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Hermeneutic Temptation of
Shamanistic Research

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Hermeneutic Temptation of Shamanistic Research Tatyana Boulgakova

In the investigation of shamanism one can hardly remain unbiased. When a researcher studies a worldview different from his own, he unwittingly may make interpretations of this proceeding from his own convictions (scientific ideology) and sometimes does so too arbitrarily. At times it is not easy to adequately understand the explanations that informants give to the researcher. The belief factor adversely affects research, and even when trying to avoid making value judgements, the researcher cannot stop thinking, as Morton Klass stated, "really now, what sort of people continue – generation after generation! – to believe in, and to devote their lives to, beliefs and practices that we know to be false and preposterous and absurd? /—/ Surely, if they had even a bit of the sense and discrimination that we possess, they would perceive the total falseness of what they have been doing and believing and would then turn away from it." The researcher's own attitude toward the material being studied is a serious obstacle that often prevents the understanding of it.

The bearers of the Nanai tradition, whom we have worked with¹, usually realize this problem and when answering our questions suspect that we would never be able to understand their answers. "It's just an idle fuss to talk about it!", shaman Lindza remarks. "Who will believe in it? Who has seen it; who knows something about it?" She was sure that any endeavour to gain information from the shamans would be ineffective. "Are you going to write about it? Do you think that people will learn (in books) about *gora* (the invisible shamanic territory) and begin to walk along it? – Even though you write it down, even though you tell other people about it, what is the use? A person can walk there (along the *gora*) only if *dzaka* (the

¹This paper is based on the materials that have been collected from the expeditions to the Nanai villages of the Khabarovsk region in Russia since the year 1980. This paper was written thanks to grant RSS # 733/2000 from the Open Society Foundation.

spirit') torments him/her and explains everything. What is the use in people coming here and asking about shamans? /—/ Even after reading what you write, nobody can learn what it means to be a shaman."

Not only have we hardly understood the bearers of the tradition, but it is also such that they do not always understand us either. We perceive their culture in our own way, and they also reinterpret our culture in their own, and often unexpected way. It becomes most vividly apparent in the cases when a person involved in the process of cultural change still continues to be a bearer of the tradition and sees the innovative culture through the prism of their own, more important, mother culture. Such is the example of Nikolay Petrovich who experienced the process of becoming a shaman while at the same time becoming a staunch supporter of communism. "I entered Communist Party sincerely!" he told. "In 1945 I entered the party and began to dream not just of shamanic stuff. I dreamt that I was at on a platform, speaking to the meeting, and calling on everyone to go and fight for the ideals of communism. Asya Grigoryevna stayed with us that night. Later on she told us, "At night I heard someone speaking. I put my ear closer. It was our Kolya who was talking in his sleep. It was so powerful and fine! He did it so well! He was sleeping and talking. I looked at him, his face was contorted, and he was just firing off his speech. Then he woke up, got up, went to the bathroom, lay down again, turned on his side, and began to sing in a shamanic way. He sang so fine and well!" One can appreciate this method of mastering the ideas of communism, if one is familiar with the tradition of shamanic singing while asleep.

Such singing is usually explained by the fact that a person (usually a neophyte) starts to sing in their sleep because of their meeting shamanic spirits in their dreams.

There is no way to remove the contradiction between the researcher's opinion and the informant's view. The most forthcoming informant's explanations do not usually suit and satisfy the investigator. He/she does not completely believe what the informant says, and explains it as being a different (and because of such difference, doubtful) interpretation. "Mainline anthropologists have studiously ignored the central matter of /—/ the information – central in the people's own view – and only used the material as if it were metaphor or symbol, not reality, commenting that such and such

"metaphor" is congruent with the function, structure, or psychological mindset of the society. /—/ What are the ethics of this kind of analysis, this dissection? May we continue in this age of multi-power as well as multi-cultures to enter a foreign society, however politely, measure it up according to our own standards, then come back home and dissert it in a way entirely estranged from the ethos of the people concerned?" (Turner 2001: 261). In the process of such interpretation the data is estranged from the context. But as generalization and summarization are nevertheless necessary, one must invent an artificial wholeness, which replaces the lost natural one. It is achieved through the simulated combination of both the studied facts and researcher's own ideas concerning these facts. Thus, our personal thoughts regarding the ideas of other people unwittingly become the object of research. V. Rokityansky refers to this unintentional substitution of the research object as the hermeneutic temptation. "There are four sections of hermeneutics: pre-comprehension, comprehension, interpretation, and explanation. In their fieldwork, ethnographers usually concentrate only on pre-comprehension. There is an opinion that this is the right way to fix the facts "objectively". Using such positivist way of thinking, comprehension is simply missed. As a rule, when starting from the position of pre-comprehension, the researchers "jump" right to interpretation (they insert the fact into the certain context of knowledge) or even to explanation (they point at the certain conforming it to laws). Both these operations are accompanied with references to some scholars of authority" (Rokityansky 1994: 83). In this process, comprehension without interpretation is, in principle, impossible. The active reciprocal position towards the perceived material is appropriated. Despite his intentions, the researcher brings his private attitude into the material. A human being has a Midas curse: everything he touches becomes his "own stuff", everywhere the imprints of his life and spiritual experience are left behind, everything is understood according to his own measure. The initiative of cognition-penetration is taken, as Mikhail Bakhtin stated, during the process of dialogue: the activity of the cognate person corresponds to the activity of the facts, which are open to him (Bakhtin 2000: 227). Such an activity is inherent within any holistic comprehension. "Whoever hears and understands the meaning of the speech takes an active reciprocal position towards it. He agrees or does not agree with it (completely or partly), he supplements it, applies it, and prepares to accomplish it etc. while

the reciprocal position of the hearer is formed from the very beginning, sometimes even from the very first word of the speaker" (Bakhtin 1979: 246). The percipient is the part of the statement that is heard. If such a "dialogic clash of two minds" becomes inevitable in any of the humanitarian sciences, it manifests itself much more strongly in cases when the subject under discussion is religion, or more specifically, when the subject under discussion is something that directly concerns every participant taking part in the dialogue, even if one of those participants is a researcher.

The ethnographic description of an alien culture cannot be unprejudiced (trustworthy). Most certainly it depends upon the context which is stipulated by the ethnographer's social surroundings and his/her own beliefs.

Nevertheless, is it possible to overcome such hermeneutic temptation? If it is possible, how can we rearrange the emphasis of the process of our cognition, neutralize our own pre-comprehension and then achieve the comprehension of the subject we research? Maybe the easiest way is to ask all the interpretations and explanations of the facts that we fix from the bearers of tradition themselves; to give them a floor. This means recording as many of their statements as possible and not just retelling, but rather siting them in our papers. Thus the given paper will show different ways to interpret a single fact of shamanic practice – shamanic self-wounding. This well-known fact is one of the most unbelievable shamanic phenomena and usually provokes misunderstanding between the researcher and the shaman, thereby becoming the source of a researchers unintentional reinterpretation. In this paper we will show different interpretations from scholars regarding shamanic self-wounding and then compare these interpretations with what the bearers of the tradition themselves think about it.

Shamanic self-wounding

A shaman sometimes thrusts a knife or some other sharp instrument into his own flesh and then removes it, but he is not harmed. It either leaves no wound at all, or the wound heals extremely quickly. It is known among different Northern peoples including the Nanais. "It was in village of Naikhin," Xenia Ivanovna told. "The shaman did *meury* (danced in a shamanic way) on the waterfront and asked someone to run a lance through his chest. It must not be done gently!

It must be done hard and quickly! After they pierced his chest, the end of the lance jutted out of his back, but he continued to dance in this way. Then he pulled the lance out, blew his nose, spat onto his palm and covered his wound with mucus and spit. Only a red spot was left after that."

Similar stories are told about walking on burning coals. "I was already grown by that time, before going to the Army" – Nikolay Petrovich related, – "when I saw how my aunt Tungus's mother danced. The people sacrificed a pig. /—/ They heated the fireplace. My aunt began to shamanize. She brought her spirits in, fed them and the ritual was about to finish. We were playing with bones. The old men told us: "Rake the burning coals out of the ash!" We began to rake them right on to the clay floor. We raked quite a lot. The coals were hot; they clicked, crackled. The people began to say something. I don't remember what exactly. They said that she had brought in another *sewen*. Then my aunt took off her *docton* (socks), rolled up her *garon* (pants) and began to dance right on these burning coals. She was dancing until these coals got dark and soft. Then she finished. She wiped off her feet with her socks, put them on and then put on her shoes. Nothing bad had happened to her, her feet were not burnt." Shamans can walk on burning coals and swallow them as well. People told me that it is an impressive sight to see a shaman holding burning coals in his mouth. In darkness you can see the light from his mouth through his teeth.

The explanations of the phenomenon

Researchers-materialists contend that shamans who perform such tricks are only conjurers and charlatans who deliberately deceive their trusting onlookers. This is the assertion of V. Bogoraz, for example. His exposing of such shamanic "cool deceptions" and "conjurer's tricks" was encouraged in the Soviet Union. According to him, shamans sometimes used wooden knives instead of real ones in order to deceive people. However, one woman shaman, named Upunge, showed V. Bogoraz her abilities by using a real knife. She cut the stomach of her son. "Willing to show me her art, Upunge ordered her son, a 14-year old boy, to take off all his clothes and lie on his back. /—/ She seemingly opened his abdominal cavity with adroit movement by holding the knife handle in her right hand and then directing its tip with the fingers of her left hand. It actually looked like a cut. Small streams spurted out from under both sides of

her fingers, they rose up and dropped to the floor. Finally Upunge took her hand away, and we saw a fresh wound full of blood on the boy's body. Upunge then pressed her face to the wound and began to quickly lick the blood and mumble some incantations. /—/ When she raised her head, we saw that the boy's body was absolutely unharmed; there was not even a trace of the wound". V. Bogoraz's debunking of this trick is not very convincing when compared with the description of it given before. The deception was, as V. Bogoraz considers, that "At some point, Upunge's daughter had given her lumps of snow from the big copper. /—/ There was probably some frozen blood from a seal in the snow. /—/ The snow and the blood melted in shaman's mouth and she let the blood out her mouth onto the boy's body unnoticed /—/ The folds on his stomach were so full of blood, it looked as if it were a fresh wound" (Bogoraz 1936: 127–128). Lev Belikov, the researcher of Chukchee folklore, who worked in Chukotka as a teacher in 1930s, also worked on such exposures and performed conjuring tricks similar to those done by the shamans. Once he secretly tied a bladder full of blood to his body beneath his clothes, and then stabbed himself, right before the Chukchee's eyes, pretending that he had thrust a knife into his flesh. After that he "came to life again". Such method of atheistic propaganda helped him to gain authority among the Chukchee.

A different explanation of shamanic self-wounding is given by Mihály Hoppál. Hoppál argues that the shaman does not deceive people at all, but actually does wound himself. In explaining this shamanic practice, he uses an idea derived from Christianity, that suffering can sometimes be necessary and expedient. He writes: "The individual, the shaman, suffers alone for the community" (Hoppál 1992: 156). Hoppál considers that when the shaman wounds himself, he experiences pain and is ready to bear it because it gives him the capacity to heal people and to save them from their own suffering. As well as that, he also "takes upon himself the illness and the pains" of his patients. In this way he receives into himself the cause of the disease, and thereby relieves the patient of pain (Hoppál 1992: 151–152). M. Hoppál's assumption regarding the shamanic ability to cure people, gained after his sacrifice, coincide with authentic ideas. The difference is in the way of understanding its essence (which will be shown later). M. A. Castrén's explanation is much closer to the authentic understanding. According to Castrén, the Nenets shamans

pierce themselves in cases when they are "transported" because of the of a "miraculous spirits presence". A Nenets shaman "must beat and cut himself with a knife and other sharp instruments when obeying the will of his "spirits"" (Castrén 1858: 288). Indeed shamans consider that they must do such tricks because only then will some special spirits-helpers come to them. Only those Nanai shamans who possess the spirit-helper *gasiko*² can cut themselves.

Self-wounding as a demonstration of shamanic abilities

It is also possible to learn how the shamans themselves explain this phenomenon. The only problem is that the shamans' explanation seems to be too incredible and contradicts with a scientific way of thinking.

The shaman cuts himself only on the condition that his spirits are present, but the reasons for such a deed can vary depending on the situation. One such situation is when it is a necessity to demonstrate unusual shamanic abilities, which are part of shaman's potestatic strategy. In the Nanai culture, such a shamanic method is called *yamaly*. A Nanai shaman Olga Egorovna told about an old shaman Tumaly, who could "thrust a lance right through his body. One end of the lance, she said, jutted out of his chest, while the other end would stick out of his back". Another well-known story concerns a shaman who was made to demonstrate his power before a local official in order to get some means of support (official permission to shamanize). "The official took the shaman to the meeting house and sat down before him". Olga Egorovna told. "The old man put his belt with metal hangings on and then began to dance. He was dancing, and dancing and then he took his shirt off, and thrust three knives

²Not every shaman possesses *gasiko* so not every shaman is able to cut him/herself. Maria Petrovna Beldy was one such possessor. Her friend Chapaka affirms that she saw those spirits with her own eyes. "They were such big snakes", she said. "When Maria Petrovna danced in a shamanic way, they came out of her mouth. When she danced there was a voice in her ears saying: "Let's go play! Let's go play!" Someone whispered to her like this. And so she went shamanizing to the people; they made her shamanize. (As it was learned later, those people had wanted her to shamanize.) She began to dance and two snakes appeared out of the corners of her lips. Their heads rose up, but their bodies hung down, and reached to her waist. Only from the two corners of her lips! They were actual snakes with red mouths. It's was them, *gasiko*. *Gasiko* is a name of a *sewen* (shamanic spirit-helper). Shaman Olga Egorovna said, "*gasiko* is one of the most dangerous of the shamanic spirits. If its owner does something the wrong way, it can kill him/her".

into his chest and went on with the dancing. Then he yelled, and all three knives dropped to the ground. The wounds were red, but there was no blood. He was dancing, and while he was dancing he grabbed a lance and pushed it into his stomach! He was dancing and the lance jutted out on one end. He was dancing, and dancing, and then he pulled it out. And there was just a red spot. /—/ Then he told the official "Now let me take you eyes out!" [The official] became frightened. He did not want it. "If you don't believe in shamans, bring a dog here!", the shaman said. They found a small dog from somewhere. The shaman pointed his stick at it and then shouted. The dog's eyes fell out of its eye-sockets. "Now let's try it with you!" The official was frightened. "No, don't!", he said." Some old people remember that the reason for this demonstration was because the priest in Naichin had complained to the governor in Khabarovsk about the local Nanais who would not give him any money for baptisms and other religious rites and preferred to shamanize. The governor then went to Naichin in order to debunk shamanism. Another shaman, Toyo retells the same story this way. "A lot of people gathered together on the waterfront. The shaman Chongida *mapa* (old man) came and invited his *sewens* (spirits-helpers). At that time the governor was still coming, but Chongida *mapa* had already started shamanizing. He (sang in a shamanic way) and told people what places (of the invisible world) he was visiting. It was as if he saw these places. He did *meury* (danced in a shamanic way) and told people everything. Then (when the governor came) Chongida *mapa* asked Ebuke to run his chest through with a lance. Ebuke was a *tudin*.³ He took the lance, stabbed the shaman with it, and continued to hold the end of the lance. If he was not a *tudin*, he would not have been able to hold the end of the lance. There were a lot of old man but only Ebuke could hold the lance. They began to dance together. Ebuke got tired of holding the end of the lance. He went where the shaman pushed him. Even if he dug his heels into the ground, he still could not hold his ground. When Chongida *mapa* finished, the lance dropped from (of his wound) by itself. The governor asked him: "What else can you do?" "I can", he answered, "take out a human's or an animal's eyes". "That's all! That's all!", the governor said. They

³The *tudin* is a person who, like a shaman, possesses the spirits-helpers and hence has unusual abilities.

finished, and the governor gave Chongida *mapa* a paper with permission to shamanize".

Self-wounding as a means to deal with the enemy

Another reason why the shaman runs a sharp object through his body is that according to the shamans' explanations, there is a need to engage an enemy in this way. If a shaman fights against the shaman of another clan (the enemies usually never met each other) in his dreams, he may attack him by means of striking not the enemy's flesh but his own. As a result the shaman's flesh remains unharmed, whereas the other hostile shaman, who is far away at that moment, dies of the wound which suddenly appears on his body. Xenia Ivanovna told one story concerning her husband's brother. "A shaman was fighting against his enemy. He asked for nine needles. He lay down, and pushed these needles into his chest. When he got up, all the needles were left on the bed. – Were they long needles? – No they were regular needles. He was not hurt. The needles went through his body and dropped out of his back." This tactic is a part of the shaman's fight against his enemy. "His opponent (who was far from this place) wanted to kill him", Xenia Ivanovna explains. "But the shaman learned about it (from his spirits), so he stuck the needles into his own body. That's why he recovered. They had quarrelled with each other". However, in the next battle against an unknown opponent he was not so successful; it ended with the shaman's death. "It was in 1943 or in 1944", Xenia Ivanovna related. "He and his wife went to the taiga to go fishing. They set up a tent. He and his wife were there, but we were here (in the village). He was fishing when he suddenly fell ill. He fell badly ill. He told his wife: "Give me a knife!" But his wife was frightened and did not give it to him. So he died." "What would have happened if she had given it to him?" "If she had given it to him, he would have done it! But he died. His wife had dreamt of this before. An old woman told her not to cry, not to fear. They were the only two out there hunting. Where would she go for the night? The village was far away. She could not go there. There is such a rapid current in the Gorin River! He would have stayed alive and would have continued to fish if he had thrust the knife (into himself). But his wife did not give him the knife, and his enemy killed him. Who can see such an enemy? It is like a dream. Such an accident occurred there. (If she had given him a knife), he would

have probably done something with his enemy, he would probably killed him. His enemy was an enemy of his home (clan). The shaman goes everywhere *herimy* (hovering, being invisible). He goes *herimy* everywhere and that is why he certainly gains enemies."

Self-wounding as self-sacrifice

The most common traditional interpretation of the "trick" examined is that it is a type of offering for the shamanic spirits. The shaman increases his ability to heal because by stabbing himself, he sacrifices to his spirits, some of whom require exactly such "nourishment". Toyo has told: "The Zacsor clan was the root of shamanism of Kiakta. She was a strong shaman. When she did *meury* (danced in shamanic way), she took a knife and thrust it deep into her chest. Then she pulled it out, but there was nothing! No trace! She nourished her *sewen* (spirit) this way. Her *sewen* made her do it when she was dancing in a shamanic way." In this case, the shamanic dance is a means of bringing the spirit into the shaman's body. The spirit arrives and demands an offering, hence the shaman must cut himself. It is only for the sacrifice to his spirits that a shaman, as Aleksey Kisovich says, sticks a lance into his body and releases it. It is long. And he dances around with it two or three rounds. Then it goes away by itself. And there is not even a wound. According to his version, a *sewen* sitting inside the shaman's body catches the lance's point with its mouth. Olga Egorovna explains it in this way: "The shaman prepares for this trick. He calls his spirit, the three-headed serpent *gasiko*. *Gasiko* is believed to be a very big black serpent. This invisible serpent comes into the shaman's body and opens its mouth. The shaman knows exactly where the serpent's mouth is in his body, so he inserts the knife into this mouth. If the serpent has three heads, he has to stab his body in three places. If someone were to say something at this moment, the shaman would die. So at the beginning of this rite the shaman asks people not to make any noise. "Be quiet!", he commands. "Don't say anything!" When the shaman stabs himself, Olga Egorovna explains, the serpent inside him opens its mouths, and the shaman knows that he is pushing the knife into these mouths. But if someone were to say something at that moment, (the serpent) would go away, and the shaman would die. "When he thrusts the knife into his chest, they must not utter a sound. Otherwise he would die. No other person can stick the knife into his body; he must do it

himself. Everybody must keep silent. If someone cried out – "aj-aj-aj!" – he would die. It's a very, very dangerous thing!", Olga Egorovna says. "In general it's very deadly to shamanize." Toyo tells the same: "A shaman thrusts a knife, and a *sewen* seizes this knife and swallows its tip. When she pulls the knife out, the *sewen* releases it. That's why there is not a wound."

As not much is known about such ideas, one can suppose that they are not widespread among the Northern peoples. However, these ideas might indeed be widespread, and yet hidden from uninitiated persons and prohibited from being divulged. This is why they are not familiar to us. We possess similar information regarding the same action from regions very far from the Nanai. This fact proves the prevalence of these hidden ideas. A. M. Shengepov explains it in this way: "I saw it with my own eyes. He stabbed his chest. I told him: "What miracles!" "They are such miracles", he answered, "that the shamanic abilities are given only to some. The Russians would say that he used hypnosis. But among Khanties, the explanation would be that the shaman had a serpent's mouth. He did not simply stick a knife into his flesh, rather he inserted the knife into the serpent's mouth. He did not hide anything from me, and told me all the details. All this is the truth. Not much blood flows out. Just a little! To mark the action he intentionally runs (his knife) over his skin. /—/ We say: "The serpent's mouth shows its poison". That's all. He takes the knife out of himself, and his flesh is intact. He does not die. Such miracles!" (Moldanova 1999).

Thrusting sharp items into the body is not considered to be the only form of sacrifice. Walking on burning coals and swallowing them is also a kind of sacrifice. Dancing on burning coals is explained in the same way as the thrusting of knives into the body. The shamans contend that some of them have a special spirit, which needs fire. Different spirits require different means of sacrifice (a pheasant's heart, metal sawdust, dust, a cobweb etc.). A special "dish" intended for a certain spirit is called a *kalan*. Fire and a knife are examples of such *kalans*. Ivan Torokovich states that a shaman would never dance on burning coals without a reason. First he should sacrifice a pig and call upon his spirit. Fire and burning coals are the *kalan* for this spirit. Sometimes the shaman swallows these coals. Sometimes he lies on the coals and is not burnt. Why is he not burnt? Because his spirit which needs the fire eats it! That spirit helped this shaman before

when he was sick, and now it must be fed with coals, he must make a hot fire. And how glad (his spirit) is! "Ha-ha-ha!" (it shouts)."

The shaman Lindza has also related that dancing on burning coals is a miraculous way of getting another *kalan* for the spirits – vodka. "An old woman lived here", she says. "She was badly ill and was looking for medicine from the sky. She lit a fire and put the coals on the floor. She put out three empty glasses. Old Manchurian glasses! And she covered them with paper. She danced on the burning coals and sang. We could not understand what she was singing about and she danced for a long, long time. She stepped barefoot on the coals. No socks, no shoes! Nobody is allowed to say: "It's hot! It hurts!" Before she had satisfied it, by stepping on the fire for a long time, it was forbidden to say such things. She herself would stop when she wanted. She would make a round and finish. When she had stopped, she turned on the light and checked the glasses. There was already medicine (vodka) in them! You can feed the spirits (with this vodka). But who had poured the medicine into these empty glasses? A night! A late night!"

Now having received enough traditional explanations of the action under study, we may then use the material from other cultures for comparison and summarization. By inflicting wounds upon his own body, the shaman offers the spirits his own blood (that is, himself). The method by which the injury is caused is sometimes entirely the same as the accepted form of sacrificing an animal within certain cultures. Thus if in some cultures people suffocate an animal in order to sacrifice it, the shamans will also suffocate themselves. This kind of shamanic self-wounding has been described by A. M. Castrén: a Nenets "fortune-teller tied a rope around his neck, and two men firmly grabbed the ends of this rope. The fortune-teller was covered with a big cloth, and two men pulled both ends of the rope" (Castrén 1858: 123). The same example (among the Chukchee) was described by V. Bogoraz, who perceived the incident as being an imitation of suicide. "The belt is tied round the shaman's neck. Two people tighten the belt by holding its ends. The shaman remains, of course, safe and sound" (Bogoraz 1936: 130). That the shaman sacrifices himself but at the same time remains unharmed should not confuse us. The Northern peoples sometimes sacrifice an animal by leaving it alive (see in Dolgikh 1960: 79).⁴

The idea that shamanic self-wounding has a sacrificial intention is

indirectly evidenced by the fact that sometimes all the people present at the ceremony must taste their shaman's blood. According to Toivo Lehtisalo's description, a fortune-teller "Ganka went behind a curtain. His helper was holding his drum and uninterruptedly beating on it in the silence. /—/ When he (Ganka) came out from behind the curtain, there were three vessels in his hands. He let his own blood trickle down into these vessels and everyone who was there had to taste it or at least be anointed with it. There was not much blood /—/ He drank it himself and then put seven blood spots on his own face, on the face of his helper, on his small son and on me" (Lehtisalo 1998: 121). Andrey Golovnev mentions the same rite: "A Yamal shaman stabbed herself with the sharp handle of her drum, then gathered her blood into a cup and gave it to a person to drink." Golovnev thinks that this was done to make this person lucky and rich. The same custom is commonly practiced within other sacrifices. Each person who is present at the place where the sacrifice was offered, should either try the sacrifice food (especially sacrifice vodka) or to be anointed with it (Golovnev 1995: 484). We can consider such accustomizing of people to the shaman's blood to be a logical deed, if we remember Marcel Mauss' opinion that sacrifice is a means of setting the blood kindred among the clan and the deity (Mauss 2000).

Conclusion

Self-wounding is considered dangerous for shamans. If a shaman does something wrong, he could die. But he does not suffer in the process of doing it. The shamans are convinced that the knife is thrust not into their own flesh but into their spirits' mouths; and when dancing on the fire they also feed their spirits; this is why they do not feel any pain at all. "When you insert a knife into the serpent's mouth it does not hurt!" Olga Egorovna explains. "Does it hurt?" Lindza asks. "No, it does not hurt (when a shaman puts a burning coal into his mouth)! It is a *sewen* that eats the fire. Another person eats it! When a *sewen* eats, you never feel pain! When she walks on burning coals, it does not hurt either. It is a *sewen* that does it, a *sewen* walks. By doing

⁴Sometimes a shaman inflicts a wound (sacrifices) not upon him/herself, but on his/her child (because the child is of the same blood). Golovnev speaks about such children's sacrifices to the fire among the Selkups. "The fire demands an offering. Such an offering sometimes must be what is the most dear for a woman (this is the interpretation!), her child. Several times I have seen children in the tundra with recent burn marks (Golovnev 1995: 484). The same is the example from V. G. Bogoraz given before.

this, a shaman gets medicine for himself. Are we able to go this way? No, we are not /—/ We've never seen that being that eats fire."

Thus, Hoppál's assumption concerning the shaman as an individual, who bears pain and suffers alone for the community, could be called into question. A shaman does not bear pain. Moreover, he even must perform these actions in order to remain safe. Nesulta has related "People say that a shaman would die if he did not walk on burning coals." Moreover, shamans must also do it when he is in danger and urgently needs a sacrifice for his spirits.

The shamans, who have told us about shamanic self-wounding, accepted as a matter of course the researcher's natural distrust and tried to help us by offering another explanation that corresponds with our scientific worldview as they understand it. Using the Russian word, they told us that everything concerning shamanic self-wounding was just "hypnosis". In this way they attempted to identify with us, and with our disbelief and misunderstanding.

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