musical instrument *chatkhan* in the traditional Khakass jurta. 1998.

Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.

In 1998, during the expedition to the Khakass-Sagays of the Askis district of the Republic of Khakassiya, the philologist L. K. Achitaeva and I first met in the village Oty the elder sister Ekaterina Semënovna Burnakova[31] (Photo 5) and taped her small shamanic chant. She told us about her younger sister who was a recognized ritual specialist. So, the next day, we went to the village Verkh-Tëya in order to meet the shamaness and recorded a rite for the removal of harm as well as many other folklore genres. We described and explained the ritual in an earlier publication (Galina B. Sychenko 2013), so there is no need to repeat this information. Instead, this analysis shall concentrate on the gender issue that was part of the previous publication.

Tadí was a daughter and a granddaughter of male shamans, but her own ritual possibilities were much more modest. She performed rites in ordinary clothes and changed only for photographic session (Photos 6 and 7). She did not have any dealings with any of the deities except the mother of fire, a deity which is honoured by all Siberian peoples and which is considered the earliest in the whole animist complex. She was well aware of that, and she insisted on being a *tag kizi*, not a shaman. At the same time, the recorded texts are full of shamanic reminiscences and references to shamanic realities. So, in her texts, the shamanic drum and a beater are mentioned, and categories of the hostile non-human beings characteristic for shamanism are described:



Photo 6 The beginning of the rite. T.S. Burnakova in her everyday clothes. 1998.
Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.



Photo 7 T.S. Burnakova after conducting the ritual in traditional festive dress sitting outside her house. 1998.
Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.

From the source of black water
I have taken a solid wood.[32]
Like snakes [they] don't hiss,
Like worms [they] don't crawl,
With irregular teeth,
With cheeks as a cliff-*khomys*.
[They] don't turn on their feet,
[They] don't whirl with their hems,
[They] don't hit who is not hit,
[They] don't affect who is not affected.
With eyes as beads,
With teeth as needles.
(G. B. Sychenko 2013, 86–87)

The rite itself was called *khamnapche*, that is, *kamlaniye* – a shamanic séance. The shamanic chant performed during the ritual was called *khamnyŋ saryny*, *"Agyryg kizini imnepchetkeni"*: 'shamanic song', "The healing of a sick person". Thus, not only did she not avoid using the concept "shamanic", but she used it systematically in her ritual activities. It was important for her to define her ritual status correctly, but the connection with the shamanic tradition itself was clearly expressed.

It seems to me that Tadí represented a specific kind of ritual specialist, similar to a shaman but somehow of lower rank, who has a connection with only one particular category of mountain spirits. However, this category is one of the most important in all South Siberian shamanism. In short, the whole ritual thesaurus testifies to her positioning into a shamanic context. She represented, perhaps, a pre-shaman type of ritual healer.

T.S. Burnakova was convinced that the ritual tradition passed down in her family would not be interrupted even afterwards. According to the performer, she will definitely go to one of her descendants, presumably to her younger sister's daughter. Tadi Semënovna informed us that the drum (*tüür*) belonging to her grandfather Chapan, who was the *ulug kham* ('the great shaman'), now "is closed in mountain", but when a strong shaman appears, it will be transferred to him or her. Thus, the past is connected for her with a "great shamanism" of sort, identified with male shamans with drums. The future is instead associated with female successors, descendants of the female lines. But she does not rule out the return of a female *kham* with a drum.

Ritual paraphernalia of modern shamanesses

All the modern shamans discussed in this chapter, both women and men, at the turn of the millennium shamanized without a drum, except one Southern Tuvan shaman, who used a very small and, in my opinion, modernized octagonal drum. Only two Chalkan male shamans (M.D. Kandarakov

and T.P. Krachnakov) used the drum beater *orba/orbu*; Tadí Burnakova did, however, mention this tool in the text of the chant:

> By a shaman's *orba*, by a shaman's *orba*
> I am beating, I am beating!
> It's me who is thundering by a shaman's *orba*.
> (G. B. Sychenko 2013, 87)

In the past, female shamans could also shamanize only with a beater; there was a separate category of shamans, *orbalyk kam*, 'shaman with a beater,' of both genders (Alekseev 1984, 167; L'vova 1984, 92). The real, not virtual, tools of Tadí Burnakova were a hawthorn branch and an Orthodox icon.[33]

Similarly, Syrga Pelekova, Aleksandra Abasheva and Akulina Kuspekova used a bundle of birch branches called *shyrba/shorba/shorbu* (Photo 8). Similar instruments were first described by Dyrenkova; in fact, she did not write about a bundle of branches but about a single branch of a tree (Dyrenkova 2012 [1928–37], 326–327). F.A. Satlaev and V. Diószegi, during a joint expedition to the Kumandins in 1964, found the use of a bundle of birch branches as a substitute for the drum. On the phonogram, F.A. Satlaev calls this tool by the Russian word *metëlka*, 'panicle', which clearly means it is a bundle and not a separate branch. When A. Kuspekova sent out to cut branches for a new *shorbu*, she gave instructions about its length ("by elbow") and volume ("so that the hand is full").[34]



Photo 8 Ritual object *shorbu*, belonging to A.O. Kuspekova and placed in her kitchen after the rite. 2003.

Source: Photo by G. B. Sychenko.

I observed this kind of a substitute drum during rituals conducted by A.K. Abasheva and A.O. Kuspekova. In both cases, the birch branches were tied with a white ribbon.

Shyrba was "the first instrument of the beginning shaman. . . . According to Kumandinian beliefs, the shamans took branches from the sacred shamanic birch tree for *shyrba*".[35] Parts of the rite of catching the soul by S.P. Pelekova were interrupted because of the fact that this ritual instrument was absent in the moment of audio recording and the spirits did not come (Galina B. Sychenko 1997). It is possible to conclude that *shyrba*, like a drum, has a communicative function and "gathers" spirits-helpers.

In the ritual performed by A.K. Abasheva, the *shyrba* was used in the second part of the ritual, during the shamanic journey, which could point to its function as a vehicle, a function often also associated with the drum. A.O. Kuspekova, who performed small single-part rituals, used the *shorbu* from the beginning to the end of the séance. On the video, some interesting details demonstrate the resemblance of the drum and *shorbu*. Before starting the séance, the shamaness found that the old *shorbu* was in complete disrepair. She sent one of the men to cut branches for the new one, emphasizing that the branches had to be taken from a living tree. This reminds us very much of the idea that the wood for the handle of a drum and the basic parts of a beater should be taken only from a living tree, and it is because of this that the tree continues to live. Another traditional concept that has been preserved in this episode is that the shaman never personally made his or her own drum and other paraphernalia, but he or she would send other male members of the community to collect the necessary materials, with which then they would make these tools.

The new bundle of branches was tied up with a ribbon removed from the old *shorbu*. Here we meet again the traditional concept of the need to transfer some amount of sacral power from the old instrument to the new one.

Despite its "simplicity", *shyrba*, like any ritual object, is endowed with rich symbolic meaning. Among the Chalkans, it is believed that nine birch branches and nine ribbons (*kondzhok*)[36] are required, because this is associated with the ideal number of shamanic ancestors. According to A.K. Abasheva, "this is the highest shamanic position when there are nine ancestors" (Galina B. Sychenko 1992, 63).

As with a drum, it is possible to extract sounds in different ways with the help of *shyrba/shorbu*. Thus, A.O. Kuskova beat the *shorbu* on her left arm, shook it in the air, circled clockwise around her own as well as the patient's head and circled the floor around her. All these actions created a certain sound, despite the absence of metal pendants. The sound was sharp when beaten and rustling when shaken. A.K. Abasheva used the *shyrba* in a similar way. Thus, a bundle of birch branches, replacing the shamanic drum and implementing some of its important functions, can be regarded as one form of archaic sound instrument.

A.K. Abasheva also used a wooden spoon[37] (*chachak*) and the skin of a small animal (kolinsky or mink). The functioning of a wooden ritual spoon was recorded on videotape in 1992. In the initial phase of the *kamlaniye*, the shamaness – holding a spoon in her right hand – hit herself on the left shoulder,

imitating blows to a drum. The same spoon was used for periodic ritual sprinkling with vodka, which is used instead of a traditional drink, *ak ortka* (white braga, that is, low-alcohol beverage), made of *talkan* (fried barley flour), malt and clean water from the Swan River. In another case, during the "unprepared" shamanic séance, provoked by a long conversation during a meal, the shamaness used the animal skin in the same way, hitting her left hand quite vigorously, at the beginning of the invoking of spirits. Note that a wooden spoon and the skin of a small forest animal are often used to make a shamanic beater. Their morphological and functional similarities are undoubted.

Other modern Shor shamans used a piece of light fabric that did not produce sound[38] and a mitten filled with sand or salt (Arbachakova 2002). Dyrenkova also mentioned a leather mitten "that he [the shaman – G.S.] swings and hits on his hand" (Dyrenkova 2012 [1928–37], 327).

In addition to the tools mentioned previously, one male shaman used a whip, *kamchy*;[39] this tool was continuously mentioned in Kuspekova's text:

> *A-yey*, with Ul'gen,[40]
> *A-yey*, I will braid with a *kamchy*,
> *A-ye, khe*, I will shamanise![41]

Other "virtual" tools noted by Kuspekova were the fan (Rus. *opakhalo*) *chel'bi*[42] ("*A-ye*, I am waving a *chel'bi*!") and an armour, *kuyak* ("*A-ye*, cover yourselves in *kuyak*!"). Abasheva's virtual armour was called *kuyak*, too, and it consisted of different reptiles: lizards, snakes and frogs, while the belt (*kurchak*) had a seventy-seven-meter iron chain that surrounded the entire body of the shamaness (Galina B. Sychenko 1993).

Interpretation and conclusions

Analysis of our materials allows us to make some preliminary conclusions about female shamanism in Southern Siberia.

1 In the traditional cultures of the Turkic-speaking peoples of Sayan-Altai, there are ideas about women shamans of the past who were distinguished by incredible power and magical force. However, in the recent historical period, male shamans dominated in patrilineal communities. They mostly represented the so-called "Great Shamanism", characterized by the employment of the drum and sacrifices to the supreme deities, the patrons of the clan.
2 In parallel to the aforementioned "Great Shamanism", there has always been the so-called "Little Shamanism" carried out without a drum. The latter focused on conducting healing rites, sending off the soul and other everyday rituals. Such forms of ritual practice were characteristic of novice shamans of both genders. Receiving a drum changed the status and increased the prestige of shamanic activity. It is not surprising that

men predominated in this role, although a formal prohibition of female shamanism with a drum never existed. Prohibition of women from shamanising to the upper deities was entirely determined by the patrilineal structure of the clan.

3 Under unfavourable conditions with the prohibition on performing rituals and active persecution during the Soviet era, "Great Shamanism" shifted to a weak position. Shamanic rites had to be performed secretly, and the high and clanic deity cult component disappeared, together with the use of the drum, and "Little Shamanism" came to the fore. Shamans of both sexes practiced it, but female shamans prevailed. It is interesting to note that with the changing prestige and commercial success of shamanistic activity in the post-Soviet era, the number of male shamans increases again.

4 Our findings do not confirm, but do not refute either, the hypothesis of the primacy of female shamanism. I think this issue needs to be further investigated. Psychological studies that reveal gender-determined features of female shamanism seem promising. Thus, studies by E. Meshcheriakova have shown that female shamans in their psychological characteristics differ from both male shamans and ordinary women (Meshcheriakova 2005). Noteworthy is the author's pointing out the flexibility of the psyche of shamanesses, which, apparently, allows them to assume the role of a ritual specialist in conditions where it is not only not officially recognized (among the people, it was always recognized and appreciated) but also not entirely safe.

Notes

1 See Tokarev (1990 [1964]).
2 See, for instance, Batyanova (1994); Kharitonova (2005b); Mastromattei (1995); Sultanova (2014).
3 In general, by the definition of "traditional" (culture, shamanism, etc.), I understand the phenomena that are characteristic of the communities of pre-industrial lifestyles and orientation to the preservation and transmission of already existing traditions instead of establishing new (or neo-) traditions. Of course, there are also urban traditions and folklore, for example, such a vast phenomenon as neo-shamanism, of which we are well aware, but such traditions do not affect the entire community and can quickly arise and disappear. The problem is, therefore, very complicated, but at the moment, it is not the subject of my discussion.
4 Scholars collected many legends about great shamans from eyewitnesses during last century and at the turn of the millennium.
5 Almost all of them are in danger of disappearing.
6 Except in the 20s.
7 I mention mainly scholars whose works contain information valuable for the gender research of Southern Siberia and neighbouring territories.
8 I do not pretend to be exhaustive, as there are many other sources that are not currently available for consideration. Rather, I am showing a general tendency, and the new sources are unlikely to radically change it.
9 Actually, the book was prepared in 1915, but for some historical reasons, it was published only after the Revolution and the Civil War.

10 He was the one of the first scholars who did it, as with many other pioneering things.
11 Here I do not consider this information, because it needs to be studied separately and perhaps with special methodology. However, I noticed that among the ancestors, female shamans from Tuva are mentioned rather often.
12 Thus, he mentions ten male and only one female names of the shamans with whom he worked (Potapov 1991, 19) but does not provide the full gender statistics.
13 We do not have information for Southern Altais and for other groups of Tuvas.
14 Anokhin's field diaries contain much more data about shamans of different ethnic groups, but they are not published and studied yet.
15 See Diószegi (1961, 1962a [1959], 1962b, 1963a, 1963b [1959], 1968 [1960]). These works, except the monograph, are re-published in Hoppal (1998), but there are also some articles in Hungarian, amongst which the field reports are, as well as field diaries and other unpublished materials. Thus, I have included in Table 3 information on the Kumandins, which I have obtained from an audio collection taped by him during an expedition with F. A. Satlaev in 1964.
16 There are still a lot of materials in scientific archives, in particular field diaries of scientists, which contain much more information than was published. Only recently have some important archived papers been published; see, for example Dyrenkova (2012 [1925–38]).
17 There are many materials already published about this family, see Popova (2005, 2009); Galina B. Sychenko (2000, 2004, 2005, 2009b, 2019); Galina B. Sychenko and Popova (2005); Galina B. Sychenko 2009b.
18 1913 (Kaldrak?)–1995 (Suranash), Turochak district of the Republic of Altai.
19 1926 (Vorob'ëvka)–2008 (Turochak), Turochak district of the Republic of Altai.
20 18??–1972 (Suranash?), Turochak district of the Republic of Altai.
21 Oral communications.
22 This rite was studied by Yu. Gorbachëva (Popova), who wrote her thesis about it (Gorbachëva 2017).
23 Copies of the phonorecords made by V. Diószegi are kept in the Archive of Traditional Music of the Novosibirsk Stated Conservatoire, named after M.I. Glinka; copies of written materials transcribed, supposedly, by F.A. Satlaev are kept in the Sector of Folklore of the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science.
24 See Galina B. Sychenko (1997, 1998).
25 See Arbachakov and Arbachakova (2004); Arbachakova (2004, 2007, 2010); Arnau Muro (2000); Nazarenko and Arbachakova (1999); Galina B. Sychenko (2001, 2002, 2007, 2010).
26 The latter kind of rite was discovered and analysed by the scholar Arbachakova (2007).
27 1930 (Seyzas)–2003 (Aleksandrovka), Tashtagol district of Kemerovo *oblast'*.
28 The soul was placed in the ear of the patient – the moment that could be seen on the video very clear.
29 1923 (Müze)–2006 (Verkh-Tëya), Askiz district of the Republic of Khakasiya. See Kharitonova (2005a, 2006, 131–132, 199–208); Galina B. Sychenko (2009a, 2012, 2013); Nyssen (2010).
30 See Galina B. Sychenko (2013).
31 They were sisters of the famous epic singer Apanis Burnakov.
32 The hypocritical name of the drum.
33 See Photo 6.2 in Galina B.Sychenko (2013, 81).
34 These moments are on the video.
35 Satlaev and Diószegi data are taken from (Alekseev 1984, 158).
36 They are characteristic of both the drum and the beater as well.
37 See also Dyrenkova (2012 [1928–37], 327–328).

38 L.P. Potapov calls such a tool *opakhalo* (Rus.) or *chel'bi* (Turk.), 'fan' (Potapov 1991, 129).
39 See Photo 6.1 in Galina B. Sychenko (2013, 78).
40 Upper deity in Sayan-Altai shamanism. A.K. Kandarakova also mentioned him.
41 Taken from Arbachakova and Galina B. Sychenko (2013).
42 See note 34.

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Section 3

Tensions and syncretism

Dynamic entanglements between shamanism and bureaucratic religions


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10 Women's sociability

The qalandar khona of Khujand (Tajikistan) in the context of political events

Sophie Roche

Introduction

In male-dominated societies, positions of religious power are reserved for men, so it is generally assumed, which, however, does not exclude the integration of women into lower power strata. Gender divisions are drawn from religious beliefs, such as in Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. The clergy, accordingly, is in the hands of men, whereas women hold low-status positions within the hierarchy. Whereas the distribution of power may differ in each society as much as the interpretation and negotiation processes, the main written references on which this division is based are more or less fixed. In many of those societies, whether in Europe, Africa or Asia, scholars have identified "female possession cults" that Ioan M. Lewis (1975) conceptualized as rituals of marginalized people. Using a sociological approach, he has suggested moving beyond the particularity of variation of cultural expression and symbolic comparison that ethnographers have provided and looking at "How . . . the incidence of ecstasy relate[s] to the social order" (1975, 27). Whether called shamans, witches, healers or clairvoyants, these practitioners share similar practices like trance and possession in order to establish authority. This authority is produced at the margins of dominant culture, goes his argument, and forms subcultures that challenge dominant ideologies (p. 99). Possession cults conducted in women's groups, in this argument, would be a form of weapon of the weak.

Although Lewis has been heavily criticized among others for not being specific enough about the concept of "periphery" (Handelman 1974), he went beyond the detailed description of individual practitioners and shamans in order to look at the larger societal configuration. The shaman may be not peripheral at all for the group who accepts him or her as authority and may still be normatively and ideological marginalized within the nation state or colonial system. For our case – the post-Soviet republic Tajikistan – we can safely assume that men dominate the political and religious sphere, whether during or after the Soviet period. The question in this context is less how "shamanic" and "peripheral" a practice actually is but rather when do religious practices become "shamanic" in the eyes of the speaker? How is the

relation between women's gatherings and men's authority positions in society structured, and how does this play out on women's religious practices?

The literature on shamanism and Islam in Central Asia shares an interesting opposition, in which the shamanistic elements are situated on the scale of a Leninist evolutionary concept of society as part of nomadic culture and thus backward to sedentary societies. In contrast, Islam is accorded developmental potential even if limited in scope, since socialism is the ultimate liberation. Among the first scholars to engage with this issue of Islamized shamanism from a European perspective was Annette Krämer (2002) in her book on women authorities in Central Asia. She observes that women's religiosity is discursively treated differently from male religious practices. While men's Sufi practices appear politically dangerous and religiously relevant, women's practices are treated during the Soviet period as politically irrelevant, just a relic (*relicty*) of the past with no potential of political challenge (Krämer 2002, 74). Soviet ethnographers following German and British ethnographic theories considered shamanism to have undergone Islamization, following an evolutionary view. However, it may be the opposite, she suggests, as Islamic practices in Central Asia hold many practices that also exist in classic shamanic literature. This argument was further developed by Devin DeWeese some thirteen years later. In search of social advancement, scholars identified shamanistic "survivals" in Sufi practices, which led to a "'shamanization' of academic discourse about religious rites," he argues (DeWeese 2014, 340). The assumed link between shamanism and Sufi practices is nothing but the imagination of scholars, whereas practices that he takes for his study are all pure Sufi rituals.

While his argument is convincing in general, he misses an important aspect, which is gender. Sufi lodges were and are primarily men's domain, as is the social acceptance for madness and unrest for the love of god. The great mystical figures he includes in his article are men without exception. All his examples derive from religious men, whereas women are mentioned as an additional group that joins public veneration of tombs, but he does not accord them any analytical attention. In contrast, several recent publications that focus on women only describe the tension that women religious leaders experience between being accused of practicing shamanic rituals and their claim to be fully in line with Islam (Sultanova 2011). The link and distinction between shamanism and Islam is hence less to be discussed in the theological dimension than as a social issue, whereas women's religious rituals appear less important, less authentic and less relevant to society's well-being. The shamanization of academic discourse of which DeWeese speaks goes along with the downgrading of women's religious and social practices.

The "shamanization of Islam" by scholars goes along with a feminization of possession and healing rituals which can be seen in academic research as well as in political discourses about health and the medical system (Hohmann 2014). The male mullahs and Sufi circles posed a political challenge, whereas women's possession was solely a matter of lacking evolutionary chances.

The publicity and popularity of Sufi practices, which DeWeese identifies as particular to Central Asia, remain mixed in gender when it comes to visiting holy shrines and some divine places. We may even claim that it is the publicity of practices as spare-time activity that helped Sufi practices to survive the Soviet period, since secret circles were closed to ordinary people lacking religious lineage descent. It makes no sense to divide single practices along religious classifications because belief can be present in banal or extraordinary as well as in ritualized activities. Yet scholarly and political discussions considered anatomizing religious practices a useful tool to secularize people on their way to communism. This went along with gendered and gendering discourses and a medicalized discussion regarding healing rituals. Finally, "charlatans" and other healing practitioners in Tajikistan became thought of as women and harmful to society. This stands in opposition to religious power being increasingly masculinized through Salafi discourses.

In this chapter, I am less interested in classifications and theological debates in Central Asia. My modest aim is to show how women struggle to keep their space of socioreligious gatherings as they are equally attacked by the officials and by the religious personnel of Khujand. The distinction between Islam and shamanic practices in this case is not the one of conceptual distinction nor of theological judgement but an emic division learned through Soviet (scholarly and political) discourses that serve to ban women's socioreligious practices. Thus the main concern is about women's socialities that were aggressively persecuted until the place under study was closed down in 2016.

Religiously motivated gatherings in Central Asia have received considerable theological attention with regard to men known as *hujra*. The literature on women's gatherings, in contrast, stands out for the deep ethnographic research that the concerned scholars have conducted in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (e.g. Krämer 2002; Kehl-Bodrogi 2005; Louw 2007; Sultanova 2011; Hohmann 2014; Penkala-Gawęcka 2013, 2014; Cieślewska 2017), which is rare for men's socialites (Dudoignon and Noack 2014). Although both men's and women's gatherings share similar practices and goals, men's sociality groupings known as *hujra* have been described in relation to religious education and political reforms, whereas women's gatherings were linked to pre-Islamic beliefs and popular or "folk" healing practices. What is missing is a comparative view of both forms of sociality under the aspect of the social, gender and political dimension. In analytical terms, male socialities were regularly integrated – even if at times highly controversial – into the political sphere, whereas women's socialities were considered vulnerable to political ideologies and marginal to society.

This chapter is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Tajikistan, on the one hand, regarding Islamic reform movements and, on the other hand, women's gatherings called *mushkil kusho* (opening up a problem) in Khujand, as well as various female authorities in remote Tajik villages of Gharm. The focus in this chapter lies on the qalandar khona in Khujand

that functioned as social gathering place for women almost throughout the Soviet period and until 2016, when it was closed down because of "extremist" teachings by local political authorities.

A word on shamanesses

The notion of the shaman was applied to various forms of healing by Russian scholars such as Basilow (1996) and Sidikov (2004).[1] In their studies in different parts of Central Asia, they focused on the practices of healers in order to establish an evolutionary history of belief. In a campaign to isolate "cultural remnants" of the past in order to discourage them by scientific atheism, scholars described different practices of healing by men and women. Sophie Hohmann has written a comprehensive work on the medical reforms under the Soviet regime that goes deep into the family domain and rhetoric of the time. In a colonial way, Soviet medical approaches were out to save women from oppression and unhygienic traditions such as, for instance, the wearing of the veil (Hohmann 2014, 115). The medical domain uncovers the tension between various healing practices. Unlike the studies of scholars coming from Islamic or Oriental studies who have been interested in the religious claims (or rejection of the latter) of those practitioners, her study shows that the tension is not restricted to religious discourses but led on the level of well-being and health. The *tabib* can equally be a clairvoyant, a shaman or a sufi (p. 178), depending less on the practices than on the terminology employed. Habiba Fathi (2004) even wonders whether health is not at the origin of the socioreligious practices.

Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 4) suggests that it is with the social devaluation of those practices during the Soviet period that healing became primarily a female occupation (see also Fathi 2004, 251), and we can add that it was linked to "shamanistic beliefs" not so much because of the practices as because of the assumed backwardness of shamanism in evolutionary theories. Since independence, the traditional healer has regained considerable respect in some societies such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (see contribution by Penkala-Gawęcka), and with it, men have re-entered the field, a phenomenon that parallels developments in Siberia (see the contributions by Riboli and Galina B. Sychenko in this volume).

The notions for those practitioners range from *folbin* or *bakhshi* (fortune-teller) to *tabib* (doctor, healer with herbs). An exclusively female term in today's Tajikistan is *otin* or *oykhola*/*oymulla*, women authorities who lead religious rituals in the Ferghana valley and in Uzbekistan primarily. The different terminology also indicates the vivid activities and nuances that the religious practices had. What these notions do not say is whether healing was an individual activity between the healer and the patient or a group activity. Since single women may lead collective meetings and individual consultancies, several scholars have focused on the authority of such women. Annette Krämer (2002) and Habiba Fathi (2004), as well as Anna Cieślewska (2016, 2017) more recently, are among those who have paid particular attention to the central role of the *otin*/*otun* in local communities.

In that sense, the *mushkil kusho* (Uzbek: *mushkul kushod*) events differ from individual séances with the *folbin*, *bakhshi* or *tabib*. While the latter may or may not include parts of the family during the healing séance, the collective rituals called *bibi seshanbe* and *mushkil kusho* are based on women's sociality. Either a certain number of women need to participate or as many women as possible in order to multiply the positive effect. In those collective meetings, the sociality of women is central; without it, the whole ritual is not effective. Women's collectives are linked to the Islamic beliefs that collectives are stronger than individual prayers. This is not to say that *folbin*s or *tabib*s are non-Islamic – in fact, most of them insist they are religious actors – but sociality is less an issue in those healing rituals but a fundamental principle in sufi *zikr*. In this chapter, I focus on what was known as the "qalandar khona" (the house of Qalandar), which is a collective event and hence differs from the *bakhshi* consultations observed in mountainous areas of Tajikistan. The qalandar in Khujand, the town under research, are remembered as the poor and "mad people of the town", the sufi beggars. As such, they differ from the *khoja* or *tura* families in the town who draw their religious authorities from genealogies and bond relations to surrounding farmers (Roche 2020). This historical dimension should, however, not be applied to contemporary times uncritically because descent and status have been open to creativity and invention. Since the end of the Soviet period, the number of *tura* families has multiplied because of the status that goes with it and the access to "good women" that such a title secures. Those who claim to be "real *tura*" complain of this popularizing process of the status and have developed new modes of distinction in order to maintain groupness. One central feature of those families is the role accorded to girls. As carrier of the status group, they receive particular education and care in order to mark distinction from "ordinary" people. If those *khoja* or *tura* families have been described to produce women of authority, this goes along with a favourable family environment. Hence, women's religious authority goes along with status group distinctions, society and political contexts, a complexity that this chapter will examine focusing on the qalandar khona of Khujand.

The qalandar khona

It is Wednesday morning; the red sun has just risen over the roofs of Khujand, but in the courtyard (*havli*) of the qalandar khona, women are already crowding. They have stored food and clothes in plastic bags and filled empty bottles with water from the well in the courtyard. Then they wait, chatting with other women until the ritual has finished in one of the two rooms in the building at the back of the *havli* (courtyard). Women now come out and search for their shoes pushing, against the women who try to get in and find a place to sit. Inside the room, *kurpacha* (sitting mattress) are prepared around tablecloths on the floor, and the women sit

down and start to take out from their bags the items they brought with them: two breads, tea, sugar, candy, clothes, a purse, photographs of their son in Russia or their infertile nephew and many more items. In front of them, they prepare some dry raisins and three or four little pieces of cotton as well as two or four candle ends. Now everybody has found a place and stops talking.

On the opposite site of the door sits a woman with a low table in front of her. This table is now covered from the open filled water bottles. She has covered her head with a white foulard. She welcomes people, smiles, gives wishes and takes the offerings (a few *somoni*). They call her *oykhola*, and she is the daughter of the former owner, an elderly man from a religious lineage that claims *khoja* descent. One person hands over a bowl of a ravioli-like dish (tushpera); she puts eleven on another plate and passes the rest to the women, asking them to eat them and wish the one for whom they have been prepared that his or her way may open up. Each woman takes a ravioli, makes a wish, breaks the ravioli into two parts and eats it.

After everybody has settled, the *oykhola* starts the prayer; in a rhythmic tone, she reads from the Qur'an, the salovat/salavot-formula (Krämer 2002, 204, doxology) and *mushkil kusho*. At specific points during the reading, women join in with a formula. After a while, she prepares a tray with candles, which is passed around from one woman to the next. Each woman lights two or several candles and passes the tablet around. The room is now filled with the light and scent of candles. Some women take the scent of the candle with their hands before passing the tray on to the next woman. The rhythmic recitation of the *oykhola* continues. Then the *oykhola* interrupts shortly to tell the women to start cleaning their raisins.

Each raisin is cleaned from its stem, which is put onto the cotton, whereas the raisins are gathered separately. Meanwhile the *oykhola* continues the recitation. The ritual ends after about half an hour. The women collect their items into their plastic bags, take their bottles, ask for a short blessing and in return give a few *somoni*. Some women rush back to work; others spend time to talk to the *oykhola* and take her advice or exchange a few words with the women sitting next to them. The *oykhola* knows most of the women and their lives and gives equally ritualized advice as well as power to go through difficult periods. The next women are already queuing outside, ready to enter the room.

I have participated regularly in this ritual, sometimes among the women, sometimes next to the *oykhola*. Each session welcomes around fifteen to twenty women. I have counted at least 250 women that come each Wednesday, each one with wishes and hopes. Sometimes they bring their daughter-in-law or daughter with them and travel more than one hour to reach the place. While most villages and neighbourhoods have women of authority who could perform rituals, women come to this place for the collective dimension that the gathering offers and because of the family that claims to trace its descent to the *khoja*.

The qalandars

Qalandar was the term for men who had devoted their lives to god and for this withdrawn from all worldly pleasures. They went on long journeys equipped with a *kachqul* (a container in which they gathered the food donated by people along their way), staying in graveyards and other places. To be a qalandar, Alexandre Papas (2010, 14) explains, was a lifestyle, not participation in an order or school. It was an individual choice that could be taken any time in life. The qalandar was also said to have healing powers, and as such they are remembered in Tajikistan today. '*Vai khele qalandar hast*' (he is very qalandar) means he is good in essence, pious and almost sacred. While little is known about the actual life of qalandars, considerable literature by some of them has maintained a picture of the qalandar as poetic saint, holy beggar and sacred madman. Famous qalandars have been Jamāl al-Dīn and Qutb al-Dien Haydar, who lived in the 13th and 14th centuries. According to an author of the 13th century

> the term qalandar refers to the people who are so possessed by the beatitude of the heart that they no more respect either tradition or usage. They reject the common rules of society and of human relationship; they only wish for the beatitude of the heart. They do not complete the religious obligation like the ritual prayer and the fasting that otherwise are absolute obligatory. Without shame they enjoy mundane pleasures as soon as the law allows for. They are content with staying within the frame of what is permitted and do not search to apply the difficulties of legal obligations. Equally they reject all accumulation of goods and all wishes to possess them. They do not observe the rituals of ascetic peoples, of sober and devoted ones. They are attached only to the beatitude of their heart in God. They have no other wish than to possess more than this beatitude of the heart.
>
> (Papas 2010, 12, my translation from French)

Mystics in Islam have long fascinated western scholars who translate their poetics and writings. Against this historical background, it may seem surprising that today, the qalandar khona is associated with women's gatherings and even superstitious practices. The qalandar khona (literally: house of the Qalandar) which is today visited by women on Wednesdays has gradually replaced the original place in Khujand a couple of streets further inside town. The qalandar khona before the Soviet period used to receive poor people, giving them a place overnight and food. During the Soviet period, the place was sometimes run secretly, sometimes officially, depending on the circumstances. But women kept coming even during the most critical periods, when such activities were strictly forbidden. For some time, the former qalandar khona was a place of *ziyorat* (place of veneration/pilgrimage) where people would come on weekends to rest and prepare food,

similar to other *ziyorat* places outside town. This was still the case in the 1970s.

When I visited this place, the courtyard had been reduced in size, and the descendants living there explained that only a few elderly women were still coming. Young people did not know the place and opted for the other qalandar khona near the river, run by a relative of the former head of the compound. The wife of the current owner of the house then showed the qalandar's utensils, the *kachkul* and the cane which are kept at this place. She presented these items as proof that this place was "the older one," as if both families were in competition over the believers. People who come to the compound ask to get a stroke with the cane and drink the water that has been poured into the *kachkul* to find healing and relief. While I was at the place, a poor woman came and asked for clothes or a mattress, and the woman promised to prepare them by the next day. Whatever people bring is redistributed. If the place lost its popularity as *ziyorat goh*, it did not lose its relevance for the poor in town, the *maddo* (Roche 2020). They know that here they will always find what they need most urgently, whether these are a couple of friendly words, food or mattresses. The *maddo* are the beggar caste in Khujand, which is kept at the social and economic margins. More common is the association of the qalandar with poverty and purity than with specific rituals. In this sense, the qalandar khona near the river is a creative innovation promoting women's sociability (compare description by Sultanova on Sitorabanu-Otin).

Both qalandar families share the same descent but compete for clients. While the other place near the river has managed to attract a large number of women from town every Wednesday and provides various services during the rest of the week, the former place is now calm and reduced to primary help to the town's poor and to elderly *murid*s (disciples, followers) who remember this place. It remains unclear why in the former place, the beggars' items are used to heal, whereas in the new place, the power of the ritual performance is derived from the status of the family as a *khuja* or *tura* family and its sociality as such.

Rather than speculating about history, what may be more important is the role that visitors play in keeping places alive. The qalandar khona near the river provides a social space where women can share their individual problems through the gathering and a female authority that leads them through the ritual. While earlier on, the elderly father had offered consultation in another little room, he was an additional factor but not the sociality that women came for. The ritual of the women is constantly adapted to the demand of religious men who criticize the ritual for not conforming to "Islam". I will come back to the salafi critique of women's gathering further down. Whereas the textual order of *mushkil kusho* remains, the practices vary. In other words, the history of the two qalandar khonas and the variety of practices found in just two places demonstrate the role of society and politics in shaping and reshaping gatherings and places. In the words of Georg Simmel, there is a kind of playfulness in the sociality (of women). Play does

not mean that the content is not serious but rather that the sociality of those gatherings transforms with those participating. One of the central adaptations according to the *oykhola* is the time of the gathering. Tuesdays and Wednesdays have turned into women's days for conducting religious rituals; Thursdays and Fridays belong to mosque-goers and men's gatherings (a man should pray in *jama'at*, in a collective, on Fridays). The only time that young women may find during the day outside household tasks and work are the early morning hours during the week. Hence, women come as early as six in the morning to take part in the gathering. Others drop by on their way to work. In order to meet the needs of the women, the *oykhola* shortened the ritual recently to around 30 minutes, she told me.

Sociability of gatherings

Collectives play a crucial role for empowerment, not only in Islam. Unlike health séances with healers, most women in the qalandar khona with whom I talked bring complex family problems along or hope to find good luck for themselves or other family members. The sociality of these women is hence not isolated from men or in opposition to them (as Lewis suggests in his marginal women's ritual argument) but an extension of family issues. Zulfiya Bakhtibekova (2014) refers to Suad Joseph to analyze why women agree to early marriage in Tajikistan and states that within the patriarchal-based connectivity of families, the boundaries are fluid between individuals within one family so that the members feel a part of the significant other (Joseph 1993). These connectivities shape their forms of sociality and social engagement. The sociality brings power to women to manage various family problems as well as individual issues.

Annette Krämer (2002, 183) reminds the reader about the variability of those gatherings and the large variety of practices, ('*Spielarten der rituellen Praxis*', literally: the version to play the ritual practice). The *mushkil kusho* is certainly a case in point, which has adapted to the most diverse contexts and linguistic groups. Stéphane Dudoignon and Ariane Zevaco (2009) have suggested sociability in their study on literary gatherings in the south of Tajikistan, primarily male gatherings. Gatherings within compounds along gender divisions have been a practice for many decades. While their content differs, their social dimension seems comparable. Here women's gatherings are as relevant and powerful as male gatherings. "Sociability is spared the frictions with reality by its merely formal relation to it" (Simmel 1950, 44).

Sociability was an ideal type of sociation in the eyes of Georg Simmel, a democratic form of artful interaction and play-form. The term is often confused with sociality, a term preferred by social anthropologists. Being less interested in numbers, types and frequencies, Tim Ingold (2000, 196, Anderson 2015) uses sociality to find the "perceptual monitoring and mutually attentive engagement in shared context of practical activity." The empirical dimension of sociality makes it attractive for field enquiry. Unlike Simmel's call for the study

of "pure" sociability that is always good and harmonious, Nicholas Long and Henrietta Moore have cautioned against such assumptions. The value of the study of sociality, so their argument goes, derives from its processual character. Social interaction "cannot 'precede' its articulation, but is rather co-extensive with, and as, articulation" (2013, 2). Sociality hence includes the ambiguity, fragility and ambivalence of social relations in gatherings. Most relevant for this study is the possibility that the qalandar khona offers women the opportunity to feel connected during the gathering and experience relief by this experience. The space for improvisation and informal talks is particularly welcome, because it allows women of all ages and social backgrounds to participate. If such gatherings are democratic, as Simmel suggests, then it can be expected that women feel empowered after such a visit.

While *mushkil kusho* in Central Asia are primarily thought of as healing rituals or as theological education, viewing the gatherings as social events uncovers another dimension. Men have no access to these gatherings and only learn about them via their wives. Unlike the former qalandar khona that derives its power from healing and men's utensils, the new centre, I would argue, is first of all a social place for women. Women I talked to seldom came for their own sake but usually for issues that affected the family as social body. The son falling sick in Russia will not be able to feed the family back in Tajikistan. Infertility of a daughter-in-law affects the continuation of the family lineage. Those women experienced themselves as extensions of others in the way Suad Joseph (1993, 452) has suggested through connectivity: "By connectivity I mean relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others". By visiting the qalandar khona, they moved out of the family context into a non-kin sociality and could do so only in their role as person with connectivity. Men do not need such legitimating arguments when visiting gatherings or the mosque; it is enough to be a man. In contrast, women would not be allowed to simply visit the qalandar khona without a family or personal "problem". Here gender difference appears less as objective factor than as fundamental difference for legitimating participation in religious gatherings. Women's gatherings may not necessarily be organized only to solve problems – though the name *mushkil kusho* means "opening up a problem" – but the legitimating discourse in society shapes women's non-kin gatherings as related to problems/healing in family. Consequently, women's gatherings have healing power, while men's gatherings are political or simply leisure activities. This differentiation lies less in the way people experience the gatherings than how society discursively frames them.

This also results in political or religious attacks on gatherings being different for men and women. Assuming that women visit the qalandar khona solely for problems, the argument that doctors and mullahs may solve those problems better appears appropriate in public discourse. However, if we assume that women simply enjoy sociability, then these medicalized and theological arguments appear only partially applicable. Instead, the

actual uneasiness towards the qalandar khona seems to be that women find extra-familial social comfort, empowerment and independence. This resonates with some men who, independent from one another, explained that "nobody really knows what is going on among the women at the qalandar khona". This "unknown space" in which women do some *jodugarī* (charlatan, sorcery[2]) reflects an order of society in which social gatherings are, first, perceived as powerful and, second, potentially dangerous to existing politics and religious discourses. In other words, the men with whom I talked waiting outside the qalandar khona until their female relative came back resonated with the governmental authorities "that the interventions of '*bibiotun*s' in women's gatherings must be limited, because it is unknown what they whisper into the ear of women."[3] The perceived uneasiness comes from the inability to control what happens at the gatherings and assumptions that women are unable to evaluate situations.

The brothers of the *oykhola* have been nervous about the gatherings for a while because in the mosque, they are blamed for providing a space in their house to women conducting "non-Islamic, shamanistic, charlatan" rituals. The city council, in contrast, has put pressure on the family, blaming women for teaching "extremist ideas of Islam". To this is added that one of the brothers is working as a medical specialist and critical of non-biomedical healing practices, as he told me personally. All these accusations are factually wrong, as the gathering neither serves to train specifically Islamic theology, nor is it un-Islamic or opposing biomedical practices. Even healing is here more seen as empowering psychologically or finding relief. The pressure on the qalandar khona gatherings increased to the degree that the gathering was forbidden a year after my last visit and the witnessing of the tension. This did not stop women from continuing to visit secretly, but the place as popular social gathering stopped existing in its dynamic way. What was restricted is the sociability of women, not the individual belief system.

When it comes to closing down women's social spaces, salafists and the regime understand each other well (Roche 2018). Even if the arguments are different, even opposite, they agree in the argument that women's gatherings are "dangerous" to society and to women themselves. Whereas a salafi-oriented argument sees the form of the ritual as the primary problem, the city council worries about superstition and extremism. In both cases, we recognize Krämer's (2002) argument that women's gatherings are denied any political relevance. Instead, their dangerousness is derived from an evolutionary argument that considers women's practices backward and harmful. This is the fundamental difference from men's gatherings, which are accorded political agency independently of whether those include religious practices or not.

Eliminating the qalandar khona

Women's gatherings are as multiple as men's gatherings. In the domain of Islam, however, they are perceived differently. Women have been excluded

from mosques since the politically motivated fatwa in 2004. Those mosques which have been designed with a women's space have locked the latter. The "Law on Parental Responsibility for Education and Upbringing of Children" of 2011 banned religious schooling in private homes, a measure which affects all girls who used to receive some basic instruction before a religious authority in their neighbourhood. Further repeated actions were taken to abolish the veil of women, which has become popular, and to regulate (female) dresses in school and public.[4]

Such political regulations of women's lives can be seen as a continuation of the Soviet period, when women were the barometer of communist success. Different groups have different ideas of how women should be and project their ideologies onto their lives. If the state more often used the rhetoric of extremist danger, other groups would attack women for conducting non-Islamic rituals. Women as holders of "old traditions" is rhetoric that works for various groups with opposing views. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), since the independence of the Central Asian republics, have discovered those very same "traditional" religious female authorities as a way to promote women's position in society. Cieślewska (2016, 223; 2017), in her book, describes the work of the NGO Sustainable Development Foundation financed by Germany to combat violence against women and girls and the prevention of domestic violence through the involvement of female religious leaders (*bibi otun*) in Tajikistan. The initiative was founded in 2013 and trained *bibi otuns* in legal and civic awareness. Although the project was implemented with the permission of the highest government authorities – the Committee on Women and Family Affairs of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan – a few years later, the speaker of the president, Abdujabbor Rahmonzoda, criticized those religious authorities publicly. He complained that NGOs and other organizations aim at cooperating with *bibi otuns* and use them to gain access to women.

> He expressed regret that participants of feasts saw the acts of the 'otuns', but did not take steps to prevent them. "Sometimes activists of 'the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan' are promoting their own political goals through the *bibiotun*s. We must be serious about this and restrict such unwanted actions," said Abdujabbor Rakhmonzoda.[5]

Such initiatives demonstrate that the actual fear is not about religious education, as it is absurd to expect the terrorist group 'Islamic Movement Uzbekistan' to act openly in gatherings today along with secular NGOs. Instead, it seems that women's gatherings as such seem dangerous because of the lack of political control. Whereas the city authorities of Khujand had first tried to integrate female authorities in the *shuroi zanon mahalla*,[6] this effort was criticized by Rahmonzoda shortly afterwards, and women were excluded again. The closing down of the qalandar khona was finally done under the pretext of building a street through the compound rather than religious arguments.

Previously, it has been argued that salafi views of women at times conform to governmental views even if their arguments are opposed. This is the case for those gatherings, in which female religious authorities lead a ritual. An example of such arguments is given by Sadoi Umed, who runs a YouTube channel and echoes the opinion of many young people who draw their opinion from online social media.

Sadoi Umed is a series of videos of Umed that attack various religious and cultural practices in Tajikistan in popular ways and demonstrate a salafi take on society. In a session called "One says that my difficulties were lifted by this woman [crying emoji] what is this?" on YouTube (2018), he attacks *mushkil kusho*, *folbin*s and treatments based on hot and cold (a principle of organizing health that goes back to classic Persian beliefs and is widespread in Asia). "Badbakht, they do this work out of lack of knowledge [*besavodi*, literally: missing brain], . . . these *jodugaron* [bewitchers] are *kufr* [non-believers]." He speaks of *kampirhoi besavod*, "elderly women without brain" who today conduct *mushkil kusho*. "They do it out of stupidity which has bad effects on them. Their practice is going to affect them badly, they will be hit by *shirk* and *gunahkor*." He calls *folbinho* or those who treat with hot and cold "non-Muslims". This seemingly theological argumentation rests on popular critiques of women healers and joins efforts to gain control over social processes. This argument enjoys popularity, as the examples in Cieślewska (2016, 2017, 110) demonstrate (she gives an example in her book of a young woman called Parviza [aged 27] who criticizes *bibi otun*s for their "insufficient religious knowledge").

The conflict over women's gatherings is at best pseudo-theological; there are no debates or theological arguments but simply blunt accusations, equally by salafi and by the government. The government seems nervous about women authorities having an audience that is outside its control. Over the past decade, women's (and men's) gatherings during life cycle celebrations and women's behaviour (dress) and lives have repeatedly been under the scrutiny of the government. The *tanzim* law[7] of 2007 was the result of regulating private gatherings during life cycle celebrations, which were particularly extensive for and looked forward to by women. This gender divide is embedded in political hierarchies that downgrade women's activities and consider them unable to evaluate discourses. If we speak of gender divide in this context, we do not exclude the fact that women may also act on the side of the government and promote the ban of *mushkil kusho* or follow the salafi argument. Gender in this discussion decides the access to define the dominant views and the hierarchy in religion. Bobosodikova, for instance, uses the argument of the backward woman to join the position:

"Guljahon Bobosodikova, the leader of Association of Women's Education says, because the bibi otuns use old books of fairytales 'they make women's head mad', but Tajik women listen to them"(Gulkhoja and Nazar 2015). Madness here has moved away from the divine meaning in sufism to an illness caused by women's religious practices.

What is at stake is not only a folk Islam or female religiosity "related to traditions and practices which function outside mainstream Islam" (Cieślewska 2017, 202) but a particular sociality of women. They are stripped of gatherings and meetings that are much more than religious events or healing rituals; they are social gatherings that empower women.

Conclusion – women's socialities

The introduction began with a claim that what women do is seen as politically irrelevant, religiously marginal and socially unimportant by religious authorities. Whereas most studies have been interested in religious female authorities and healing practices, this chapter has suggested focusing on gender and sociability. The gatherings of women, like that for *mushkil kusho* in the qalandar khona, are justified only because of the healing practices. Legitimacy discourses and attack of practices are directly linked. Scholars are not innocent in reproducing this gendered division by calling women's practices folk Islam, backward or shamanic. These descriptions downgrade women's religiosity in comparison to men's practices in mosques or state organs. The gender divide in gatherings is strict only within *mushkil kusho* and the mosque but less strict in various other forms of individual healing. Discourses are gendering practices, a phenomenon that has been observed in relation to many other conflicts or transformations. The party that is capable of defining gender order automatically has the say after a conflict, Christina von Braun and Ulrike Auga (2006, 2) observe. "A party capable of defining the gender order of its own society automatically has the say, no matter whether it is the governing party or not." Hence gender remains a crucial factor in the making of society in post–civil war Tajikistan. The link between gender and power is closely linked to religion as the factor to define this new order. Thus, even if in practice, the gender divide is less absolute, the discourses have a clear gender and gendering dimension. The shaman is in Tajikistan not the wise man that interacts with the other world of hunters but the Muslim's other and government's charlatan and extremist. It is embedded in a gender hierarchy that accords positions of power to men and considers women's sociality central to society but of minor relevance to political and theological discourses. The enormous efforts to regulate women's gatherings demonstrate that they are indeed crucial to society, hence the wish to control their developments.

Lewis departs from a society in which men are the standard and women constantly fight to catch up. This Freudian view of society reduces women's sociality to a sub-product that only exists in relation to male dominance and the achievements of men. While I agree with Lewis that women's sociality has to be studied in relation to men's social roles, the many different kinds of gatherings and practices that can be found in Central Asia may take place in private houses, but they are not peripheral to society. The argument that

women's gatherings are healing rituals seems to be the case for various other similar rituals, whether in Sudan (*zār* ritual), Siberia, the Americas or East Asia. Healing is here more often social than biomedical. Women come to have success in their business, to find a partner for their son or daughter, to make sure that birth will be smooth and for many other reasons. All these issues are social before being medical or religious. As such, women are central to society and perceived as powerful. It is not the ritual in itself that is powerful, as the different forms of attacking the ritual show, but the very fact that women have social spaces which they fashion independently of men's control. It is universal that diseases/healing are a valid argument for a woman to obtain leave from the daily housewife routine. Whether this is a personal illness or a social one may differ by context. Hence, women's socialities such as in the qalandar khona are key social spaces for the research of gender developments in a society.

Notes

1 See the chapter by Penkala-Gawęcka for a full bibliography and discussion on this issue.
2 The notion of *jodugarī* is not always a synonym of sorcery. Most common is the use of the word as a negative description of the magic of fortunetellers in the sense of a charlatan. In the vocabulary of Islamists, *jodugarī* becomes devil worship and sorcery.
3 Gulkhoja, Shahlo and Nazar (2015). "Bibiotuns".
4 Kudenko (2017). See one of the more recent actions in Khujand: *Sadoi Umed* 2018 "They say, this woman opened my way out of difficulties – smiley – what is this?"; For a discussion, see Roche (2019, 239).
5 See the video presented with the article Gulkhoja, Shahlo and Nazar (2015). "Bibiotuns".
6 *Ozodagon* 2015 "Uniforming the clothing of bibiotuns and the recommendation of the City Council to the neighborhood women's council."
7 Law of 2007 entitled "Sanadhoi me'jorii huquqi oid ba tanzimi an'ana va jashnu marosimho" (Standard Document of Law about Customs and Celebration and Ceremonies).

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Without author

"МЕГА МУШКИЛИ МАРА ХАМИ ЗАН КУШОД☹ЧИГАПАЙ? [They Say, This Woman Opened My Way out of Difficulties: Smiley: What Is This?]." *Sadoi Umed*, March 21, 2018. https://ru-clip.net/video/qcc0p1F6iLo/%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D1%83%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0-%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%88%D0%BE%D0%B4%F0%9F%98%A2%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B9.html

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11 Shamanism and gender construction among the Kavalan of Taiwan

Men and women's illness caused by different spirits

Pi-chen Liu

Introduction

The issue of gender in shamanism has been a focus of debate in academia since 1985. In many societies, male and female shamans are given different tasks due to gender difference. Although each is important in their own way, this sphere is usually male dominated. Taking the typical patrilineal and hunting society of Siberia as an example, shamans are mainly male because they conduct the rituals to obtain prey. They often have many animal helper spirits. Also, if there are female shamans, their helper spirits are mainly connected to the spirits of dead people. Female shamans play relatively unimportant roles in curing illness and in divination (Hamayon 1990, 450).

Another important approach to understand gendered shamanism is through the theory of symbolism. In the explanation of the northern Inuit by Oosten (1989, 334), as males have weapons with which they kill animals, simultaneously in shamanic rituals there are many scenes in which the shaman "kills" evil spirits or removes illness agents from the bodies of ill people (Taylor 1989; Laugrand and Oosten 2010). In terms of symbols and ideology, the male hunting and killing value-centred shamanistic complex is incompatible with the domains of female menstruation and fertility. Therefore, shamanism attaches most importance to male values but does not exclude the values of females. Ideologically and symbolically, the shamanistic complex expresses male values not by excluding female values but by encompassing them (Oosten 1989, 334).

The theory of shamanism developed on the basis of research material from the patrilineal societies of the Arctic Circle, Siberia and northern China. In these societies, females were always marginalized and had mainly secondary positions and, for this reason, did not attract much attention from researchers. Up until the 1980s, the theoretical concepts of shamanism tended towards: shamanism is guided by males, and they control the journey of the spirits; they are fearless and competitive hero types. In contrast, females cannot control spirits and so can only be mediums (Eliade 1968; Lewis 2003 [1971]). There is another hypothesis, namely the evolutionists believe that, in the origins of humans, shamans were mainly female, in particular in

matrilineal societies where all important tasks were performed by females. These theories have been criticized for being overly mechanical or simplistic and also for not fully considering the issue of gender (Kendall 1981; Holmberg 1983), or, as Atkinson (1992, 317) criticized: "Scholarly constructions of the category of shaman reveal highly gendered assumptions."

With the aim of providing reflexive thinking for the study of gendered shamanism research, the author's fieldwork focused on the indigenous people of Taiwan where the climate is sub-tropical, natural resources abundant and social organization very different from typical northern shamanism. This chapter will study matrilineal societies in eastern Taiwan where the males not only hunt; prior to the 1930s, they also headhunted. Hunting was not only for food; it was connected to headhunting, which had symbolic meanings of exchange of life between hunter, enemy and wild animal and the value of reproduction (Liu 2013). Headhunting also involved collective self-defence. This symbolic articulation shows that the importance of hunting in their society was no less than in the northern societies. However, in these societies, female shamans were much greater in proportion than males. If the ability/possibility to become a shaman is seen as a spectrum, the Kavalan are at the extreme of the spectrum, as only females can become shamans in their society. Next to the Kavalan on the spectrum are the Puyuma; in the Japanese Colonial Period (1895–1945), the number of males who became shamans was in single digits. Before the 1970s, the Amis/Pangcah shamans were half male and half female, while today, almost all shamans are female.

In the 1980s, scholars began to notice a new trend for the feminization of the shaman. They thought that, in those societies impacted by external forces, men who had previously occupied a core position had taken up positions in the relatively superior external religions, resulting in the marginalization of traditional religion, and this was the reason the role of shaman gradually was occupied by women (Métraux 1967; Lewis 2003 [1971], 59–89; Hamayon 1982, 23; Guillermoz 1982, 175–185; Perrin 1995, 79–81). However, this explanation cannot fully explain the feminization of the shaman of the indigenous people of east Taiwan. When studying the Puyuma, Cauquelin (2004, 184) stated that the effect of Japanese colonialism (1895–1945) and changes in economic patterns were the main reasons for the feminization of shamans. She thought that although the Puyuma were previously a matrilineal society, as they were hunting based, the archetype of the shaman was male. It was a kind of "going on a voyage" in shamanic form. Only with the gradual change to a farming society in the late 19th century did they change from a shamanistic hunting society to a female-dominated shaman society. Their ritual took the new form of "the ancestors come down (incarnated)". However, in the neighbouring Puyuma villages, Chen (2006, 2010, 170–174) did not see the same change from male to female shamans and questioned Cauquelin's hypothesis. Chen stated that, even among the 43 shamans of the same

village (Nanwang) studied by Cauquelin, only 5 were men, and asked if this phenomenon was a variant specific to certain times and places and not the general rule. The author believes that the key to understanding is to further deconstruct the connection between shamanism and gender categorization and conceptualization in matrilineal society. This is the main theme that this chapter will analyze.

This chapter will start with the Kavalan people, who are at the extreme of the spectrum, live close to the Puyuma and were also once a matrilineal society, in order to understand female shamanism from the perspective of gender construction. In contrast to the Han Chinese of Taiwan, Western colonialists or Japanese, Kavalan women have a relatively high social position, similar to what scholars have observed elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Van Esterik 1982; Atkinson 1990). What is special about the Kavalan is that, no matter past or present, hunting or farming society, or after the move into the global labour market in the 1970s, Kavalan shamans have always been female; even after the Kavalan converted to Catholicism en masse in the 1960s, the traditional concept of female shaman has still had an influence in contemporary life.[1] When a French missionary was training local priests in the 1980s, he wrote in the mission affairs report that in matriarchal/matrilineal societies in which women have more power, like the Kavalan and Amis, people found it hard to believe that males had been called by God to become priests (Cuny 1986).

This chapter will discuss the following question: What female traits and values are linked to shamanism, allowing women to take the lead? The different illnesses imposed by spirits that men and women contract will then be analyzed; in particular, the shamanic "illness of initiation" diagnosed and confirmed by a female shaman, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the "bitten by animal spirits illness" of males in contemporary Kavalan society will be compared. From these two different gendered illnesses, we can see the different relationships of females and males with spirits (goddess, ancestor spirits and animal spirits). What kind of asymmetry does this relationship display? This asymmetry reveals that shamanism becomes a means of gender categorization and construction.

For the Kavalan, the relationship between being ill and the cause of the "illness" is inherent. As Lévi-Strauss (1958, 212) stated, this relationship is like that between symbols and symbolized objects. By further analyzing the symbolic representations within this healing system, we can clearly understand the process of the social construction of the concept of illness, gender and shamanism interrelated in everyday life. In this healing practice, the body (existence in individual form and the most private part), the system of symbolic representation (shared by everyone) and each person's pain and hardship and gendered identity are all articulated together. Through this intersubjectivity, symbolic representation, in particular, "makes everyone move towards others (collective) while, at the same time, contradictorily moving towards the self" (Godelier and Panoff 1998), forming a social

relationship network. For this reason, the focus of this chapter is examining to what degree an "ill body" can become an expression and instrument of the (re)construction of individual subjectivity and gender identity.

When the individual feels a vague feeling of "pain", "discomfort", "listlessness" or "unease" for a length of time, it is an opportunity to reconstruct him/herself as a social subject (Kleinman and Erin 2007). That is, the individual feels they face a body-crisis/life-crisis or are perhaps in a conflict situation and they feel they need to change or protest by leaving behind a certain state. In Kavalan group life, an individual is unable to achieve a better state alone by himself/herself. The occasion for reconstruction of the social subject needs the assistance of a person with a special task, so a shaman (*mtiu*) has to be sought. The *mtiu* uses some techniques to carry out divination (*pesepi*), then diagnoses the "cause of illness" and the "source of illness" and, on this basis, forms a kind of illness discourse (Foucault 1963). Then, the *mtiu* decides the corresponding people, time, place, things and reaction needed to heal the "patient".

The discourse about illness formed in this process is key to understanding the shamanist symbolic representation system of the Kavalan. This discourse provides the people with the conditions for understanding the world and consists of an important set of descriptions through which the Kavalan cognize things that not only build their way of seeing the world but also construct the scope of knowledge and gender difference. In the discourse of illness, what kind of gender different social subject does the (re)constructed/represented individual become? Before analyzing, we will first understand the contemporary social context of the curing of illness by the shaman.

The social context of Kavalan shamanic healing

Han Chinese settled in large numbers and cultivated rice from the end of the 1700s onwards in the Yilan area of eastern Taiwan, whereas the Japanese were the colonial rulers of Taiwan for 50 years starting in 1895. After over 200 years of assimilation by the Han, forced relocation and the Kominka[2] policy of the Japanese, the identity, language and social culture of the Kavalan were placed under immense pressure and almost disappeared. In this process of frequent migration and war, the physical illnesses suffered by the Kavalan people and shamanic healing were closely connected to localization following these migrations and wars and also linked to the tangle of matrilineal or patrilineal practices.

Only when the people of the last Kavalan settlement in eastern Taiwan, Sinshe in Hualien County, launched a campaign in 1987 for the ethnic group to be recognized as one of Taiwan's indigenous people did ethnic consciousness begin to gradually re-form. In 2002, the Kavalan were officially recognized by the government as an ethnic group and, from this point on, received an increasing amount of political and economic resources. Today, the group has around 1,500 people. The village where most of the field research was

carried out, Sinshe in Chinese, PatoRogan in Kavalan, constitutes about one-third of this total population.

It is a journey of about 15 minutes by car from this seaside village to the Fengbin Indigenous People's Hospital (10 kilometres), the nearest hospital where Western medical treatment can be received. Over half of the villagers were converted to Christianity in the 1970s by the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. Although Western medicine became more widespread and the number of believers in shamanism decreased, it is still common for Kavalan people to seek the help of *mtiu* to diagnose the cause of their illness and treat it through a ritual. The Kavalan believe that some illnesses cannot be treated by a doctor and a *mtiu* must treat them using traditional methods, with the result that alternative medicine, Western medicine and Christian religion are distinguished and coexist.

What illnesses do the Kavalan think that Western medicine cannot cure and require a *mtiu* to carry out a *pasepi* for diagnosis and treatment? Two types can be identified: the first is called *taRaw* (illness). Broadly defined, *taRaw* means a lasting pain in a part of the body with external symptoms, for example, a toothache; headache; foot pain; stomach ache or swelling; swollen feet, hands or penis or a person's subjective feeling of unwellness or weakness throughout the whole body. The second type is emotional worry or fear. When a person has a nightmare or sees a dead person in a dream, they feel psychologically ill at ease; they want a further explanation and so will go to a *mtiu* who will make a diagnosis through a *pasepi*, giving the "patient" peace of mind. The motives for seeking healing are very similar to the previous one but without the external physical discomfort. In the Kavalan representation of illness, physiological pain and psychological problems are placed in the same social category.

As Hoskins (1996) argued that motivation and symptoms do not allow us to understand the social pathology, the Kavalan classification of illnesses and injuries is based on causes, not on symptoms. When they suspect that their illness or injury is caused by spirits, they will go to see a shaman. In this diagnosis of finding which spirits affect the concerned patient, the shamans play a decisive interpretive role, and their discourses provide a position for the individual to reconstruct him or herself as social subject. Following my fieldwork in the village from 1993 to 2000 and 2006 to 2009, villagers were often observed waiting at the door of a *mtiu's* house at dawn to have their illness diagnosed and be told treatment methods through divination. In fieldwork, cases were not specially selected but were encountered randomly.

Usually, women more actively consult a shaman, and they are the main actors. However, most visitors do not just inquire about their personal matters; they ask on behalf of their husband or take their children with them. This habitus clearly shows that *taRaw* is family centred and family members influence each other, forming kin groups as a community of destiny so people do not exist as individuals. The Kavalan concept and value of personhood is different from the European one. In the Christian culture of

Europe, the person is unique in the relationship with the only God (Godelier 2011, 17). Subsequently, the illness of initiation to become a shaman and the "bitten by animal spirits" illness of men in the network of family and deities will be discussed.

Mutumazu goddess illness: become a shaman (*mtiu*)

In a summary of interviews on life histories with shamans, before the 1970s, every year, on average one or two young girls in the village would have an illness (*taRaw*) attributed to the goddess Mutumazu. As the Christian influence on the village increased after 1960 and people moved away to work in cities after 1975, fewer and fewer people experienced this kind of illness, and it largely disappeared. In 1987, as the drive to have the Kavalan recognized as one of Taiwan's indigenous groups gathered steam, there was a revitalization of traditional belief. In addition, globalization has resulted in an increase in urban unemployment, leading some Kavalan people to leave their villages only to return because they have difficulties finding work in the cities. This kind of illness has made a reappearance in this new setting. This shows that "illness" is a reaction to special political, economic and social change.

During fieldwork in 1995 and 1996, I encountered two cases where people were regarded as having experienced this *taRaw* (illness) attributed to the goddess. One was a six-year-old girl who had gone blind as a result of complications after a high fever and had not recovered her eyesight despite having sought Western medical treatment. Another was a 17-year-old girl who lived in a nearby village who had felt discomfort and weakness throughout her body for a long period of time. She had been for consultation with an Amis shaman (*sikawasay*) in a nearby village on several occasions to no avail. Both girls sought out shaman Ipai of Sinshe to give a diagnosis. After a *pesepi*, the discourse of the shaman and the family members of the "patients" was that they had experienced an illness which the Kavalan considered "impossible to heal". This illness was a sign that the sufferer had been chosen by the goddess Mutumazu, who is regarded by the Kavalan as their creator, making it necessary for these two "patients" to conduct a *kisaiz* ritual. *Kisaiz* is the terminology for a ritual and has no literal meaning. In Kavalan myth, *kisaiz* is a set of taboos and methods for survival taught by goddess.

It was thought that the illness could only be cured by the songs and dances displaying the goddess treating the illness and by sharing food during the *kisaiz* ritual. However, after the 1960s, the shamanic initiation ritual (*kisaiz*) was no longer held collectively. Today a one-day *pakelabi*[3] substitutes for the *kisaiz* ritual, a feast that was grander and lasted for three days or a week in earlier times. The two girls took part in that year's female shaman group worship of the goddess, deceased shamans and their ancestors. After this ritual (*pakelabi*), the two "patients" became *mtiu* with the right to learn how to treat illnesses.

As explained by a senior shaman, in the Kavalan symbolic representation of illness, only women experience an illness of the goddess that has to be healed by holding a *kisaiz*. They are usually young virgins or unmarried women. Why, though, is it coincidentally young women who have not given birth? If we think of this virgin characteristic together with the prohibition for all participating shamans from having sexual relations with their partner during the period of *kisaiz/pakelabi* as being linked in a symbolic system, it can be found that both these situations are connected to human reproduction.

For the Kavalan, behind this kind of illness lies a Mutumazu myth interpretation, which clearly explains:

> Long ago, Mutumazu lived in heaven and was the goddess (Ziyalan). She saw a man, Siagnau, who was poor and pitiful, so she came to earth to help him. When she descended there was no food. Mutumazu showed him how to clear the land and plant upland rice seeds. Before long, Mutumazu became pregnant and gave birth to a *sunis* (child). As the rice grew longer, weeds also grew so Mutumazu gave the child to Siagnau to take care of and went to weed the fields. However, Siagnau was too lazy to take proper care of the child and fed it crab from the river, after which the child died. Mutumazu was furious, went onto the roof and rose up into the sky with the smoke. After this, humans had death and sickness.

From this myth, the need to hold the shaman initiation ritual (*kisaiz*) on a roof and the fact that only women who have not given birth can be shamans, we can see the shaman initiation ritual is a life-giving ritual. It is emphasized that the goddess Mutumazu gives the Kavalan their descendants and that the new shaman symbolize her descendants and successor. The social order of reproduction is put under the control of the power of a supernatural goddess.

From the words and lyrics of the shaman initiation ceremony (*kisaiz*), it can be seen that the main point of the songs and dances of the shaman on the roof is to shout out the name of the goddess and treat her as mother (*tina*). Thus, it is necessary to carry on holding the ritual and offer her sacrifices to guarantee health and well-being. In other words, in the process of going from "an unmarried women with an illness" to "a woman who can treat other people's illnesses," the Kavalan built a matrilineal inheritance system and maintain a continuing relationship with this imagined supernatural being. What exactly is this relationship?

New shamans and Mutumazu are virtually "consanguineal", and they become her agents on earth. In fact, most new shamans have female shamans in their lineage, for example, the blind girl in this study has a grandmother who is also a *mtiu* shaman. This shows that the status of shaman is passed on through matrilineal descent. Mutumazu is not just the mother of a new

shaman, she is the mother of all Kavalan people collectively, a guide who taught them to plant upland rice, cure sickness and solve life problems. Consequently, the Kavalan must continue to hold rituals and offer sacrifices to stay safe and well. This is their public concern and the shamanism of the Kavalan.

The shaman initiation ritual is not only a life-giving ritual, it is also a food-giving ritual and closely connected to ecological regeneration. The *kisaiz/pakelabi* ritual is held every autumn after the rice harvest. A family with a "sick" shaman, or one who will soon became a shaman, has to make offerings of newly harvested rice and hold a banquet in which rice products are the main dishes.[4] During the ritual, when the *mtiu* comes down from the roof after dancing and singing, she shakes her necklace, making a tinkling sound. The Kavalan believe this sounds like rainfall and will bring rain. For the Kavalan, this illness healing ritual is also a collective rain-calling ritual for the village. The tinkling sound, the rainfall sound and the sounds of footsteps and singing are all associated with the goddess's world. Within these symbolic practices, the power of nature – rain – is given to and controlled by the goddess, the spirits of deceased shamans and the ancestors.

Overall, the feast and giving of rice products in the entire *kisaiz/pakelabi* ritual during which the performances depict the goddess treating the new shaman shows that these rituals are closely related to control or management of family unit-based rice production, distribution and consumption. The exchange relationships involved are not just personal, familial and inter-village social relationships within the village, they are also entangled with the natural environment (rain, rice harvest). Through the public healing of their body, a relationship is built between people and the spirit and simultaneously among people. There is also a relationship built between people and nature, and these multi-relationships are connected, interdependent and mutually beneficial.

In the illness cause explanation system of the Kavalan today, goddess, shaman and initiation ritual are still linked to giving/continuing the value of life. Kavalan shamans do not just give life (give birth) or continue a lineage, they are a source that continues and makes life reproduce, including natural ecology. At the same time, women are the base of male and female identity, family and social identity.

Illness of wild animal spirit (Saliman): territory and male power

The second cause of illness which this chapter focuses on is related to the wild animal spirit "Saliman". It is worshipped by individual hunters, with the typical discourse that illness is caused as a result of being "bitten" by a Saliman. In the last 20 years, although hunting has declined in the village and most of the former hunters have converted to Catholicism, during my fieldwork, cases that were diagnosed by the shaman as illness caused by Saliman were still encountered. The author interviewed 21 cases in total.

C.'s case allows further analysis. One day after C. came down from the mountains, his testicles suddenly swelled up, and he was in so much pain he could not walk. He was taken to Hualian Hospital where he was diagnosed as having a hernia and an operation was arranged. Although C. was in hospital, he still felt ill at ease and interpreted his illness in a different way. C.'s behaviour shows that people who become ill or encounter crisis in life will seek the significance of pain/injury not treated by modern medicine (Kleinman 1995). This shows that the Kavalan still live in a common cultural network, and the people believe that their illness has not healed for a reason and that this reason can be found through a shaman *mtiu*.

His narrative of falling ill was: the day before going to hospital when he was in the mountains, he passed by a plant known as "biting cat", (*Urtica thunbergiana* Sieb. & Zucc) and had joked to the woman accompanying him D. that the plant would bite her on the vagina and cause it to swell up so she wouldn't be able to walk. D. was not to be outdone and responded by saying he was old, performed poorly in the bedroom and that the plant would bite him on the testicles, causing them to swell up. The next day, C.'s testicles really did swell up. He believed that his swollen testicles were connected to the conversation he had had with D., so he asked a *mtiu* (shaman) who was also with him in the mountains that day to carry out a diagnosis when he went to hospital. The shaman pulled down C.'s trousers and carried out a divination by touching the affected body part. The discourse of the shaman was that: that day C. had passed through neighbour E.'s hunting grounds and had been bitten by E.'s animal spirit (Saliman). E. had thus to be invited to go to carry out a *pasniw* healing ritual.

From the interpretation of the cause of C.'s swollen testicles by the *mtiu*, we can see that in the Kavalan's symbolic representation, the wild animal spirits are aggressive and, like people, have intention and will "bite" people without provocation. The symptom of "being bitten" is swelling. This *taRaw* involving the swelling of a part of the body is often regarded as a punishment that makes fun of the afflicted person. The animal spirits do not "bite" people at random, and they select people who have been immoral to punish them. They only "attack" people with certain characteristics. The example of C. shows that the women accompanying him were not "bitten", only the man, and he was bitten because he had entered someone else's hunting ground. Namely, the representation of Saliman is closely linked to the male hunting space. It was imagined that these spirits stayed in and patrolled the hunting grounds, scaring ordinary people and making them wary and unable to enter the specific area "owned" by its master without worry.

Moving on to the symbolic representation of animal spirits (Saliman), how does a hunter "have" a wild animal spirit? Not all men have one, and it cannot be inherited from a man's father. Prior to the start of hunting annually, hunters chose a rock or large tree in the forest near their village as the representative landmark. They prepare rice wine, betel nut and betel vine and conduct a ritual before going into the forest to lay traps. When they

catch large prey such as wild boar, deer or Reeve's muntjac, they offer the best parts, namely the raw heart, liver and other innards, to the animal they have caught and then hang the skull or lower jaw of the animal in that place. The Kavalan believe that after a skull is worshipped (fed) in this way, its spirit (*tazusa*) will gradually enter ("live in") the skull. These spirits are collectively called Saliman.

Through this kind of "domestication", hunters hope to create two symbolic effects: as stated in the orders and the words of prayer to encourage the animal spirits, they hope that they will take up residence in the skull and then go back bring their relatives and friends. In this way, the hunters will successfully snare prey again next time. The second symbolism is that hunters often hang the head of the wild boar or deer they have caught on a tree, in a corner/ceiling of the kitchen or on a fruit tree they grow. The main aim is they hope the animal spirit will patrol nearby and prevent the items in the territory from being stolen, such as prey, fruit and the tools in the house. Through this kind of symbolic practice, the place where the prey's head is hung becomes a *crisis heterotopia* (Foucault 1984)[5] that people will avoid if they can so they won't be bitten by animal spirits and thus become ill (*taRaw*).

The power of the wild animal spirits to "bite" people actually extends well beyond the normal field of observation. To the Kavalan, it is real, has substance and exists but cannot be seen. The process of being "bitten" to falling ill and healing shows the intention of the animal spirits. The people who are "bitten" obtain an intimate physical connection with them and are thus able to describe them for themselves and understand their movements. The Kavalan people believe that in the daily living space, invisible forces exist and the illness *taRaw* is a way of displaying the meaning of these forces. The ill body makes people realize meanings that do not exist in language form. At the same time, through the process of being "bitten" and falling ill to give illness meaning, people become aware of the scope and spatial field of the male-centred crisis location.

However, a man cannot use Saliman to establish his power and authority to control and use forest resources; his power is very limited. Hunting ground allocation and hunting activities are decided by consensus of the men of the village, not by individual power. Saliman is, to an extent, like the objectification of the hunter's desire and intention (Liu 2009, 195). However, hunters hope that Saliman can serve them and turn into their power tool. This use of politico-religious means to try to control and manage hunting territory displays the process of construction of the male social subject as well as implying competition and enmity between men. It is a kind of embodiment of the dual natural and social territories that are exclusive to men.

From the cause of illness narratives of the 21 people "bitten" by E.'s Saliman interviewed by the author, we can further clarify the scope and boundaries of the male-centred area (including natural and social). The author sums

up the reasons for being "bitten" by Saliman into three main causes: the first was, as in the case of C., entering E.'s hunting ground. The second was because of taking betel nuts, betel vine or fruit from E.'s courtyard or even just visiting E.'s house; the third reason was using E.'s tools such as a knife or hunting equipment. Reasons 2 and 3 previously include the embodiment of things and spatial concepts. However, not all "thieves" were "bitten"; only those who entered the special space and violated items belonging to the hunter were bitten. The place where these people were "bitten" matched the area where the hunter hung the wild boar head.

Further, according to their illness narratives about being "bitten" by E.'s Saliman, not all of them who entered this space were bitten. 20 out of 21 of the people bitten were E.'s neighbours or villagers, and only one was a Han Chinese, a son-in-law who lived in his wife's home, showing that Saliman was the boundary of the construction of their ethnic culture. From this selection of people within a special space, we can see that the animal spirits and hunter-related territory are centred on the hunter's house and extend into the common living space in the village and some parts of the mountains around the village. The wild animal spirits are highly localized, and the centre of their territory is the hunter's village.

The 21 patients "bitten" by Saliman had another commonality: they all had an intimate relationship with E; for example, they were his wife, wife's family, his children and neighbours. This shows that this illness is a kind of male relationship negotiation mechanism, highlighting the tension and pressure, conflict and competition between men and their wife's family or other men in the village. We can see here that the Saliman is not only connected to hunting and animist beliefs, but it also has an important role in the network of social relations. The whole process of becoming ill after being "bitten", then asking a hunter to heal the patient can best be described as a kind of repairing of fractures in social relationships, such as the case of the Ndembu hunter's returning soul "biting" people with his teeth analyzed by Turner (1967). However, unnoticed by Turner were the problems of subjectivity, of subject/sovereignty declaration, demonstration and protection of men with regard to their living space and property.

Saliman functions as the basis of male power and interpersonal relationships, but not every man in the village had a Saliman. Two hunters had Saliman that were regarded as the most formidable. One was E.'s, regarded as the most powerful and most likely to "bite" people. The 21 examples also show that even the best hunter cannot control or instruct their Saliman; that is, the Kavalan attribute a dual character to the Saliman, it is both half savage and half domesticated, so when it bites someone, the victim or their family won't complain or engage in conflict with the hunter. Actually, E. was respected by villagers and was seen as a hero, a model of masculinity and a powerful man who was able to help people heal Saliman illness and who had also served as chief and deputy chief, receiving a high social position (Liu 2009).

In the end, healing requires the hunter to hold a simple ritual called *pasniw*. This is not a public healing ritual and does not involve song or dance performances or a banquet or require any offerings such as *kisaiz*, showing that wild animal spirits have quite a low position in the Kavalan spirit world and people do not negotiate the healing by "feeding" the spirits or giving gifts. The *pasniw* healing ritual was very rapidly conducted. The master of the Saliman breathed onto his palm three times, then moved his hand from the head to the feet of the patient about 5–6 centimetres from their body, while reciting a prayer asking the Saliman to behave "don't bite, let him go" so that C. could recover. The purpose of *pasniw* is to drive away the Saliman from the body of the patient. The Saliman is imagined to follow its master, so during the entire healing process, the hunter cannot touch the body of the "patient" because the Kavalan believe the Saliman will bite the patient again and make the *taRaw* worse.

In the short, less than 10-minute-long healing process, the ill person did not carefully offer rice products as in the aforementioned shaman initiation ritual (*kisaiz*). It involved ordering and negotiation with the wild animal spirit (Saliman), the hunter using language to "tame" the spirit and establish a peaceful relationship with it. In contrast to the respect for the female creator (goddess) of the Kavalan, in this process, the human has a relatively high position and is able to give the animal spirits orders.

Asymmetry of representation of shaman illness and animal spirit illness

From these two different illnesses provoked by goddess and animal spirits, we can see the different relationships of females and males involved with the spiritual world.[6] What kind of asymmetry does these relationships display? Five different asymmetries can be highlighted by comparing. These asymmetries will then enable us to deconstruct the articulation of shamanism with gender categorization and conceptualization. First, the range of power a Saliman confers to a man is very limited, since, contrary to a *mtiu* (shaman), in symbolic practices, a Saliman's host cannot communicate with the spirits. A man cannot use his Saliman as a means to build formal authority to become a shaman. The participation of women in hunting activities is a taboo, but only women can become *mtiu*. Contrary to what is commonly observable in shamanic societies, here the activity of male hunting is not connected with being a shaman. The *mtiu* are not involved directly in any specific hunting rituals. Their rituals are not conducted in order to attract more wild animals in the forest but only for helping to find lost domestic animals such as the water buffalo used in the fields or find lost children or relatives. This is to say that shamans tend to handle the domestic sphere.

The representation of the Saliman is associated with male–female asymmetry of power. In this very particular society, men are excluded from the position of shaman. The construction and reproduction of this relationship

are (strongly) related to their representation of animal spirits Saliman and goddess Mutumazu. Males are excluded from possessing supernatural knowledge, language and the symbolic power of manipulation of symbols (Bourdieu 2001). When the Kavalan come into contact with the Earth God (folk belief of the Han Chinese), they regard it as the Mountain God who will give them prey. However, the hunter depends on a Han medium as intermediary to invite the Earth God to come or go when facing the problem of reduction of prey. In the face of new changes, men still have no way to communicate with deities.

A second asymmetry results from the dependence of male hunters on shaman women, who retain a monopoly on communication with spirits. Female shamans are the only ones able to understand the Saliman's intentions. Therefore, male power is greatly reduced. Not only can a man not control his Saliman, he cannot order it to bite one person or another; he is also unable to find out if his own Saliman or someone else's is responsible for a bite. Only a *mtiu* can determine this through the practice of the divinatory ritual *pasepi*. As a consequence, when a man comes back from hunting wild pig or deer, he has to send his name to a *mtiu*. Then, when the hunter starts to butcher the hunted animal, the shaman touches the animal's blood that flows out from the first cut made by the knife. She does this with the rattan cane or bamboo stick ornamented with a stone cylinder (*smakai*) that is normally used as a divinatory tool (*subli*). Kavalan often say it is because this tool touches blood that its magic power increases.

Animal blood symbolizes vitality and good fortune, which will be transmitted to the village population through the tools of the *mtiu* during divinatory and healing rituals. Here, we can see that in Kavalan society, the power of redistribution of fortune is attributed to the *mtiu* even though this fortune comes from the blood of the animal hunted by men. Because everyone in the village desires fortune, which brings success and good health, *mtiu* assume a central role in society. In comparison, men do not get as many social benefits from the hunting activity. Moreover, hunters used to give the thigh of the prey to the *mtiu*. These actions show their respect for and acknowledgement of the shaman's superior social status. These asymmetries reveal the superior power of the *mtiu*.

From the fact that divination tools must be smeared with the blood of animal to be efficacious and the practice of dividing meat, we can see the third asymmetry. Many scholars believe that, in terms of symbolism and ideology, shamanism attaches the main value to killing by male hunters and, as this is incompatible with the category of reproduction/fertility, women are excluded from the main shamanic roles. However, what is interesting is that, although the Kavalan woman usually cannot touch the tools of male hunters, men also can't touch weaving equipment, that is to say that the essential incompatibility and antagonism of male/female, life/death in most human societies exist also in Kavalan society, but especially in Kavalan society; female shamans/hunters are a special category, and it is the shaman who

has to touch the hunted animal's blood to become a symbolic exception, with the female shaman (life) encompassing the hunter (death).

This kind of encompassing is not an isolated case in the symbolic representation of Kavalan shamanism. In past shaman initiation rituals (*kisaiz*), the participating hunters of the village needed to contribute the meat of game, as well as smearing deer meat or throwing deer meat on the head of the initiate (new shaman). Participating people from other villages could also enjoy the meat. After the Japanese banned hunting (1895–1945), the meat of game gradually disappeared from the shaman initiation ritual (*kisaiz*). There is no direct link between men, shamans and the imagined spirits of animal (Saliman) in public affairs in Kavalan society. The relationship developed between wild animal spirit and a man was originally highly personal (private). Only through the female shaman hunter's prey and intangible good luck can it turn into public interest and then develop his special social network.

If we come back to a more global analytical vision of power in Kavalan society, two other asymmetries can be discovered. First, women's power is based on wealth and shamanism, both of which are directly linked to production and redistribution of rice. Hunting is not central to the production of wealth, but agriculture is. Second, through their respective production activities, the women and the men each enter into different relations with the other world (the supernatural). The first group (*mtiu*) is connected to the goddess Muzumazu, who brings life on earth (human beings and rice) and is the mother of every Kavalan, who are subject to her.

Each male individual is, for his part, related to the Saliman/*tazusa* (soul) of the animal he hunted. However, although Saliman do have desires and will, they are not humanized. Kavalan do not have anthropomorphic representations of wild animal spirits. Moreover, Saliman are not superior to human beings and are even treated as inferior creatures in their association with the image of hunting dogs. In the hierarchy of the other world, Muzumazu occupies a much superior place to Saliman, which has repercussions in the world of living beings, the *mtiu* legitimizing their social status and their power as agents of the goddess. They are depositories of her power, whereas men are merely helped by their Saliman, which in the end stay out of their control. In other words, the relations between each gender and the other world serve to reinforce the construction of internal relations in Kavalan society in which women have a higher social status than men.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on studying and reconstructing the system of symbolic representation that connects causes of illness and the female deity/animal spirits belief of the Kavalan people in Taiwan. These representations still affect them and are at the heart of their cultural revitalization. In this area, goddess belief culture and matrilineal and matrilocal social structure only partially remained after the entry of Han Chinese culture, Japanese colonialism and

Christianity, modernization, nationalization and globalization. The rate of disappearance and change has been astonishing. Female models, the goddess as the ideal image of social practice (female who represents family and village), highlight that the value of women in creating and extending life is an important value in the overall society. Not only this, the neighbouring Amis, who also have a matrilineal system, even retain a female deity, Dungi, who controls the power of death. Dungi is a giver of life as well as the decider of life who sends the Deity of Hunting, Kalejah, to headhunt (*miadop*) the heads of those she decides should die (Liu Pin-hsiung 1965, 152). This kind of female image not only dictates the symbolic connection between birth and femaleness seen in most societies, unusually, it also controls death.

In contrast, the animal spirit representation related to men constructs the idea that men are somewhat "hostile" and malicious, and their animal spirits will attack others. However, a man cannot communicate with his animal spirit nor control it. The discourses of women suffering an illness caused by a goddess mean they must become a shaman, whereas the illness that men get from being "bitten" by an animal spirit constructs the expectation of the Kavalan with regard to the different social roles of men and women, making them become different social subjects. At the same time, this corresponds to imaginings of female god/male god and wild animal spirits. Clearly, men and women have asymmetric social relations with deities.

The author attempts to point out that shamanism is closely connected to categorization and conceptualization of gender in Kavalan matrilineal society, and there is a much bigger difference between their symbolic representation and current illness/injury meaning than in most societies. Beginning discussion from this point, the intention is to enrich the ethnography of female shamans and female deities in matrilineal society, as well as to clarify the complex relationship between gender construction and religious symbolic representation and develop another symbolic view outside of economic patterns and colonial politics influence.

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Notes

1 This does not mean that the female shamanism of the Kavalan is static and unchanging.
2 Kominka literally means "to make people become subjects of the Japanese emperor". The Kominka program started in Taiwan in 1936. It had three policies:

promotion of the Japanese language, the name changing program and the "voluntary" military service.
3 *Pakelabi* means dinner.
4 In the 1960s, there was still prey contributed by hunters.
5 We can regard this area as the *crisis heterotopia* analyzed by Michel Foucault (1984). However, the mode of function is not as he analyzed, in primitive society, with a specific form of differentiated location specially reserved for individuals in a state of "crisis" such as adolescent males and females, menstruating women and the elderly. This is where the wild animal spirits live, and people who pass through will be beset by crisis (illness).
6 This passage is rewritten from page 209–210 of an article by the author (Liu 2009).

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12 Mirroring values in possession ritual

A biographic-narrative study of female participants in the *zār* ritual in the Hormozgān province of Iran

Maryam Abbasi

Introduction

Hormozgān is a male-dominated society, where a range of roles and rules are culturally prescribed for both men and women. Women are more restricted because of their ascribed gender at birth. According to Islamic and official norms, there are certain restrictions among women and men once a girl is 9 and a boy 15 years old, which is the age when they are considered adults and have to be separated. Their social activities will now take place in different social settings. Women have to cover their hair from all the men except from the father, brothers and uncles also grandfathers. The other men are considered *nā-mahram* (the opposite of intimate), which means women have to keep them at a distance, should not laugh with a loud voice in their presence and should not shake hands with them. Also, it is preferred by society that a woman marry at a young age and accept an organized marriage, since children are not wise enough to decide about their future. A good woman is supposed to be a housewife and a good mother, always patient and tolerant, whatever problem turns up.

In this society, a good woman is one who follows her father and brother when single, and after marriage, she follows her husband. She has to live with her parents-in-law after marriage to learn how to be a good wife, and then she is expected to give birth to many children, especially boys. Those women who do not follow this structure and rules are considered intolerant and rebellious and may encounter domestic violence or rejection by their families.

All these issues make women more vulnerable to being possessed and hence taking part in a ritual, which is called *zār*. Once a woman is possessed, she is allowed to talk about her requests, which could be having access to some material items such as clothing, food, jewellery or some intangible goods such as freedom to choose her future husband, postponing marriage, not having sex with her husband when she does not want it and many other things. These are some of the *winds'* requests which have to be met in order to protect woman from another attack or being hurt by *wind*. The whole process of the *zār* ritual is organized in order to communicate with spirits.

The ritual is moderated by a master spirit that finds an agreement between the spirit who is the reason for these problems and anomalies, the woman as representative of the spirit and the society that pushes women to follow the norms but also accept the requests of spirits in order to protect the woman from being hurt.

Being possessed and participating in the *zār* ritual to get rid of this spirit gives them a possibility to negotiate their requests and social status and change the gender-based social norms. Participants in the *zār* believe that during the ritual, the spirit of a person leaves the body and is replaced by a new spirit, which might have a different gender and different behaviours.

In the Hormozgān province of Iran, "*bād*[1]" (which literally means *wind*) is a Persian term used for all spirits that attack a person and cause problems or illnesses which need to be treated through a *zār* ritual. This ritual takes place as a lavish party among women lasting from one to seven nights, depending on the specific requests of the *bād*. *Zār* is also the name of the most dangerous *bād* (or *Red Wind*), which purportedly originates in Africa and can cause the death of the possessed person.

Women are not the only participants in the ritual. Men also take part in this ritual and have different roles in it. Men take more active roles in the ritual and women are more passive unless they have been able to meet all requests of their spirit, who then gives them power. Some men are *zār* therapists and able to control their spirits, some are singers and not possessed and some others take part in the ritual as possessed people. According to my observations, I classify this group into two main groups. The first group is made of the male participants who are rich and powerful in society, and after taking part in this ritual, because of having money and being able to meet all of the *wind*s' requests, their *wind*s are powerful and reach control over all spirits and participants. In other words, they acquire a higher stature in the ritual just as they have acquired in their social life. The second group is made of men who are in a lower social position since they are poor or have African ancestors.[2] This makes them weak in society and in the ritual. Since they have no money to meet the requests of their spirit, they suffer from being possessed and have to follow the requests of *wind*s in order to avoid suffering more.

According to the scholar Gemechu (2007), the *zār* originates from Amharic spoken in Ethiopia. *Zār* as a ritual is practiced in northern and eastern African countries, such as Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as in some Middle Eastern countries such as Kuwait, Israel and southern Iran (Mianji and Semnani 2015; Keener 2010; Abbasi 2019).

Hitherto, studies in Iran, Africa and other Arab countries have evaluated the *zār* ritual from a musicological (Jankowsky 2010; El Hadidi 2016; Monteiro and Wall 2011), religious (Eliade 1989; Crapanzano 2005; Bowie 2000; Frazer 1911), social (Keener 2010; Edelstein 2002; Keller 2002; Kenyon 2007) and psychological (Henshaw 2003; Spinelli 2004) point of view. In Iran, the ritual was studied according to its musicological (Zāvieh and

Asl Marz 2012; Modarressi 1968; Darvīshī 1999; Khosronejad 2011), psychological (Mianji and Semnani 2015) and social (Sā'idī 1976; Moghaddam 2012; Mirzai 2002; Abbasi 2019) dimensions.

The current research is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2016 in the Hormozgān province of Iran. In the first phase of the research, I had the impression that the female participants of the *zār* ritual consider the ritual a possibility to escape some of the gender-based inequalities and, although not being accepted by the family and community, still gain their support.

In this research, the main focus is on female participants of the *zār* ritual. I will take a closer look at the way the *zār* offers the possibility to establish status and negotiate positions within the strong normative order of society. For this purpose, three biographic-narrative interviews with women have been chosen in order to provide different ways to negotiate positions within the normative society of a village community. I look at these three women as three possible paths to negotiate positions out of a range of many possible ways. These interviews unfold individual and social backgrounds, which have led them to be possessed and show their reasoning on the ritual in relation to their lives and positions in society.

It seems that the ways in which these women are connected to the ritual, as well as their ways of following the rituals, are different according to their social backgrounds and personal characteristics. The first example is a woman who accepted being possessed and was able to follow the whole process of treatment until she became able to control the *bād*s and develop her career as possessed person and healer. She was able to break some of the social rules and step up to the highest level of the ritual, that is, becoming a *zār* therapist. The second example is a woman who has taken part in the ritual and followed the rules but is not interested in getting or allowed to get access to the highest position. She submits[3] to the ritual and accepts being under the control of the *bād*s. The third example is a woman who questions the existence of *bād*s and the full ritual that supposedly controls them. She is, however, considered being possessed by others in the community. Despite the fact that she has demonstrated the symptoms of possession in daily life or in the ritual itself, she does not believe in it. As will be demonstrated subsequently, the social background and individual features shape the way people engage and connect with this ritual.

Some of these people are simply submitted to the whole process as followers of the ritual, while others are trying to move up in the hierarchical system, which helps them to not only reach power, respect and safety but also be able to control the other participants and *wind*s.

"*Markab*" (a horse or a place to sit and ride) and "*rākeb*" (a horse rider or a person which sits on something and rides it) are crucial in the process of upward mobility within the social hierarchy. The whole process of ritual is considered by participants a transition from a *rākeb* to *markab*. A *markab* is a person who is being led by another one – here *bād* – and *rākeb* is a person

who is able to control the *bād* and lead it. This transition happened according to a spectrum which is affected by time as well. A person is able to move from the first step of the spectrum (being a *markab*)to the final step, *rākeb*, just by following the rules of the ritual and meeting the requests of the *bād*. All participants start the treatment cycle by being a *markab*, which is being submitted to the rules of the ritual and being obliged to respect the rules. At this point, a *markab* is considered a horse for the *bād*. In other words, the body of the *markab* follows the requests of *bād*s. By following the rules of the rituals over a long period, they may finally be able to lead the *wind*.

In this chapter, I suggest considering the *zār* ritual a process of negotiation in which participants, primarily women, negotiate their sociofamilial status. Through the ritual, they become able to open new opportunities and satisfy their wishes and requests. Following Ting-Toomy (2015), I use negotiation as the process of communication through verbal and non-verbal messages between two or more persons in order to continue, change or inspire different personal or group cultural images and identities. Negotiation provides a useful concept to capture the nuances and dynamics that women employ to create alternative hierarchies to the one that state Islam offers and in which women have limited possibilities of gaining positions of respect. These negotiations include community positions and individual capacities as well as economic opportunities.

Value (*arzesh* in Farsi) is one of the concepts which I will use in this chapter. This word has different meanings that change according to the situation. Some of its meanings are: worth, value, price, merit, rate or weight. In this chapter, I use the word values for all of these meanings and will mention the relevant meaning in parentheses.

Methodology

The data used in this chapter was collected through ethnographic field work between 2010 and 2016 using methods of participant observation and a variety of ethnographic interview approaches (narrative-biographical interviews,[4] semi-structured and expert interviews). Participating in more than ten *zār* rituals was part of doing this research and collecting data. Overall, I did about 50 interviews with *zār* believers, 3 of which have been chosen to draft this chapter. Information from the other interviews is also used in order to introduce the ritual and its process.

These three women offer three possible ways to negotiate one's position in society as a woman. Whereas they may not cover the whole variety of possibilities, the examples chosen have a certain level of representativity within the village community under study. The social background and personal life course of these women is the reason that leads them to believe in the ritual in different ways.

The interviews with these women took place at their homes and through biographical narration. I asked women to tell me their life history and the

reasons which have led them to be possessed. According to this method, the researcher does not interrupt the flow of narration until the person stops. Only then are additional questions asked.

The duration of these interviews varied from two to six hours based on the interviewees' interest and level of cooperation. Some interviews took more than three hours and thus were conducted while staying in the homes of my interviewees over a meal or even overnight when the interviews took place in the evening.

Thanks to the good relations and trust which I established with my interviewees, I was able to contact my participants at any stage of the research to complete the data, and they did not reject answering questions.

During this research, I lived in two villages and three towns, since my interviewees do not live in the same area but are connected together and know each other. The time of residency in each area was dependent on the number of research participants and was different, from two weeks to 40 days. Since I was introduced to the people, I did not spend much time to introduce myself and my work to the people. All interviewees were waiting for me and shared their information openly. After participating in and analyzing the ritual, I explored different ways of negotiation between the *zār* participants and other members of the community. After participating in and analyzing the ritual, I explored different values of this ritual and the way processes of negotiation help the possessed women change these values and gain social tolerance for their lives.

The *zār* ritual is a sensitive issue since it is connected to the participant's supernatural and cosmic belief.[5] The sensitivity of the issue may cause potential risks[6] or unwelcome social consequences for participants (Abbasi 2019). In order to protect their anonymity, I use pseudonyms for my interviewees and adhere to the guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK & Commonwealth (ASA)[7] at every stage of my research by providing the utmost respect to the social customs and rules of the studied society.

What is the *zār*?

The *zār* or *bād e sorkh* (*RedWind*) is the most dangerous *bād*, because it might attack people at any stage of their life and cause illnesses which lead the possessed person to a ritual called *zār* for treatment.[8] *Zār* is not simply a ritual treatment of women who do not conform to social and religious norms, but it is also a belief structured around a notion of belonging that requires being a member of sorts in more or less structured groups. This belief is also connected to Islam as the main religion of Iran and Hormozgān. Although the main ideas of the *zār* ritual, which involve being in connection with spirits and using their powers, are not accepted by Islam,[9] the participants usually perceive it as justifiable under certain conditions and actively contribute to Islamize this ritual. They believe, for example, that it is acceptable if they use the spirits' power to help people and try to solve

their problems, while refraining from hurting them by magic[10] or negative power from the spirit.

The *zār* ritual is led by a person who used to be possessed earlier on but after completing the cycle of treatment gained power over the whole set of spirits. This person is now able to control the *bād*s and treat possessed people using these *bād*s. The *zār* therapist could be a woman, in which case she is called *māmāzār* (mother of *zār*), or a man, or *bābā zār* (father of *zār*).

The *zār* participants believe that after death, the spirit of a dead person lingers in the air for 300 years. After this time, this spirit may accidentally fall in love with a living person and enter her or his body and become his/her second, third or fourth *bād*. When a person is possessed for the first time, his or her body is open and accessible to new *wind*s with different genders and nationalities, which could attack him or her for different reasons and present new requests. According to *zār* participants, the possession often unfolds through a peculiar illness that cannot be treated in a conventional way. People then turn to the *zār* ritual to find treatment (see Abbasi 2019).

This ritual begins by a set of practices to identify whether a person is actually possessed and, if that is the case, to recognize the identity of the possessing *bād*. The first step takes place in private space between the dubitable person and the *zār* therapist. During this process, the *zār* therapist reads the 72nd Surah of the Quran, which is called "the Jinn", over the head of the person and checks his/her reaction to the therapists' voice. At this time, if the person is possessed, the *bād* comes to the body of the person and starts to talk about the reason it entered the body and what it demands in order to retreat from bothering the patient.[11]

I suggest seeing this as a process of negotiation between the *māmā/bābā zār* acting on behalf of the possessed person and the possessing *bād*s. According to my research findings through interviews and participant observation of the *zār* ritual, the *bāds*' requests can be different according to individual *wind*s, usually ranging from clothes and perfume to jewellery or other gifts. During this phase, the *zār* therapist promises the *bād* to meet all these requests provided that the *wind* stops bothering[12] the person again. The women in this area are housewives financially dependent on their husbands and fathers. This is why the father or husband has to pay the expenses of the ritual and the *bād*s' needs. This process of negotiation brings the possibility of using the male resources in order to change the woman's condition inside the family. Once everything is ready, the body of the possessed person is covered with 40 different spices and jasmine oil, and the patient has to enter into quarantine. This quarantine is a room with the basic equipment to fulfil the person's needs for a couple of days. The number of days varies from one to seven according to the identity of the *bād* and its request. During this time, nobody[13] is allowed to visit the person in order to protect him or her from being attacked by another *bād*.

After quarantine time, it is possible to celebrate the ritual. According to my observations, the ritual begins with playing *doholl* and other percussion

instruments such as the *kaser*. A group of male singers sit in a corner of a room in the therapist's home, and the other participants sit around the singers, separated according to their gender. While the singers are playing the instruments and singing the songs, the participants follow the music by chanting and clapping. With these songs, they initially pray to Allah, Muhammad and other saints and then continue by calling all the *bād*s, one by one, with their names. Upon hearing his or her name, the *bād* will enter into the body of the affected person and start to dance by shaking the head and moving the legs or other parts of the body. During this ritual, the *bād* is offered what was previously agreed upon during the negotiation phase and in return promises to never bother this person again. Being possessed brings the person a valuable position,[14] since it gives the possessed person a supernatural/charismatic power. The possessed person should be well treated, respected and tolerated; otherwise, he or she will be able to hurt the others through the powers of the embodied *bād*. The *bād* stays with the person forever and may have new requests in different situations later on. The symptoms of being possessed can appear at any stage of life and should be accepted and tolerated by the family and community.

During this part of the ritual, a new and probably the main negotiation happens, and through it the *bābā/māmā zār* negotiates with the *bād* on behalf of the possessed person but also with the family of the possessed person and the community. In this process, in front of the other participants, the therapist sits in front of the possessed person, close to his or her ears, and engages in a conversation not with the possessed person but with the embodied spirit. He or she talks about the requests of the spirit and what the possessed person should do. The spirit has to promise not to bother the possessed person anymore after the fulfilment of his or her requests. During this process, the possessed person should meet the requests of the spirit, which usually include some material requests, for example, clothes, gold, a ring, food and a party. If the requests are accepted, the *wind* will stay calm in the body of person and work as a personal guardian for the individual. The family of the possessed person usually accepts all the requests to avoid further possession and to prevent the spirit from hurting the possessed person. Holding this ritual is socially accepted, and it brings respect to possessed persons.

The negotiation which happens in the ritual also has an effect on the status of the possessed women in their life, since they have to follow the requests of the spirit, which might be different from what is expected of them in their life as women.

Zār ritual and its different values

Since the possessed persons are touched by a supernatural power and receive support by means of the *bād*, they enjoy freedom and possibilities which are not conventionally accepted among the community or according the main

Islamic rules. For example, I witnessed a ritual in which, when all the people were possessed, they started to dance together without paying attention to the Islamic rule of gender segregation. The reason, I was told, is that these people were being possessed by spirits of the same gender. In another occasion, I attended a ritual where women were shaking hands with men, since they were possessed by male spirits who were good friends with each other.

Another very sensitive issue that I encountered in all rituals and interviews is the taboo related to blood according to Islamic rules in contrast to the practice of blood-drinking in the ritual. According to my interviewees sometimes the *wind* asked the possessed person to feed him with blood, which is then taken from a sacrificed animal. "Drinking blood" is connoted as a costly ritual, since it also requires money to buy the goat to be sacrificed. In addition, it requires the breaking of Islamic and social rules that forbid drinking blood. People break the taboo of drinking blood by mixing it with rosewater. They put five to six drops of blood in a small tea cup which is half full with rosewater. They think that it is enough if the colour of rosewater changes because of blood (observation). My interviewees believe that since they just drink a little bit of blood that is mixed with rosewater, it is no longer a taboo. In some cases, people refuse to drink blood, and consequently they get no power from their *bād*, but since they sacrifice the requested animal anyway, the *bād* refrain from hurting them.

Therefore, those who drink blood move one step up in the group's hierarchy. This hierarchy forms according to the *bāds* and gives the possessed people a new position, which might be different from their position in community without being possessed.

Those who drink blood seven times are candidates to reach the position of *zār* therapists, which brings them social respect and power to control the other participants and the *bāds*' world. This position is considered by all participants the highest level within the hierarchy. In order to reach the highest level of the hierarchy, one needs to be patient and brave, to follow the rules of the ritual, to overcome religious taboos and to have a good financial situation. Gender plays no role in defining who can reach which position inside the hierarchy. Here it is the *bād* who decides the spiritual hierarchy, which, however, will be reflected among the participants' real life as well.

According to my observations, the whole process of the ritual is connected to values (in Farsi *arzesh*). Here the concept of value is related to things that one aspires to because they bring to the possessed person additional charisma, which is based on the contact with supernatural power.

The *zār* participants also abide by values and rules that are meaningful for those who are part of the group and that are grounded in its internal hierarchy. This system of hierarchy is affected by the relationship between people and the spirits' world. It also depends on the ways the participants are individually tied to the spirits' world, on how they interact with it and how they use them to control other spirits. According to the rules of the *zār* community, a possessed person has first to follow the rules of the ritual

in order to be safe from supernatural punishment. In a second step, those people who are interested and have the capacity to advance further in their relation with the spirits can do so under the control of a person who knows the process properly. Finally, after following this lengthy process, the person gains respect and a charismatic position, which enables her to lead the other interested and eligible people.

In case the requests of the spirit exceed the means of the woman and her family, the *bābā/māmā zār* can negotiate further with the *bād* and persuade it to reconsider and accept fewer material things. One of the examples is Leilā, whom I met at the house of Muhammad. She is 37 years old and is possessed by a male spirit. This spirit was in love with her and required the divorce of Leilā from her husband as a precondition to release her from possession, but also in order to make her available for a marriage with the embodied spirit. The symptoms of being possessed, in her case, involved not being happy with sleeping together with her husband and not accepting sex whenever her husband wanted to. They negotiated with the spirit and persuaded him that the woman was entitled to sleep separated from her husband just one night per week. The spirit accepted, and when I had the chance to talk to the woman sometime later, she mentioned that she was sleeping away from her husband once per week and the symptoms of possession were gone. She slept much better and had no bad feeling anymore. In this case, being possessed meant challenging the social norm that a woman has to remain available to her husband almost any time.

The *zār* participants believe in a hierarchy defined by the relationship between them and spirits. The *zār* ritual is made of different elements, which are not exactly similar but consist of binary oppositions which create and sustain a hierarchical community (see also Dumont 1980; Robbins 2016). The complete ritual process is considered a path towards a position of respect. *Rākeb* and *markab* are two local concepts which show the beginning and end of this way.

Rākeb, or the rider, is used for a *bād* when it enters to the body of participants for the first time. Until the requests of the *bād* are met, this word will be employed. During this time, the *bād* is considered to be sitting on the back or the neck of the possessed person, leading him or her at will. In this situation, the possessed person is called *markab*, a horse. The word *rākeb* is used to qualify a person who has undergone the whole cycle of rituals reaching to the highest position in the hierarchy. Once in this position, the person is able to keep the *bād* under control and negotiate the *bād's* requests him- or herself. The community among which I lived was convinced that people who respond to their *wind*s gain more power than those who deny engaging in the ritual cycle. If a person is able to feed seven *bāds* and in this way gain power over them, the *rākeb* reaches the highest level of the hierarchy and becomes a therapist himself or herself.

Reaching the highest point of the social hierarchy is the most important goal for the participants; however, not all of them share the desire to engage

in possession rituals. According to the research findings, in order to be able to reach this position, a person requires more than just possession. The following social and economic requirements are equally necessary:

- Being able to lead people through a ritual.
- Feeding seven *bāds* with blood and, for this, sacrificing seven animals, which requires a solid economic background. Feeding *bāds* with blood should take place during big parties and in presence of a number of *zār* believers and therapists.
- Having at least one *zār* therapist among their close relatives, such as parents or grandparents.
- Being accepted by seven *zār* therapists who have witnessed the feeding of blood.

Since each treatment goes along with a payment, being a *zār* therapist is a source of income. Many of the participants are not interested in reaching this position, since they consider it a difficult position that comes with many responsibilities.

From submission to control

In the society that is of interest here, the gender-based roles are supposed to be followed by people throughout their lifetime. The gendered norms and roles ascribed on the basis of biological sex vary considerably between men and women. Women are subordinate and given secondary status. However, this inequality is generally accepted by most women as a reality that can hardly be changed. Although men are not exempted from being possessed, women are more in danger of being possessed for various reasons (see also Abbasi 2019).

There are many reasons women are more vulnerable to possession than men. My research participants believe that women's beauty and possible pregnancy are crucial to making women more vulnerable to be possessed by *bād* than men. These are the same reasons which are considered to make women more vulnerable to the evil eye as well (see Abbasi 2019). It is commonly believed that a beautiful woman can attract the attention of the spirit world. The spirits appear in the form of a human being or any other form. That is why a woman should hide her beauty from the eyes of unknown (*nā mahram*) men. During pregnancy and after giving birth, a woman and her baby are particularly vulnerable and in danger of attracting the jinns' attention as well as the evil eye. from a comparative perspective, the symptoms of possession during pregnancy or after childbirth are very similar to what is described as pre-natal or postpartum depression in clinical literature. Further, a woman is more exposed to the risk of being possessed in general unless she takes precautions and avoids being left alone.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the *zār* is also considered a legitimate way to break out of certain norms. The *zār* compensates for gender-based restrictions by empowering women through supernatural power, manifested by their *bād*. The syndrome of possession manifests itself in the first place by a set of recognizable symptoms, which may include sadness, inexplicable crying, aggression, lack of appetite and reluctance to communicate with others.

If a woman shows these signals or disregards social norms and community-based rules, she is considered to be possessed by a *bād* which may harm her mentally or physically. In order to protect this woman from dangers, she is pressured to start the cycle of the treatments that end only once the requests of the *bād* in her body have been met. The symptoms of possession become noticeable in different social situations in form of pain that moves from one part of the body to another. If doctors are not able to find the cause for these symptoms, these women are led to participate in the *zār* ritual.

The way through which women are connected to this ritual and the requests of *bād*s can obviously vary from one person to the other. Individual and social background determine, to a certain extent, these differences. The power they have in controlling *bād*s and the other participants may vary according to their social status and the position they occupy within the cycle of rituals. In order to show how differently women get in touch with *zār* and follow the cycle of treatment, I will present three biographic narrative interviews with women who are possessed.

For my research, I chose a variety of women with different individual life courses. In their narratives, they talked about their experiences of becoming possessed, what they noticed about it and whether this ritual and connection to the *bād*s' world had affected their lives.

In these three case studies, the women had been possessed since they were young. All of these women had many problems and difficulties in their lives, forcing them to develop particular strength to manage their lives and children. The symptoms of possession in these samples manifest themselves similarly to what psychiatric and psychological literature has called depression.

The ritual deals with unfulfilled desires that might stand in opposition to what society prescribes or idealizes as social and religious values worth pursuing. When the summoned spirit comes down and enters the body of a woman, an exchange happens, and she transforms into a new person. The identity of the woman is related to the identity of the spirit entering her body during the ritual. This new identity will stay with her forever as a constitutive part, showing itself sometimes in real life and in different ritual contexts. The symptoms of possession manifest themselves in diverse circumstances, for example, when the person is angry, sad, happy or nervous. Since this spirit is accepted by the family and community, the changes in behaviour are accepted and will be attributed to the spirit and not to the woman. This new identity might be different from the one the woman usually shows in her daily life and even in contrast to what is accepted by society

as good/"normal" behaviour for a woman. In the following, I will discuss three biographic-narrative interviews with women participants in different *zār* rituals in the community where I conducted research. The *zār* participants live in different areas of the Hormozgān region and more specifically in villages, but they know each other and are in touch, since the number of participants is not high.

Zahrā

Zahrā is a 70-year-old woman who never went to school and lives on one of the 14 islands of the Persian Gulf. She is a famous *māmā zār* in the island and treats people who are believed to be possessed. She is one of the women who successfully reached the highest level of the hierarchy in the *zār* rituals. She reached respect and a higher social position[15] because she successfully underwent the cycle of treatment. However, she believes that "being possessed is not good and wishes nobody to be possessed".

She talked about her possession openly and did not care about what others thought about her. According to Zahrā, God chose her to be possessed. She considered being possessed a kind of mutual reciprocity, because the possessed person meets the requests of *bād*, and in return the *bād*s will bring her charisma and protect her from supernatural dangers and social problems which she may face in society.

> I got the wind when I was young and the main symptom of possession for me was headache. It was like I had something like a worm which was moving in my head. I visited many doctors but they did not find a reason for this headache. That is why I went to my grandmother who was a Mama zār at that time. She found out that I am possessed by a male bād which is Arab[16] and speaks Arabic. He asked me for a ritual and he wanted to be fed. We celebrated this ritual in a couple of months and the bād came down and played. After that, I participated in many other rituals and got six other bāds which had different requests but all asked me to sacrifice an animal and drink some of their blood. I drank blood[17] seven times in seven different rituals. After drinking each cup of blood in different rituals, I received a certificate which was in a little drop of blood on a green fabric as a certificate for drinking blood. This certificate was made by the zār therapist in presence of six other zār therapists. After collecting seven certificates, I was able to apply for being a Mama zār. The process of this application was difficult because I needed to be accepted by seven other zār therapists in order to become a Mama zār. These therapists should acknowledge that I have different conditions for being a zār therapist and controlling the bāds' world.

Zahrā lives alone, and all of her children live in Dubai. She visits them two or three times per year, and her children support her financially. She

also participates in different rituals in Dubai and speaks Arabic fluently. She believes that the *zār* ritual in Iran compared to the one in Dubai is not serious. In Dubai, people follow all of the rules of the celebration carefully, but in Iran, they have introduced many changes over time, she complained.

Possession and especially being a *zār* therapist helped her not only to reach power and acceptance within the community of *zār* believers but also opened a way for treating possessed people, which brings her some monetary compensation, too. Her patients provide for her an income such as gold, money or whatever the *wind*s request. Zahrā introduced herself as a special person chosen by God for possession. She believes that being possessed is an inheritable issue, and that is why her children are exposed to the danger of being possessed one day, just as she got it from her grandmother. Zahrā considers the *zār* and possession a universal issue:

> Since people have no knowledge about possession, they consider it as mental problem or other illnesses. For example I know a man from north Iran who believes that he suffers from Parkinson since his hands are shaking but when I saw him I recognized his possession. He never accepted to take part in the ritual with me and I never met him again but I believe that he is dead now. We have to believe in spirits and respect them.

Sakineh

Sakineh is a 56-year-old woman who never went to school and lives in an urban environment in the mainland Hormozgān province of Iran. Sakineh explains that she is ashamed of being possessed because people consider possessed people crazy and do not trust them. She prefers not to talk with people about this, so being possessed has made her socially lonely. She is not making use of her *bād* and does not participate in the rituals. In her descriptions, the main symptoms of possession appear as aggression and pain. She married at the age of 13[18] and has eight children. A *bābā zār* found out that she has two dangerous male *bād*s, which are originally from Africa.

> I got possessed at the second night of my marriage when it was time to have a sexual relationship with my husband for the first time. During that night I got crazy and became aggressive when it came to have sex with my husband. I don't remember what happened after that because I just fainted and when I recovered they told me that I was screaming without reason. The symptom showed itself as aggression and panic attacks and I could not control myself. It showed itself again after a couple of days so I decided to visit a doctor.
>
> At the time of pregnancy the same situation happened to me. I visited many doctors after that but nothing changed and the doctors were not able to see what was wrong with me. But it happened again and again

in different situations. After a while a friend of mine asked me to travel to Kuwait and visit a bābā zār. I went there and learned that I am possessed by an African male bād. My bād wanted a party and so I did it.

When my bād was in my body, I had no feeling about what was going on or happening around. For example, one day I bit my tongue hard and it bled but I was not aware of blood and how it happened. The other day I was cooking and started having that feeling again so I burned my hand with oil. My bād comes down when I am sad and after that I feel nothing. When it leaves I see that I bite my tongue or something like that. This time it took a couple of years and a friend of mine offered me to visit a holy place which is attributed to the tomb of Suleiman Nabi[19] somewhere between Shiraz and Hormozgān to see what the problem was. This pilgrimage was somewhere in Shiraz where, according to her friends, Suleiman is buried who is the boss of all of the bāds.

At this place I met a man who was working there. He asked me to enter a room and try to sleep and then come and talk about what I saw in my dream. I went there and tried to sleep but it was just a nap and I had no dream. Then I came out of the room and that man asked me what my dream was. I told him that I had no dream. He told me that I can go back home, I am fine again but the spirit still exists in my body although it never hurts me anymore.

When I came back home, and after that, I never had any strong panic attack again but my wind comes down when I am sad. When it comes I understand nothing but my family told me that I am not as I used to be.

The *bād* comes over her when she is sad or angry. That is what her son (who was present at the time of interview) mentioned; otherwise, she is not aware of what happens to her when her spirit comes down to her body. Her son also mentioned that, compared to the time before conducting this pilgrimage, she was no more aggressive than she used to be. Unlike Zahrā, the only connection for Sakineh with possession is her illness. She is just suffering from being possessed and meeting the requests of the *wind* just helped her to reduce the level of pain. Sakineh is ashamed of being possessed, and this has made her socially isolated.

Marzieh

Marzieh is a 40-year-old woman who went to school for 12 years (which is exceptional for her generation in this area) and currently works as a yoga teacher. She is an active woman with regular social contacts with both men and women, which is rather unusual for women in her community. Because of this behaviour, there is much gossip about her among women who question her social contacts. She married for the first time when she was 13 years old and has five children. A couple of months after the marriage, she noticed that her husband was no longer taking responsibility to feed the family. He

became a burden to the family and treated her badly. She finally realized that the relationship would not work and it was better to divorce, although this is a taboo[20] in her community. Her parents did not agree with her divorce, but she did it anyway, which led to social exclusion. She divorced when she was 27 years old and started to work hard in order to support her children. She started her independent life by cooking at home and selling dishes to the people.[21] After a while, she learned how to sew and became a tailor. Since she was a very talented woman, she became a good tailor. Later she even studied and managed to constantly improve her life.

> At that time I had many difficulties, I had children and no support. But I did it because I was still hopeful about the future. I finished my high school and learned a lot. Since I was young there were many rumors[22] behind me but I ignored all of them. I started to do sports and teach yoga. I joined the hiking group of our city and met a guy who was 18 years younger than me and I married him. I don't have many contacts with the other women in society. I have to say they don't like me because I behave differently and have a different life-style than the others. Although I am happy with my new situation the past difficulties of my previous life sometimes come up. I got depression. I was always tired and cried without specific reason.
>
> My brother, who is a bābā zār, and I are no longer in touch. This is because I do not agree with his beliefs, such as when he forced me to take part in a zār ritual because he believed that I am possessed. Though I participated in this ritual, I am not aware what happened to me but the other people told me that I lost control over myself and went into a trance. At that moment I scratched my face and body and that is why everybody believes that I have a bād. I don't believe that I am possessed. I just think that it was my inside anger, which was inside me for a long time because of all of the difficulties of my life. That is all.

In the eyes of the other people, Marzieh is possessed because she decided to live independently. Being possessed is an excuse for condemning her for being different, she believes. Hence, she rejects that she is possessed.

Reflection on the three cases

The whole process of the *zār* ritual is considered moving from submission to control. This movement is similar to the painful process from submitting to normative expectations in society to gain control over one's own individual life. It is a way to gain individual space and freedom at the cost of losing normality and the protection that norms provide to women who submit. The female participants in this research, according to their individuality and social backgrounds, are placed at different locations across a wider spectrum. Women who are at the level of submission are considered chosen by

*bād*s to act according to the latter's requests. There is no way to get rid of this possession. They have to obey the *bād*, since it is sitting in the neck and orders the direction; in other words, it leads the person out of social and religious norms. On the other side of this spectrum are women who control their own and other people's *bād*s and move them as they want.

According to my research, women are supposed to follow different social rules than men and have their own social circle, which is made of their family members and other women. Being possessed means to break the expected rules. Possessed women are allowed to expand their friendship circle and include men as well. Within the *zār* community, rules differ from those prescribed by society. These women should follow the requests of *bād*s, which may demand dancing, being brave and communicating with *bād*s and their world. These are all empowering actions that lead to gaining control over the *bād*s eventually.

Following this process needs both social and personal features. The social possibilities are related to the support from the family, which is easier to gain in the case where the family is familiar with the ritual. If a woman has the social backing of her family, she can undergo the full treatment cycle and will finally become accepted by the community.

Zahrā is a woman who was able to control her *bād*. This helps her to hold the same position as a male *zār* therapist. This position also opens a source of income, since she is able to celebrate rituals to treat other possessed people. She had the necessary financial background that made it possible to celebrate seven rituals and sacrifice animals.

Many people like Zahrā believe that being possessed brings power and social acceptance. The process of being possessed for Zahrā works as a positive experience while it brings social respect and money to her.

Sakineh is a woman who is considered a horse rider, as she had money to feed the *bād*, and now she is riding the *bād* in the direction that she wants. She has been a horse rider for more than 60 years. The symptoms of possession happened to her on the first night of her marriage. While she can situate the exact time when she was first affected, she was not able to get hold of the *wind*. She only managed to be accepted as an ill person who is aggressive at times. Her situation refers to child marriage in this area. This is a big shock for women, especially when it comes to having a sexual relationship with the man. Her reaction to the sexual relationship on the first night of marriage obviously shows this shock.

Like her, many other women consider possession dangerous. They even avoid talking about the rituals out of fear that it may invite other women to become possessed. Sakineh started the treatment and participation in the ritual, but she stayed at the phase of submission, which means being possessed had no effect in changing her social status. She remained a typical mother and housewife who is suffering of being possessed and has to take part in this ritual in order to stop her problems from worsening.

Finally, I have included a woman who rejects the belief in possession. She is not an exception but rather an example of many women who do not want to pay for their choice to be free by being treated as mad and possessed. They do not accept possession as society explains it and are not trying to follow the ritual to find empowerment. While society considers their symptoms to come from possession, they provide a sociological explanation for their choice of living another life. Being possessed is a reason to reach desires and requests which are unattainable in society. People like Marzieh are not the subject of transfer from submission to control because this transfer is dependent on the request of the person and not of the *bād*. Since she is not a believer in the ritual, she has no interest in participating in the hierarchy of *bād* control.

Conclusion

The main focus of this chapter was on female participants of the *zār* ritual. Three narrative interviews with three women of different individual and social backgrounds have been analyzed for this purpose. The individual and social backgrounds of these women affect their way of connecting to the ritual. The *zār* ritual constitutes a possibility for female participants to negotiate positions and status within a gender-segregated society. This ritual, which takes place in the form of a party, is also considered a process of treatment for women who are believed to be possessed by *bād*s.

During the ritual, the identity of the possessed woman makes space for a spirit, which might be of a different gender and have totally different behaviour. According to my observations in different rituals, the possessed woman seems to become a new person, with a different voice, gender, behaviour and name as well. Her new identity and behaviour can challenge community and social norms but are accepted, since this behaviour is attributed to the spirit and not to the woman.

In the *zār* ritual, the participants gather to negotiate between the *bād* and society. It is the possessed woman who attains these requests and benefits from them on behalf of the *bād*. These requests vary from food, clothing, a party or even something which is not accepted by society for a woman, but they have to be accepted by the family and society since they are presented as the desires of a *bād*. If these requests are not met, the *bād* will punish and retaliate against the possessed person or other people.

The whole ritual cycle can be considered a spectrum. The local concepts of *markab* and *rākeb* show the two directions of this spectrum. Those people who solely follow the rules of the ritual and the requests of the *bād*s (*markab*) are considered at the level of submission. They just follow the rules of the ritual and do not step up, either because they are not interested in doing so or have no possibilities. The other group of women, who are considered *rākeb*, are active during the ritual and try to climb up the ritual

hierarchy. Some are able to reach more advanced positions, which allows them to take control of spirits and treat other people afflicted by possession.

Notes

1 According to research participants, *winds* live in a parallel world with human beings and have different nationalities, languages and genders.
2 Having an African background is a reason for being secluded in this community.
3 They accepted the *zār* as a supernatural entity which should be respected to avoid punishment or retaliation.
4 According to Szezepański, the biographical method is a way of conducting social research based exclusively on first-person accounts of events and processes that constitute the research subject and on the basis of these accounts, the processes are described and explanatory hypotheses formulated (Kazamierska 2004, 153).
5 By cosmic belief, I mean beliefs in two different worlds which exist parallel to each other: one for human beings and the other for jinns and the way these two worlds meet and affect each other. This is paired with belief in reincarnation. According to it, after death, the spirit of the person stays in the world and enters the body of a living person in the form of a *bad* and present his/her requests.
6 At the time of fieldwork, I heard about two *bābā zārs* who were in prison because of getting money from people for their treatment, but they could not treat them and these people's conditions deteriorated.
7 Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK & Commonwealth: theasa.org; www.theasa.org/ethics/index.phtml. Accessed on 21.02.2019.
8 The symptoms of being attacked by a *zār* spirit show in form of pain in different part of body or mental difficulties like aggression and depression. In this sense, it resembles the classic shamanic diseases, although the term is never used in relation to *zār* participants in Iran.
9 According to the 72nd Surah of Quran, Jinns are created from fires and have a parallel world with human beings. They could be in different forms of air, insects, snakes, human beings and scorpions. Although some of the jinns work for human beings, not all human beings are allowed to contact them and use them.
10 The *zār* participants believe that each spirit has two different powers: a positive power, which is aimed to help people for treatment or solve their problems and a negative power or magic which aims to hurt people or do things which are against humanity or what Allah says.
11 The voice of a possessed person changes while it is the spirit that is talking in the body of that person.
12 In Bandari dialect, *āzāri*, which means a person bothered by spirits.
13 Except the *Bābā*/*Māmā Zār*, who feeds the possessed person and puts medicine on his/her body.
14 The possessed person has a charismatic position.
15 She has charisma which comes from her supernatural power, so people respect her, and this respect also comes from their fear of being punished by her *wind*.
16 *Bāds*, like humans, are from different countries and speak different languages, but most *bāds* are from African and Arabic countries. African *bāds* are more dangerous, and after that Arabic *bāds*. Iranian *bāds* are not dangerous and just look for fun and cannot hurt the possessed person.
17 Seven times from seven different sacrificed animals.
18 At the time of fieldwork, child marriage was one of the social issues in this area. Both men and women marry when they are young, often even under 18 years old, and most of these marriages are arranged by parents. They have their first

sexual contact on the night of wedding party without having enough contact to know each other and be mentally prepared for this relationship. This issue causes many pressures, specifically for girls. During my fieldwork, I was invited to two wedding parties at which both bride and groom were under 18, and also I met many people who married when they were under 15.

19 It is believed by the *zār* participants that Suleiman is the owner of all winds. According to local beliefs, he is buried in "Shāhe parioon tomb", which is somewhere between Shiraz and Hormozgān. Many people visit this place to find the solution for their illnesses, which are considered possession.

20 Divorce is legally possible but, especially for a woman, is not appreciated.

21 Take away homemade food

22 Since she was divorced and had many social contacts with men, there was much gossip around her friendship with men and even if she had relationships, which are not accepted by society.

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13 Shamanism in Mongolia

Women, mother-earth and the world

Laetitia Merli

Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia suffered tremendous economic and social changes, bringing about crises in every structure of the society. During the 1990s, this transitional growth crisis was also the scene of religious revival and a new freedom of thought and speech, which was free from Moscow. Mongolian intellectuals, scholars, poets and artists, flattered by an audience in search of its own culture, were spokespeople for this "revival of traditions". Societies were funded in the mid-90s to defend and promote Mongolian culture (Merli (film) 2000). Searching for roots, the authentic Mongolian culture is considered that from Chinggis Khan's time, going back to the 13th century (Aubin 1996). These societies started to promote the idea that the religion considered the truly Mongolian faith is shamanism. With democracy, shamanism came out openly from the shadows where it had to hide. Progressively, shamans tried to regain a place in the culture, and, as an old system of beliefs practically forgotten by most Mongols, shamanism had to be reconstructed from snatches of memories or from ethnographic books in a search for traditional Mongolian shamanism. At the same time that the Mongolian people had to forge ahead to develop the country, nationalism and the revival of traditions that were forbidden by the communist government were regaining interest. This country had to look back for its artistic, religious and historical roots and traditions to rebuild a Mongolian cultural identity and simultaneously build a modern liberal country. In this hectic accelerated period, women revealed themselves to be extraordinary resources and leading figures for the whole population.

Shamanism was openly persecuted in Mongolia first by Buddhism, at least since the 17th century, as the state leadership community was converted to the religion coming from Tibet, and then again forbidden by the communist atheist ideology as an archaic superstition incompatible with the modern idea of progress imposed by the Soviets. But shamanism has never been totally eradicated. It remained more or less secretly in some places, adapting to new situations. Nowadays, far from having disappeared, as many would have believed, shamanism has revived with success, coming from the

shadows to the light of the scene of modern Mongolia. Women are more and more likely to take the vocation of shamanism. *Udgan* is the name for a female shaman, *böö* for a male and *zaïran* for a master shaman. It is interesting to note that only men are called *zaïran* and that only *zaïran* participated in great ceremonies involving the state and the government such as official anniversaries or national commemorations.

Besides the needs of believers in dealing with individual misfortune and calling prosperity, shamanism has been made use of at different levels in the process of rebuilding identity and culture, as a special label of the uniqueness of original Mongolian culture. For example, shamanism is used in nationalist speeches for cultural associations to revive traditions and to preserve them against globalization (Merli 2004, 2005). Also, in ecological discourses, the shamanistic system of beliefs is used as a carrier of purity and authenticity to encourage people to preserve the environment, as shamanism is based on the belief in spirits of nature that shouldn't be disturbed and with whom humans have to negotiate to find a sustainable balance. For example, to promote the Hövsgöl area and to apply to the UNESCO World Heritage selection, the proposal made by the government in 2002 was called "Hövsgöl Lake Tsaatan Shamanistic Landscape". Shamanism is presented in this case as a guarantee for the purity, authenticity and originality of the area as a rich ecologically and culturally preserved area. The region is presented as a place which has survived with its pristine religious tradition as an "island surrounded by Buddhism". Not only have the people preserved shamanism and still practice it, the environment itself is presented as a "shamanic landscape" where shamanism is part of the trees, the rocks and the mountains.

Shamanism is being rediscovered and highly promoted in Mongolia, serving different purposes, and, at the same time, a growing international interest in shamanism is coming from abroad. Shamans have to face new practitioners and new believers from foreign countries, especially since some tourist companies, prompt to exploit this market niche, have included shamanistic performances in their tours. On the leaflet of the Hövsgöl Lake National Park, written in English, one can read that "Shamanism is still active in some places" and that it's possible to visit some reindeer people, the Tsaatan. Both shamanism and the Tsaatan people are used to internationally promote the area. In a marketing approach, they are made used of as major assets to claim a culturally rich area.

Shaman tour

Enkhe, who is both a shaman and reindeer herder, has all the attributes to find her way in the new world. Enkhe is an *udgan* (female-shaman) from Tsagaan Nuur. From her father's side, she is Tsaatan, a reindeer herders ethnic group originally from Tuva, and from her mother's side, she belongs to the Darxad community, the major ethnic group in the Hövsgöl area. The Tsaatan (Duxa) were officially, and actively, incorporated into the Mongolian state in 1956

and were forced to settle in the village of Tsagaan Nuur, where their cattle was collectivized. The population became involved in the fishing industry and the children were placed in boarding schools and young boys enrolled in military service (Wheeler 2000). Married to a Tsaatan man, Enkhe lived in the village until the collapse of the communist system at the beginning of the 1990s. Then they moved to the taiga, where some of the Tsaatan families remained, going back to reindeer herding and their traditional nomadic dwelling: the *urtz*, a tent made with long branches looking like a "teepee". Enkhe got her shamanic essence from her Darxad matrilineal side, but her teacher, the one who initiated her, was Tsaatan, a native of Tuva, a Russian republic just past the northern border. When she was 13, she began to have a crisis of tetany, and she used to lose consciousness. For three years, she stayed seriously ill. Her mother used to secretly visit an old shaman and told him about her daughter. He explained that her family had a shamanic lineage and that the shamanic root was willing to revive in the young girl. The only way to survive was to take up the will of the ancestors' spirits and accept the vocation to become a shaman. A mouth harp with nine coloured fabric strips was made for her and became her *Xuur ongod*, the physical medium of the disruptive spirit who was bothering her. Thus, she started to shamanize in the forest with her mother and her teacher, who agreed to give her initiation. This first step was to make her a *yavgan böö*, a shaman-on-foot, who doesn't possess a drum yet but only a mouth harp. When she learned to master this first spirit, the *Xuur ongod*, she cured herself of her sickness. She also developed since childhood the skill to see the future, and she knows the plants that she collects, dries and administers to her clients and family. When she was 25, she was given a drum and animated it with her *Burxan Tenger* (sky deity). She performed her first ritual with costume and drum in order to call superior entities, the skies, to put herself under their protection and show her acceptance of becoming their messenger. She then became a "shaman-on-horse", a shaman with a drum. She is the fifth generation of shamans in her lineage.

Fifteen years ago, with her husband, their five children and their reindeer, Enkhe have settled her camp in the taiga in the Hövsgöl area. The owner of a nearby tourist camp on the lake shore came and asked them to settle down closer to the Hövsgöl lake and closer to his tourist camp to take advantage of financial spin-offs from tourism, as he said. The family, eager to have some extra income, decided to follow the advice and came down from the taiga in order to settle closer to the lake and to the only road coming from the south, from villages and towns. A lot of tourists started to visit the area, and one of their wishes was to see some reindeer. The other Tsaatan families were quite far from the lake, and it was a trip of a couple of days by horse to visit them. Pushed by tourism, Enkhe's family adapted well to its new role of the "Tsataan-family-easily-accessible". The park administration made a contract with them and gave the family a monthly salary. But Enkhe understood there was more money to make and decided to be independent. The

Hövsgöl lake's shores considerably developed as new tourist camps set up on the road alongside the lake. All the tours and local guides pay a visit to Enkhe's camp, and she has a special chapter for herself in the Lonely Planet guide about Mongolia. By jeep or mini-van, many groups come and visit her teepee and reindeer. During the summer season, this place becomes a major touristic attraction of the area. Twenty to thirty persons a day visit the camp, one small group after the other. The reindeer themselves are a tourist attraction. Charming animals with their soft and downy antlers, they bring happiness to the children and adults, who mount them for a souvenir picture. While the husband and children are busy saddling and gathering the reindeer for the tourists, Enkhe in the tent makes tea and offers pieces of cheese and little doughnuts. At the rush hours, around mid-day, the tent is packed with people who try to converse with their host. Enkhe, with experience, is now quite at ease with foreigners and perfectly masters her role. Through the translator guides, she answers the questions, always smiling, trying some jokes and mimicking for the tourists who burst out laughing. The fees are 3,000 tugrugs ($1–$2) for pictures and 5,000 tg for video. She also sells some artefacts made out of reindeer antlers, small pendants or painted antlers or birch bark boxes made by her brother and younger son. Some of the tourists are outraged by this venal attitude. But most of them give some money and buy souvenirs (Merli (film) 2009).

Sometimes up to five nationalities are present in the ten, mostly Koreans, Japanese, Mongols, Germans, British, French and Americans. At this level of tourism, ethnicity and way of life are what the visitors find interesting. A few of them know that Enkhe is a shaman, and if they learn about it while they talk with their guide, this fact just adds an exotic flavour to the encounter. On the other hand, some visitors, Mongols as well as foreigners, come to see Enkhe especially for shamanism.[1]

Enkhe is now used to seeing foreigners falling into a trance during her own rituals and has many western disciples who come every year to go on with their initiation.[2] Mongolian tourists also take advantage of their holidays in the Hövsgöl area to visit Enkhe for a blessing, a divination or some advice on life. Some come specially and sometimes from far away for a special request. For example, an old mother of nine children came with her two elder daughters from Ulaanbaatar, which is a three-day trip by car, to visit Enkhe. The old woman was ill; one of the daughters had a stomach operation and did not recover well, the other daughter had troubles at work and the other children had general financial problems. They heard about Enkhe in Ulanbaatar, oddly from a Buddhist lama in a Gandan monastery, the main monastery of the capital city. According to him, only a powerful shaman could change the bad curse that was apparently swooping down on the family. The three women arrived loaded up with presents and food. During the three days they spent with Enkhe, they cooked and fed the whole family. Enkhe started their treatment with a divination séance to identify the source of misfortune and by telling their fortune out of the forty-one stones,

a special divinatory practice, consisting of setting stones on the ground or table in front of the shaman and making a square of three times three positions with little bunches of one, two, three or four stones. Depending on the number of stones at each position of the square, the shaman "reads" past, present and future in order to apprehend the global situation of the person requesting help and to be able to propose the most appropriate shamanic ritual and offerings. One of the daughters wrote on a piece of paper the ten names and astrological signs of the mother and the nine children, and then took notes on the fortune telling as Enkhe successively told the stones for the ten persons concerned. The three women also prepared ten wallets belonging to the family members, and in each of them, Enkhe put a folded note of a hundred tugrug with a pinch of incense in the middle. The wallets, prepared in this way, will be put on the altar to be blessed during the ceremony and call money for the family. The three women who came from the capital city also went into the forest to take three branches from three different pine trees. To thank the trees for their taking, they tied *xadag*, ceremonial blue scarves, to them. Then, each group of pine needles of the three branches was tied up with a white fabric strip. Thus prepared, the branches are called *örgöl* and are also placed on the altar during the night ceremony. A black ribbon was also added, tied up with the white ribbons. This object, the bundle of ribbons, will be brought back to the mother's house in the city and put on the right side of the entrance door. If I insist on this ethnographic description, it is to pinpoint the fact that the shamanic treatment does not rely only on the trance-calling-the-spirits ritual but is a complex process requiring many actions to be performed over several days.

During the confidential practice of divination that Enkhe was doing for the three women, two Israeli people arrived with their translator to ask Enkhe when the next night ritual would be. As Enkhe replied "This very night!", the men asked permission to come back with a group of tourists. "Yes, no problem!" said Enkhe. The three women were surprised and a bit embarrassed. Nevertheless, the mother dared to ask if the group of tourists would hamper the progress of the ceremony on which she put so much hope. "On the contrary", Enkhe said. And she explained that a shamanic séance should always develop with an audience. The bigger the audience, the more satisfied the spirits. The group of tourists came back in the evening with a lot of offerings, food, candies to be put on the altar and also gave $10 each to participate in the ceremony. As usual, the ritual started at eleven. The old mother was settled on a chair at the centre of the ceremonial attention, and the tourists sat on the floor. Flashes from many cameras broke out when Enkhe started playing the drum, the fringes of her costume whirling round in the light of cracking branches of incense.

A question has to be raised: How should such a shamanic séance be considered, when a course of treatment becomes a tourist attraction? And how can Enkhe navigate between her clients to cure and the spectacle she gives to the tourists who paid for the right to use their flashes?

Between ritual practice and touristic performance, Enkhe fulfilled her task with success, and everybody was satisfied, the spirits also, she said. After the ritual, the tourists went back to their camp without any exchange with the shaman or with the other Mongolian people present in the place. The next morning, the three women went on the top of the hill to plant in the earth their *örgöl* branches oriented in the direction of Ulaanbaatar, where the curse touching their family was supposed to come from. One can see that the familial therapy was not limited to the only shamanic séance of calling the spirits. There was the first divination, then the making of shamanic objects like the wallets, the branches, support of spiritual entities made with ribbons and so on. The séance in itself is essential, as it is the way to call the spirits and animate those objects, but it wouldn't be enough for the good progress of the therapy. It is the set of actions performed by the three women and their many conversations with Enkhe that will bring a positive effect. (See Laderman & Roserman on performance and therapy, 1996.) So, in this way, the presence of tourists during the séance is not an obstacle, either for the clients or for Enkhe. And actually, what tourists see of shamanism is only one of the steps of the process, taken out of its social and psychological context. From their point of view, they attended a performance, a folkloric show without any symbolic or spiritual meaning. On the other hand, Enkhe's clients, like in this case with the three women, who came to solve a problem, attended the ritual as the climax in the treatment organized for them by the shaman, and they know the symbolic and energetic significance of it. Shamanic practices with spiritual effectiveness and performances for tourists are not incompatible, as a lot of the shamanic process takes place outside the visible performance and relates to the implication of the people involved. Tourists and clients may have a very different perception of what happened during the ritual, but both were satisfied at the end.

The professionals of tourism fulfil their contract with their clients asking for exoticism, and Enkhe fulfils her contract with her clients asking for shamanic treatments. Far to deny her label of "shaman-for-tourists" that some people gave her in the area, she managed to play both sides and receive money and prestige from both sides. Enkhe is respected by Mongolian people believing in shamanism and by the professionals of tourism. For the first, her success in business, her strong character and the respect she has from so many foreign visitors increase the prestige she has as a shaman. In fact, her ability to perform and her charisma during the séance that makes shamanism so attractive to tourists are features adding to their beliefs in her as an efficient shaman. On the other hand, professionals of tourism, satisfied with the performance they can offer to their clients, are prepared to pay Enkhe more and more money to support and maintain her at the same place so that they are sure to find her again when they come back next time with tourists.

Year after year, an economic network rose around her. Money and gifts brought by tourism considerably improved the living and habits of her family. People living nearby also make profit by renting horses and working

as guides, selling souvenirs in front of her main teepee. School bags, brand new clothes and school supplies were brought by visitors and tourist guides. Enkhe is at the centre of the network she built up around her own character, her shamanic practice and her reindeer. Her business benefits at least thirty people in her immediate surroundings, not counting the professionals in tourism. From the taiga to the lake shores and then to the village, Enkhe's family prepared the ground for their social and economical rise. They marked out the scenic road that is changing their lives and now occupy some strategic places on this road. Hope is put in the children who go to school and Enkhe is proud to be able to pay the schooling fees. Jealousy from others, of course, started to rise, and Enkhe has to share her good fortune if she wants to calm down tensions around her. That is why she organizes a big festival every year on her camp where all her students, family and friends gather to celebrate spring and honour Enkhe. The national park administration would prefer to send them back to the north into the taiga, where the Tsaatan usually live. They argue that the reindeer damage young trees in the lake area and that the warm weather in the valley is very bad for their health. Nevertheless, Enkhe, supported by the tourist industry, intends to stay in this area as long as possible and to use her cultural heritage, supposedly archaic, as a shaman, Tsaatan herding reindeer and living under a teepee: three major features of this remote area, considered backward, to enable her family to participate to the global liberal economic deal.

French apprentice

During my research in Mongolia on the post-communist revival of shamanism in the late 90s, I was contacted by a French woman who had the intention to be initiated by Enkhe. I was at first sceptical and didn't want to be involved, but then I took it more seriously when I had to know the whole story and when I realized Corine was genuine in her quest. Anyway, if westerners were coming into my field research, then I had to consider their cases as well, and I accepted Corine's offer to accompany her in this adventure (Sombrun 2005; Merli (film) 2004, 2010).

Two years before she arrived in Mongolia, Corine had a serious breakdown after the death of her partner. She started to be interested in Buddhism and Chinese medicine. Visiting a shamanic art exhibition, she met a Peruvian shaman, who impressed her by his paintings. She was also impressed when he told her about her pain and suffering and the way he could help her. She decided to go to Peru as he proposed and started one month of therapy in the jungle, in the shaman camp, where she had treatments by plants, especially the psychotropic plant *ayawasca* (Sombrun 2002). In dreams, when she took *ayawasca*, she heard sounds, more precisely polyphonic overtone songs. As a musician, she knew this kind of music was from Tuva and Mongolia. Back in France, she enquired about going to Mongolia, as she thought the dream she had was a message to follow her quest and go there. Once again at an art

exhibition in Paris, this time, she met a Mongolian woman who specialized in shamanic tourism, who organizes tours in Mongolia with French tourists interested in shamanism.

In the summer of 2000, the two women travelled to Mongolia and met two shamans. During the first visit, when the shaman was calling the spirits, entering a trance, Corine herself fell into a trance. She beat her knees and jumped like a grasshopper all over the yurt (*ger*). The shaman was shocked, as he never saw such a thing before and was afraid because he didn't know how she would stop and recover her consciousness. Later, when she "came back", the shaman said it was too dangerous for him and for her, that she could have died. He explained her spirits attacked his own and, as he was more powerful, his helper-spirits fought with her spirits and she might have stayed in the other world forever.

The second shaman they met was Enkhe at the Hövsgöl lake. When the shaman started to play her heavy drum, Corine started to beat her knees and jump again. At the end of her ritual, as Corine was still trembling, Enkhe played the mouth harp gently in front of her, and Corine regained consciousness. This time, Corine understood she followed the sound. The drum's percussion was taking her away, as she wanted to enter the sound, the centre of the drum, and the mouth harp was leading her to come back to reality. Enkhe claimed that Corine was a powerful shaman to be and asked her to come back the next year to be initiated. In the summer of 2002, we spent one month with Enkhe and her family in North Mongolia in the Hövsgöl area. As Enkhe explained, Corine had a 'shaman' in her family, in her lineage, a person with special powers, probably in healing, who was dead now and wanted Corine to become a shaman. The initiation started with the making of the shamanic paraphernalia. The previous summer, Enkhe gave a list to Corine of things she should bring back. In Ulaanbaatar, before our trip to the north, Corine and I bought many meters of nine colours of fabric at the market in order to make her costume. The colours had to be: white, black, green, red, blue, grey, brown, pink and yellow, Then, in an antique shop, we found a shamanic mirror, and we bargained for a good price, telling the seller that Corine was to become an apprentice shaman. Under the teepee, the first days were dedicated to making and animating the different objects or tools that would be used by Corine as a shaman.

Enkhe started with the shamanic mirror, which is a disk made of bronze and polished on one side. She was happy we found this mirror. She said this mirror used probably to belong to a shaman like her in the past and it was good that we took it from a shop to turn it back into a real shamanic object instead of being bought by any tourist. The mirror was cleaned, and Enkhe polished it with her palm for a long time. Strips of cloth were tied to it at the hoop it had on its back. The nine colours of cloth represent the colours of the moon, stars, Earth, Sky, spring, summer, fall, winter . . . everything that makes the world, she said. Nine colours of nature and nine colours of the sky, that also represent the ninety-nine Tenger. To animate the mirror, she

started to say a prayer while turning the mirror in the smoke of an incense branch of juniper.

> Burxan Tenger,
> Take away misfortunes!
> From now, call happiness (*ad jargal*)!
> Get rid of misfortune (*zovlon*)!
> This woman comes for the second time to see you.
> From now, this foreigner woman has to become a
> messenger for the people,
> She will be able to tell them their fortune and their misfortune.
> Oh, Tenger! Please help her in her task!
> To erase misfortune, to make people happy and healthy, to
> make them live a long life!
> Oh, my Burxan Tenger!
> She is not a Mongolian person, but the mirror is Mongolian!
> It is the one used by Mongolian shamans!

She explained the mirror is also a tool for divination. The person puts one's middle finger on the polished side of the mirror and tells one's astrological sign, and the shaman can "see" things for this person.

After the mirror, Enkhe did the same with the mouth harp. The year before, she had already given a mouth harp to Corine. She was supposed to train to play the mouth harp and to concentrate on contacting her spirits. Corine said she did it in Paris, following Enkhe's instructions. She played mouth harp on her balcony every first, third, fifth and seventh day of the lunar calendar when contact with the spirits is supposed to be easier. The mouth harp was also tied with ribbons and passed through the incense. The juniper incense is to purify, like a medicine; it is considered to cure illness, as it erases impurities, stains and dirt. Juniper grows in the taiga. It is collected and dried into powder, which Enkhe put in little bags to give to her clients to erase and protect them from stain (*buzar dev*). When the mirror and the mouth harp have been animated, it means they become *ongod*: they become physical support of spiritual entities.

One day, Enkhe was playing and singing with Corine's mouth harp:

> 99 Skies of mine,
> Heaven of my father and my mother,
> I handed on this mouth harp to a stranger,
> She is not from our lineage.

But she stopped, saying she suddenly had a strong headache. She explained that now she could not use this mouth harp anymore because it was animated with Corine's spirits, and as soon as she started to play, a spirit she did not know came. This spirit couldn't speak Mongolian, and Enkhe couldn't

speak French! That's why she got a headache, she said. She told Corine that the process of the initiation was to prepare everything she needed as a shaman, but then she had to experience and address the spiritual entities the way she wanted and in the language she knew.

> You have to do things your own way, the French way! OK, I teach you, I prepare everything for you but then I won't be always on your side! You'll have to manage on your own! When you talk to the *Tenger Burxan* (Gods of the Sky), *Lus Savdag* (Lords of the rivers and the mountains) and *Xangaï Delxii* (Earth, World), you have to speak in French to them. I can not teach you the words!

Corine started her initiation as a *yavgan böö*, only with the mouth harp for the first three weeks. During the summertime, Enkhe was often in demand for a ritual from Mongolian or foreign tourists or from local people.

Enkhe asked me to hold Corine and prevent her from beating on her legs and make her concentrate on the mouth harp. When Enkhe started to play her drum and to sing, Corine forced herself to concentrate on playing the mouth harp. I was asked to hold her arms in case she started to jump. Enkhe drummed and sang. Corine's knees started to tremble and I tried to put myself on her knees to stop her. She stopped and played mouth harp, but then she dropped the mouth harp again and started to play drum in the air with her hands in front of her face. I was still holding her with my whole weight to make her stay in a sitting position. But then she started to beat her face, her head, as if she was playing drum. Her whole body was trembling, shaking; I couldn't even hold her knees anymore. She started to sing a bit, and shout like a little animal, shrieking, yelping. She seemed to suffer from being able to go to the drum, where the sound was calling her. With arms outstretched towards the drum Enkhe was playing, towards the percussive sound, I heard her saying "There it is! That way!" This time, for the first time, she said she entered into the sound. In previous experiences, she had the feeling the drum was the door of the sound and that she had to enter this door to access the other world. But she never passed it. This time, as Enkhe said, she had to concentrate more and be held in order to save her energy and concentration she was usually wasting in jumping, and Corine started to "see" things. During this trance, she saw a smiling young man, showing her the way to the door. He led her to the passage, but stayed behind as she entered the door. Then, she was scared by the "black, infinite, vertiginous, space", "cold and empty", that was suddenly in front of her. She felt dizzy and went back to the door.

In the process of the initiation, Enkhe always said that Corine would learn the most by herself. "The spirits will tell you", she used to say. Corine, after this strong experience, started to understand what it meant: Enkhe was supposed to prepare her, to go into a trance, to control the trance, to fight against her own fears, and she would learn the most during the time

when she was in an altered state of mind. According to Enkhe, Corine had to master her trips to the other world, and then she would know what to do, depending on the spirits she meets and on the visions she has. Corine has a lot of questions on shamanism in general, but Enkhe always says that she will feel things and she will know what to do. Corine is always frustrated by Enkhe's answers, and she feels doubts and fears. But at the same time, she is excited to live this adventure, and more and more she is looking forward to a new séance when she will be in trance. Once, she told me: "I'm not a cosmonaut but I'm happy to be a psychonaut!"

Corine had to wait for her costume and drum to do her first solo ritual and to go further in the initiation. She often complained that if she had a drum, she wouldn't beat her legs or drum on her head. She also had the feeling she was not "stable" enough to travel in the other world and that probably when she got her drum, it would be better. The material we brought from Ulaanbaatar was left with Enkhe's mother, elder daughter and daughter-in-law, who sewed the costume on an old Russian sewing machine. The costume was a blue coat, closing in the front with white laces. On the edging of the coat and the sleeves were sewed white goatskin fringes The boots were made from the same skin in a *yama guris*, wild goat skin. The headdress was cut into a large blue cloth band where a yellow sun looking like a smiling face was sewn. Shells were added, as well as little bells, *gonginuur*. When Corine asked about the shells, Enkhe said it was to represent the ocean, *Dalaï*. Enkhe took one feather from her own headdress to sew on Corine's. She said at least one thing must come from the master shaman to one's student. The drum was made by a specialist in Tsagaan Nuur, a village up north. Enkhe drew a red doe on the skin drum and also drew a line all around the skin side that she called the ribbon of the drum, *tuuz*. Deer's skin is used for a male shaman's drum and doe's skin for a female shaman, *udgan*. Enkhe animated the drum with a prayer and incense. While playing the new drum, she sang:

> Be her docile horse!
> Be good for Corine!
> Be generous!
> Be her docile and nimble horse!
> Let Corine be ready to help people!
> Let her be the messenger!

When Corine received her drum from Enkhe's hands, she was very moved. For a while she just touched it, stroking the skin, looking inside, trying its sound with the tip of one finger. With genuine emotion, she said it was like her magic wand and that she hoped to be allowed to "travel" with it.

One day, it was time for the initiatic ritual, the one where she would call the spirits on her own with her own drum, confirm her ability to become a shaman and ask protection from the Skies. Her *ongod* were hung on the altar, the drum was hung near the fireplace to warm the skin up and we

prepared offerings for Corine's altar. In the evening, before the ceremony, Corine was stressed. As a musician, she compared this stress to the stage fright she used to have when she played the piano in a concert hall. She wondered how she would go into a trance if she was the one playing the drum. How can she follow the sound if she has to concentrate on beating the drum? She remembered the mouth harp she would always drop and wondered if she could still play when she was in a trance. And how will she stop playing? How can she know when it is finished? She spent hours alone near the lake before the ritual. Then, when the first stars appeared in the sky, it was time to put on the new costume, the boots and the headdress tied at the back of the head. The drum was passed through the fireplace and incense by the one who was appointed to be her assistant, Enkhe's elder son (I was actually designated to be her assistant, but I was also filming [Merli 2004] and couldn't take care of Corine). Enkhe turned a burning branch of juniper three times around Corine's legs. And Corine started to play the drum. She turned and turned on herself, beating the heavy big drum that almost hid her whole figure. She was held from the back by her assistant. Enkhe was also at her back, whispering prayers in her ear and leading her hand to show her where to beat the drum with the stick. After about ten minutes, Corine started to accelerate, turning wildly, sniffing the air around her. Then, she started to howl like a wolf. She jumped on her two legs, moving the drum from the right side to the left side. Most of the time she beat the drum with her head inside the frame. She came closer to the audience, Enkhe's family and some neighbours, and started to sniff people. She caught one, Enkhe's brother, and threw the drumstick on his head, growling like she wanted to bite him. She was held back by her assistant; otherwise, she would have jumped on the man. She bared her teeth, and her hand was like claws. She was given back her stick and went on playing, from time to time baying like a wolf. The ritual lasted forty minutes. Then, she fell on the ground and dropped the drum. Her headdress was removed and replaced by a scarf. Her regular boots were replaced carefully, as Corine was still sniffing the people around her. She tried to bite the hand of her assistant when he was holding her shoulder, trying to take off her boots. The coat was taken off at last, and her Mongolian dress, *del*, was put on. Offerings and tea were distributed to the audience. Corine, sitting up on the ground, was still moving her hands in front of her as if following the rhythm of a make-believe music. She was pulling the skin of her face as she wanted to take off an imaginary mask, like she wanted to regain her real face. She was also sweeping the front of her coat with her two hands, like she wanted to get rid off something. Enkhe sat in front of her and played the mouth harp. Corine's hands followed the music for a while, and then her look came straight, her eyes became clear and she started to look around her, as if she was just waking up. I must say I was also moved by this experience, the violence of her movements, the shouting, the wolf behaviour. . . . What impressed me the most was actually this gaze at the end, with a look of panic, surprised suddenly to be here. She was given

a milk tea and a cigarette and began to laugh with us, Enkhe and I, as we were also looking at her with a look of panic.

Corine was the first one of a series of foreign apprentice shamans trained by Enkhe. Nowadays, Enkhe and her family organise a festival every year on their camp on the lake shore to celebrate Enkhe's anniversary of her shamanic career where all her students from Mongolia and from all over the world are invited for a four-day event, with rituals and teachings, music, dances and food.

Oracle hi-tech

Gundje is a 50-year-old Mongolian woman and has been a shaman for 10 years, starting around 2009. A well-educated, urban Mongolian woman, she travelled a lot and lived abroad for a while with her husband and children. Gundje had a serious breakdown and started to visit shamans in Mongolia around the middle of the 2000s. As she was treated by a shaman with drum, sound and vibrations, she went into a trance and could communicate with ancestor spirits. Very shocked by this experience she couldn't explain and was not prepared for, she started a blog on the Internet to tell her story and give advice to develop consciousness, for well-being and health . . . and was soon followed by hundreds of people very touched by her story and personal drama. Fully initiated into shamanism, she developed her own way and started to teach other people around her, mostly young educated people living in town, and soon had a small community working all together around her. Very concerned by ecology, she had the idea to launch a call on the social networks to gather on a hill near Ulaan Baatar with the aim to show respect for the mountains, hills and rivers of their mother land, Mongolia. To her own surprise, hundreds of people showed up on the hill and consecrated her and her disciples as a major group of new shamans in Mongolia. Her community grew up rapidly and as urban, English-speaking young people, they master new technologies, write a lot, communicate a lot, write books, travel abroad to international shamanic festivals and participate in film projects and interviews (Merli Film 2016). They are very active and internationally present everywhere Mongolian shamans are represented and this in less than 10 years. This generation of shamans is open to new experimentations, techniques and influences. They adopted a oracle-like shamanism which consisted of channelling ancestor spirits to enable them to give messages, advice, predictions, rules . . . any messages that could help people nowadays. They claim the ability to use old traditions, uses and customs to live a better life in modern days. In their big yurt near Ulaan Baatar, they organize sessions where Master Shaman Gundje channels spirits, living humans from the past, and dictates to scribes around her, typing on their laptop computers to record those precious messages and teachings, which they then publish in books. They have in this way published a half-dozen books dedicated to How to educate the children; Take care of your health with ancient wisdom and The (rewritten)

Mongolian History. The techniques they use to write the books are inspired by automatic writing and channelling, close to spiritism. The master-shaman in "trance", connected with the spirits, gives messages through her mouth, but also through the body; she can touch the hand or any part of the body of some of her disciples, who can also receive direct messages and type on their computers to record the words of the spirits, usually ancestors from the 13th century, the time of Chinggis Khan. In their practice, they include chakras, breathing and body techniques, pendulum and energetic work . . . much wider than Mongolian traditional shamanism. As they have access to books and to the Internet, they have adopted features from Chinese medicine and qigong, from yoga and from globalized New Age conceptions. Nevertheless, they are very strict about respecting Mongolian traditions, with searching in historical background their present pride. They pay great attention to their costumes, using expensive materials and rare handicrafts.

One of their main concerns is the protection of Mother Earth; they tour the world to share their conceptions of preserving the environment; respecting the spirits of nature, the water and ancestors and raising the alarm about the situation in Mongolia. They claim their right over international mining companies damaging the land and polluting rivers in Mongolia. They are active on the Internet and call for ecological campaigns, where they promote collective meditations all over the world to concentrate energy on the same focus, for example, to protect a sacred hill from mining exploitation. In their teachings and workshops they give in Europe, the United States and Asia, they offer insight into the disharmony and misbalance of the Earth. If mining companies overmine and collect a great amount of minerals from one point, materially unbalancing the planet, the whole balance of the Earth and the Universe will be destabilized. Very active on the international and virtual scene as shamans, they receive less credit in Mongolia than traditional shamans like Enkhe.

Conclusion

Udgans, female-shamans, have taken their revenge on history, developing new forms of spirituality and pragmatic psychotherapy; bridging different worlds of ancestors, spirits and humans, they still act as mediators between the East and the West, between tradition and modernity. Buddhism had difficulties allowing women to find a valuable place in the hierarchy, as did historical shamanism, whereas in the time of Chinggis Khan, only men are mentioned to be close to power. This revenge is taken today, as most of the renowned shamans are women, even though they are still not invited to the opening ceremonies for the national holy day celebrations, for example, as male monks and male shamans are.

The generation of traditional shamans, young and older, remained strong landmarks in the shamanic landscape of Mongolia, dealing with misfortune and calling good fortune. The urban, well-educated ones have a wider vision of their task and do not hesitate to claim a political voice, facing the government and big companies for ecological issues. Taking their fight abroad on

the international scene gives them more visibility on the Internet but also at festivals and workshops aimed toward western people. The revival comes with western apprentices inaugurating this dialogue between the East and the West, progress, rationality and spirituality, not only as colonizers, nor anthropologists, not denying or taking or analyzing their culture but sharing practices, empathy and sensibility to work together. Mongolian shamans, and I would say those from other parts of the world, really want and need this opening in the world to save their culture from globalization and regain pride as minorities but also to propose a sustainable vision of ecology for present times and the future.

Notes

1 Shaman Tour – 63-min documentary film – shot in 2006 (Merli 2009).
2 A film was shot in summer 2002 about a French woman, Corine, and her initiation with Enkhe, *The Quest for Sound* (Merli 2004).

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