

The Globalized Shaman: Memory and Modernity

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ABSTRACT

The anthropology of shamanism, once a perfectly viable (indeed, nearly unexamined) niche within the discipline, would likely benefit from extrapolation to accommodate a broader perspective and to focus on shamanism as *one community discourse among many*, none of which can be ignored. It would be difficult, I think, to find a social scientist willing to go on record as saying that all cultures' histories are essentially the same, albeit with a few minor details out of place here and there – ditto for politics and economics. Why, then, in light of this mindset, has shamanism until very recently been a case apart, something about which sweeping (global, even) generalizations could be drawn? Following a discussion of the recent use of the term in anthropological scholarship, I.M. Lewis concludes by saying, “This exercise in unpacking an ethnically specific term for what is actually the very epitome of charismatic authority may, it is hoped, contribute to a more informed understanding of *universal* religious roles, which for too long have been treated as though they represented different species beyond the reach of effective comparative analysis” (1996: 121, emphasis mine). It is part of my intention in this paper to suggest that shamanism is better understood as a contextual phenomenon than a universal one.

The waters are muddied, however, when shamanism is adopted (some would argue that ‘co-opted’ is a better term) by a westerner, stripped of any cultural particularities, and marketed to a general audience as a kind of self-help technique. Michael Harner, a Ph.D. anthropologist with extensive fieldwork experience in South America and northern Scandinavia, has done just that with his Foundation for Shamanic Studies, “a non-profit incorporated educational organization” with a Web site at www.shamanism.org. Billing itself as “your source for information and products relating to the study of shamanism,” the site is partly a catalogue offering such paraphernalia as synthetic-hide drums and instructional videotapes, and partly a platform from which Harner defends his unique relationship with shamanism.

Reference is made to the Foundation’s “three-fold mission to study, to teach, and to preserve shamanism,” which begs the question: What exactly is preserved by this kind of commercially-driven reductionism? Though the case can be made that the FSS’s “beginner’s version” of shamanism, with its decidedly New Age approach and appeal, introduces people to shamanism who otherwise would not be aware of its existence, one is left with a larger uncertainty: is this a good thing?

Anthropology’s relationship with shamanism is as old as the discipline itself, but given a willingness to accord shamanism (and our relationship with it) the same constant reexamination and latitude for change that it practices reflexively in its efforts to reinvent itself, this longevity should not necessarily be a problem.

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*“My body is all eyes.
Look at it! Be not afraid!
I look in all directions!”*

-Inuit shaman’s song, in Eliade 1964: 290

Shamanism stands as one of the first and longest-lived foci of anthropological inquiry, moving like a capricious bass line within the discipline’s song: by turns prominent and unobtrusive, but always there, always contributing something. But what do we mean when we use the term “shaman?” For most, it is likely to conjure up images of a fur-clad Siberian or Inuit practitioner, corporeally present but entranced and spiritually far away, doing battle with nefarious spirits. In fact, the term is Siberian in origin, coming as it does from the Evenk people (called “Tungus” in the late 19th and early 20th century literature), and as such, Siberian and Arctic shamanism, broadly defined, was long seen as the “gold standard” by which to judge forms encountered elsewhere in the world. Indeed, the phrase “classic Arctic shamanism” occurs frequently in the literature on shamanism, and this kind of linguistic indiscipline can have the effect of making other ecstatic modes seem like evidence of degeneracy. In any event, anthropologists seem to have been enchanted with the idea of the shaman, to the extent that they frequently recycled the term without much regard for major cosmological and methodological variation between groups.

The anthropology of shamanism, once a perfectly viable (indeed, nearly unexamined) niche within the discipline, would likely benefit from extrapolation to accommodate a broader perspective and to focus on shamanism as *one community*

discourse among many, none of which can be ignored. It would be difficult, I think, to find a social scientist willing to go on record as saying that all cultures' histories are essentially the same, albeit with a few minor details out of place here and there – ditto for politics and economics. Why, then, in light of this mindset, has shamanism until very recently been a case apart, something about which sweeping (global, even) generalizations could be drawn? Following a discussion of the recent use of the term in anthropological scholarship, I.M. Lewis concludes by saying, “This exercise in unpacking an ethnically specific term for what is actually the very epitome of charismatic authority may, it is hoped, contribute to a more informed understanding of *universal* religious roles, which for too long have been treated as though they represented different species beyond the reach of effective comparative analysis” (1996: 121, emphasis mine). It is part of my intention in this paper to suggest that shamanism is better understood as a contextual phenomenon than a universal one.

What makes us so eager to maintain shamanism as a distinct, immutable category? Then again, what distinguishes a shaman from, say, an oracle? Or a diviner? Or a spirit medium? This exercise can be used for a long list of anthropological terms, all of which to some extent signify what shamanism does: direct contact with the supernatural, generally glossed as “trance.”

Since semiotic angst, of the sort that makes us question our authority to name and categorize, is as central to anthropology now as it has ever been, it makes sense to examine shamanism in the same temporal frame: how has the practice, in all its forms, encountered modernity and the process of globalization? What in these traditions can be said to have changed as a result of this meeting, and what has proved tenacious? Is

shamanism, as some have argued, incompatible with the nation-state, that building block of modern (dominant) identities? How does the concept of authenticity fare in light of the process of globalization? In order to tackle these questions, it is necessary first to work through some definitional issues.

What do we mean by ‘shaman’?: Defining and Describing

The vocabulary and sensibilities surrounding trance states differ from culture to culture, but a willingness to look beyond labels yields to the patient eye the fact that trance is, quite simply, everywhere. There are few people in the world who would be incapable of recognizing the hallmarks shown by an individual in a trance state, though of course no two of these would interpret the event’s meaning in quite the same way. In analyzing the dominant attitude of the post-Enlightenment West toward trance and other such phenomena, one sees a process of demonization and sustained attempts to discredit and isolate something perceived as a threat to the social order. Such is far from the case in many non Western contexts: spirit possession, along with its visible, public manifestation, trance, while often nominally characterized as dangerous and corruptingly amoral, is in fact more productively seen as a parallel (and complementary) sphere of social action. The actors just happen not to be human. This is certainly brought out in Michael Lambek’s *Human Spirits* (1981), a treatment of spirit possession among Malagasy speakers on Mayotte, one of the Comoros Islands. A side-by-side comparison of these two seemingly diametrically opposed strategies for dealing with trance should show what a powerful social force it can be (and how it is recognized to be in both worlds), whether its potency is met with acceptance or attempts at containment.

For the people of Mayotte in the mid-1970s, trance opens the door to a parallel yet somewhat less than mysterious world: the spirits one encounters are emphatically not human (1981: 29, 34, 41) but with time they can be incorporated into human society to a remarkable degree (1981: 69). The spirits are just as interested in humans as we are interested in them, and in human-spirit relationships, both parties bring something unique to the table. Humans are able to satisfy the spirits' desires or demands both for material goods and for the opportunity to enjoy a little mischief from time to time. While possession is generally spoken of in terms of affliction and curing (1981: 43), it has the potential to become a directly positive force in the life of the individual, as well as satisfying an eminently pragmatic social end. The role of the curer/adept is one of prestige, and as is so often the case with humans who engage on personal terms with the spirit world, it is a path that few are able to travel to its end. The majority of those who truck with spirits will never become curers, and while their entries into trance are mediated by these individuals, it must still be said that the reproduction of the spirit world is a fundamentally polyvocal affair.

Lambek refers to possession as "an integral, although semiautonomous, part of the social structure" (1981: 181), and this is a formidable combination. Spirits can be said to be nearly omnipresent, as under the right set of (fairly common) circumstances they can be summoned to the human realm. But it is wrong to see their presence and influence as some kind of solitary, revered guiding light for the people of Mayotte. Spirits are appeased because doing so is easier than suffering the consequences of their annoyance; as the spirits are seen to be childish and rather amoral themselves, there is not much question of using their behaviour as instructional templates. Thus, the

semiautonomous part: the spirits can be said to be ‘in’ but not truly ‘of’ Mayotte culture, and this ambiguous status grants them some licence, though this is far from total.

Trance has in this milieu tangible potential for what would probably best be seen as subversion: in providing a more or less acceptable space for sensitive issues to be raised with no culpability (indeed, not even memory) assigned to the speaker, it makes its strength as a more broadly accessible and influential forum difficult to ignore (1981: 74). The commonplace inversion of gender roles and positions of authority, coupled with what Lambek refers to as a carnival atmosphere marked by a sense of “entertainment and license” (1981: 165), does much to obscure the fact that if this is indeed a carnival, it is one with a constitution. Far from offering refuge from codified restrictions on decision-making and behaviour, though, human-spirit relations present those concerned with an entirely new set of boundaries and considerations. The locally accepted notion of the discrete self applies to spirits as well as to humans, and this has immediate ramifications for trance: a body can accommodate one entity at a time, be it human or not; conversely, a spirit can inhabit no more than one body at a time (1981: 26-28, 40-41).

So, if “the relationships formed by an individual in trance have a social reality” (1981: 45), this is because these relationships adhere to the rules prescribed for these interactions; anything less and they would never be taken seriously. “They mesh with the ties of kinship, alliance, and locality to form a single whole” (1981: 69); the fact that spirits lack bodies of their own does not keep them from having a demonstrable effect on the social lives of the people whose bodies they borrow, but by definition this effect will never run *too* strongly counter to the other sources informing people’s behaviour. For example, the spirits will never take their hosts into the local mosque (1981: 51): that

would be going too far, and the spirits know it. The ambience of the actual ceremonies may look chaotic and the behavior may at first seem unfettered, as it did to Lambek early in his fieldwork, but by no stretch of the imagination does this alter the spirit possession rituals' gravitas and reproductive power in the social and political life of any given Mayotte community. In a sense, trance as a quietly controlled institution functions for these communities like a feedback loop, a sociological analogue viewed from a comfortable distance, but with direct lessons and applications for concerns closer to home.

The process by which 'unreason' lost its credibility in the West has yet to be reversed, and despite some recent rethinking, those individuals unfortunate enough to be lumped together and referred to as some version of 'insane' can have little hope of being taken seriously as members of society with something of value to offer. Having quite simply thrown away the framework with which to understand the insane (many of which, had they found themselves born into a culture like that of Mayotte, would likely have had no reason to fear rejection or exceptional treatment), we are left with a rather lopsided paradigm. Everyone on 'our' side of the line is sane and therefore worthwhile; whoever manages to stray over into the now comparatively uncharted territory (indeed – Here be Dragons) of insanity will run headfirst into the compartmentalization that is part and parcel of the medicalizing mentality. His or her *symptoms* (certainly not traits or characteristics) will be run through a checklist and the matches will determine the diagnosis. From then on, all efforts will be directed at rehabilitating the individual and enabling him or her to rejoin society. It has been this way for so long that few think to question the reasoning behind allowing anyone to be relegated outside society.

With a simple exercise one can begin to get at the degree to which Western society rejects and stacks the decks against those who are possessed or otherwise fall outside the bounds of mental and behavioral acceptability. The simple and rarely scrutinized act of referring to individuals as suffering from multiple personality *disorder* (as the term exists in common parlance, though perhaps not so much in the academy anymore) amounts to what Lambek borrows from Austin and calls a “performative utterance” (1981: 145-6). The speech act itself, specifically the use of the word ‘disorder,’ by virtue of no authority other than its own, marginalizes the referents and establishes them firmly outside the ordered realm within which all sane Westerners dwell. If the Mayotte case has shown us anything, it is that possession and the procedures and structures of meaning surrounding it need not be at all *disorderly*; the onus for the out-group positioning of these individuals lies within a cultural construct. The briefest of recourse to the ethnographic record puts the lie to the implicit claim, made by its association with Western medicine, that possession is symptomatic of one more malady to treat and eradicate.

Informed by these notions, Ian Hacking (1995), in the context of a book about multiple personality, periodically reflects upon the place of trance in the Western idiom of mental illness or aberrance. First of all, he seems indirectly to inquire why the Western model for this behaviour is not applied more broadly: “although we in the West have multiple personality, most of the rest of the world has trance” (1995: 143). And as for those Westerners who study ‘trance,’ “Anthropologists are fascinated by the subject, but although they say a great deal about trance behavior and its social role, their discipline does not have the tools for studying the physiology of trance” (1995: 144).

Presumably, acquiring these tools would open anthropologists' eyes to the fact that what they are witnessing is nothing more than manifestations of multiple personality, merely played out in a different language.

Provided this is Hacking's intended meaning, 'bludgeon' would be a more apt gloss than 'tool': if we are interested in smoothing over noisome cultural inconsistencies in order to get at a universalizing pancultural truth, then anthropology has outlived its usefulness in any context, to say nothing of stepping on psychology's toes. Those anthropologists who tend not to employ physiological tools in the study of trance, Hacking contends (1995: 148), do so quite simply because most have no interest in the results that would come back. Focusing on the medical/physiological end of the phenomenon can only tell a culturally-focused researcher the *least* interesting things about possession; the results of such tests have everything to do with how trance *looks*, or in a very narrow, strictly biological way, how it *comes about*, and nothing whatsoever with what the practice actually *does* or *means* for the people involved.

So, given the widely divergent ways in which Western society and the people of Mayotte treat instances of trance and the individuals who experience it, what can be said about the phenomenon in general terms? The answer is perhaps a frustrating one, as its essence is truly ambiguous. Trance can be a subversive act, or it can play a critical role in the (more or less smooth) reproduction of society. It can be seen as the gateway to high status and respect within the community, or it can brand one as a distrusted and feared outsider for life. The presence of trance is a cultural feature, not unlike tool use or monotheism, which is every bit as susceptible as those two to local variation and sometimes drastic editing. The danger of speaking of trance as a normative entity lies in

the possibility of reifying it as a monolithic concept and losing the ability to see the subtleties that allow it to flourish in so many different forms, provided it is allotted the necessary space.

Spirit possession on Mayotte and “classical” shamanism in the circumpolar Arctic share several characteristics, both in their reliance on the practitioner’s simultaneous *physical* presence and *spiritual* absence, and with regard to the larger epistemologies undergirding them. At a certain point, however, it becomes necessary to draw some distinctions, as an unreservedly blanket treatment, even for heuristic purposes, can prove misleading. A fundamental point of difference, and a workable criterion for a rudimentary system of classification, lies in the imagery surrounding different tropes of trance or possession. “Classical” shamanism tends to treat possession as initiated and to some extent directed by the human practitioner; in these motifs, the shaman goes through a complex ritual to prepare himself, and subsequently seeks out the object of his endeavor, be it an evil spirit or a point in future time or distant space. Another cultural form of trance is exemplified by the Mayotte example: humans have no say in the process, and possession is not predictable or something for which one can prepare. In this idiom, the experience is frequently spoken of as being “mounted” by the spirit, and the process takes on gendered and overtly sexual connotations. In the broadest of strokes, then, shamanism and spirit possession differ in that one is understood as inherently active, the other as almost totally passive.

Until quite recently, ethnographers’ relative ease with the term ‘shaman’ was evidenced by their decisions either to let it stand on its own within their texts or to advance what were often the barest of explanations. If diagnostic details for identifying

and distinguishing shamans were offered, they tended to be fairly standardized and to fall in line with a “less is more” rationale: common in egalitarian societies, characterized by the use of a trance state to contact the supernatural realm, tendency toward healing and/or divining functions (see Lewis 1996: 116 for an example). In all fairness, the list goes on, but not for very long, as any universally applicable list is bound to be short. More problematic than the number of attributes on the fieldworker’s shamanism-detecting checklist, is the reductionist conception of shamanism as a monolithic, unitary phenomenon, a common thread running through most of the non-Western world. I would submit that the term “shamanisms,” used in the plural unless one is speaking of the practices of a particular group, can help us to avoid overgeneralizing; given the broad variation to be found in the practices of different groups, and the underlying philosophical differences this variance points to, use of the term “shamanisms” indexes an appreciation of this variance, even if we cannot always do that variance justice.

When in the revised edition of his *Ecstatic Religion*, I.M. Lewis writes of “the magical power of words in the anthropologist’s conceptual vocabulary” (1989: 3), one hopes that he is building up to a reconsidered treatment of the academic uses of “shaman.” Indeed he is, but while he goes on to address some of his colleagues’ reluctance to employ the term in its “classical arctic sense” (1993: 8), he disappointingly chides them for their caution. Lewis asserts that what may appear to be differences in shamanic practice and function can usually be put down to the different shamans’ unequal progress down a universal, prescriptive trajectory he refers to as “the possession (or shamanic) career” (1993: 8). Here Lewis provides us with an example of a truly reactionary response to the (long-) shifting paradigm governing anthropology’s

engagement with its object: to paraphrase Fichte, if the (ethnographic) facts aren't in keeping with the theory, then so much the worse for the facts. In taking this stance, Lewis advances an account of shamanism as something almost independent of human agency, which certain groups have adopted and made relatively insignificant adjustments to. This acultural monad, the thinking goes, achieves analogous ends for the different peoples who employ it; if individuals or groups happen to talk about the phenomenon in different ways (and this is overstating the case, but worth exploring), it makes little difference to the analytical bottom line.

Happily, anthropology is justly regarded as skeptical toward its received wisdom, and prevailing notions about shamans and shamanism are not exempt. As happens so often when ideational floodgates are opened, many new theoretical lenses have appeared through which to view shamanism. A common approach in the 1960s and 70s was to turn to the neurochemical explanation for the shamanic experience; given widespread popular experimentation in the West with altered states of consciousness, it must have seemed natural enough to propose a link between the two superficially similar phenomena. Necessarily, this view takes shamanism's sociocultural function for granted (or, to spin it a different way, ignores it altogether) and focuses on the readily observable mechanisms by which shamans "prime the pump" for supernatural communication and what are often quite athletic and draining performances. As such, this medicalizing school of thought (led by Richard Schultes, *inter alia*; it seems worth noting that much of this theorizing has come from pharmacologists, botanists, and psychologists, though we cannot say that anthropologists have never jumped on this particular bandwagon, Peter Furst being a prime example) showed its implicit acceptance of what is a very old

characteristic of anthropologists' interaction with shamans and their cultures: a (probably) counterproductive fascination with the trance state/Altered State of Consciousness/Shamanic State of Consciousness itself.

This is understandable, given the charismatic nature of shamanic ritual and its novelty for Western observers (Pentecostals excepted, of course), but nevertheless carries us away from a holistic contextual analysis of shamanic action. "Certainly shifts in consciousness are a key part of shamanic practice," writes J.M. Atkinson. "But to analyze shamanism primarily as a trance phenomenon is akin to analyzing marriage solely as a function of reproductive biology. Understanding the neurophysiology of trance is valuable, but it does not explain the associated structures of ritual, knowledge, and society that have been the focus of so much research over the past decade" (1992: 311). Atkinson goes on to re-emphasize that we must come to grips with the physical aspects of shamanizing, but only as "elements of shamanic practice and not shamanism itself" (312). The forest has long been obscured by the presence of one particularly eye-catching and interesting tree. So, given this tendency to marginalize cultural elements and foreground the physiological and psychological aspects of the *individual's* experience of shamanism, a valuable role for ethnography is here to locate shamanisms within their political, economic and historical (ergo cultural) contexts.

An easy challenge to casual usage of the term "shaman" is to ask: If these individuals are fulfilling the same roles as our physicians and religious leaders (as they often seem to be), what is our reason for calling them by a separate name? First of all, too much has been made of the congruity between shamanic and Western doctor/priest roles. In the broadest of strokes, their functions are the same, but again the question of

context rears its head. Often, a shaman does indeed heal others, but his or her position within the community is otherwise so different than a Western doctor's that the argument falls apart rapidly; shamans are always to some degree more (or less...) than just healers or diviners within their communities, and a strictly functionalist stance does not hold up here. Nonetheless, a tempting further solution is to posit the West's desire to 'other' members of the cultures among which one can find shamans and their adherents. The New Age movement aside (for the moment), Westerners tend not to conceive of their religious/spiritual ceremonies in this way, and look to individuals drilled in the precepts of what we consider objective, dispassionate, 'hard' science for healing (our religious figures are likewise trained in accordance with standardized, time-tested formulae). Throughout much of the non Western world, the scientific paradigm is employed in tandem with myriad other ways of knowing; the dominant discourse of the post-Enlightenment West has been essentially intractable in its unwillingness to cede any ground to rival epistemologies. Perhaps the fact that "shamanic traditions have long been the target of institutionalized religion and state powers" (Kendall 1981: 315) goes some way toward explaining our willingness to see shamanism as an isolable (not to mention conquerable, in the terms of a monopolar 'discourse') phenomenon.

If we are in fact stuck with the terms "shaman" and "shamanism," such resignation carries with it responsibility, even if the decision is taken for purely heuristic purposes. We are not absolved from contextualizing precisely our use of the terms whenever they are used: if we run the risk of alienating or othering people by using the words, we must justify our decision to do so. The reasons must of course be valid and compelling, though the particulars will vary between ethnographic situations. Thus,

Lewis' attempt to define a shaman in *Religion in Context*: an “inspired prophet and healer, a charismatic religious figure with the power to control the spirits, usually by incarnating them” (1993: 116), contains nothing unambiguously objectionable (his attempt to extend this characterization to encompass *all* shamans everywhere is, on the other hand, objectionable). Much more contextualization would of course be needed to individuate the shaman one refers to and locate him or her in a cultural milieu, but this pared-down version makes a fine start. However, even if everyone's bare bones justification for appropriating the terms read the same, word for word, there would still be no grounds for attempting a generalist exercise in definition. Most ethnographers who choose to describe individuals as shamans do so citing their trance performances, but this and all the other stock descriptors of shamans tell us nothing about that individual's placement within and discursive relationship with the larger culture. Ethnography's contribution ought to come in its function as a persistent rebuttal to essentialism: that much more is informing the shaman's dance than his or her “psychoses” or alkaloid levels: indeed, behind the performance lurk the complexities of an entire cultural complex.

So what are we talking about? – Ethnographic Material

While shamanism is best understood as a local phenomenon, (re)produced and understood in ways unique to the communities in which it exists, it is nevertheless possible (and of some utility) to adopt a broader focus and examine it in a comparative way. Provided one has internalized the necessary caveats regarding overgeneralization and essentialism, a survey of the ethnographic material for a particular region can be illustrative both of the richness and variance to be found among the groups, and also of

some of the (undeniable) common threads that have made the decision to lump these traditions together such a tempting one. The western region of North America, including the Arctic north, provides ample fodder for both comparison and contrast.

The presentation of dated ethnographic material in the following sections is by no means done with the intent to locate the peoples mentioned in a synchronic space, immune to passage of time. Nor is my intention to deny the importance of history in forming an understanding of shamanism or any other cultural phenomenon. What follows is an amalgamation of snapshots, taken at different times and under different historical conditions, but which together should provide the reader with a working knowledge of some aspects of the shamanisms (extinct and extant) of western North America. Indeed, we cannot even be certain of the extent to which what was discovered by the first ethnographers documenting Inuit shamanism, for example, was forged in the distant past, or shaped and codified during the period of contact itself. That being said, there is little to be done about the ethnographic record we have inherited, other than to take what it gives us with caution.

The Arctic

As Arctic shamanism is so often metonymous for all forms of the practice, the region seems a natural place to begin. Shamanic interaction with the supernatural takes place in an idiom of unambiguously active human participation; far from being passively possessed, or “ridden,” the shaman actively seeks contact (and often conflict) with the spirits responsible for bringing misfortune to members of the group. Whether the problem at hand is an individual medical one, or is of direct concern to the entire community, as would be the case with persistent bad weather or elusive seals, there is a

strong chance that the shaman will need to do battle with malevolent spirits to rectify matters. The shaman is often understood to engage in physical combat with these spirits, or *tupilaq*, and his primary goal in individual-centered cases involving supernatural travel tends to be retrieving the soul of the afflicted person. That being said, the ritual whereby a trance state is induced communally (with help from those assembled, who drum for hours at a time and are said to “sing him along the way” – Jakobsen 1999: 13) in the shaman does not always take place, as some work is performed under ‘light trance,’ which the shaman can enter on his own.

In addition to soul loss, the presence in the patient’s body of a spiritually potent foreign object is often diagnosed. Usually by means of a sucking tube, the shaman effects a cure in these cases by removing the offending object with his mouth, and displaying it for the onlookers. The intrusion of the object is ascribed to a hostile shaman from another social group (Palsson 2001: 269), a never-ending cycle of attribution that tends to reinforce the shaman’s position in the community (as the only one capable of inflicting such damage upon enemies, and, conversely, the only one able to treat those afflicted).

In both situations (soul retrieval and object removal), the public shamanic protocol is best described as theatrical: through the deprivation of light stimulus and extended periods of rhythmic percussion (whether with drums or rattles) and chanting, both the shaman and his audience have their consciousness transformed. “There is no doubt that drumming is the most important tool in inducing trance,” writes Jakobsen, as “Drumming, dance, and the already established expectation of being in contact with defined spirits seems in many cultures to suffice as a ‘drug’” (1999: 12). There is no evidence for the use of

psychotropic substances (hereafter, “entheogens,” to use Huston Smith’s gloss: “the god within” – Smith 2000; this term steers us clear of any possible pejorative connotations called up by the use of “psychedelic,” in addition to making clear the difference between drug use for religious and recreational purposes) by spiritual practitioners in the Arctic. The use of ventriloquism and misdirection, so common in the Western idiom of magic performance, are widely acknowledged as part of the procedure, though by no means does this amount to a disavowal of the reality of the spirits or the shaman’s ability to contact them (1999: 49).

Typically, one becomes a shaman in the Arctic following a lengthy period of serious illness, which can be manifested in both physiological and mental/spiritual terms. Thus, the shaman’s curative powers to some extent derive from his firsthand knowledge of the shadowy space between the human and the spiritual. Some groups go so far as to say that the shaman must actually *die* and be reborn anew, rather than simply overcome sickness: “The process of dying and being revived is a well-known part of the initiation of the shaman...It is necessary to die and thereby be transformed in order to overcome the fear of death and dealing with the world of the dead people” (1999: 55).

Given their function of navigating between two spheres of reality, and the potential for their power to be put to either curative or harmful purposes, “shamans are ambivalent people in Inuit society” (Riches 1994: 389). The communities served by shamans do not accord them unquestioning credence; the shaman’s position within the group is thus tenuous and constantly result-dependent. As Riches says, “if practical successes underpin the system, then it must be allowed that practical failures will, to some degree, undermine it” (1994: 391). This “undermining” seems to take place with

specific reference to the individual currently fulfilling the shamanic role: failures on the part of a shaman are not seen as an indictment of the system itself, but rather of the practitioner's abilities. That is to say, in the Arctic it is never Shamanism, writ large, that is under review, but merely the shamanic aptitude of one individual or another. Beyond the loss of face (and livelihood) that accompanies removal from shamanic office, an individual can in some communities expect his punishment to take on a physical dimension, up to and including being killed. An incompetent or false shaman is a liability that no community is in a position to afford, in light of the central importance of his contribution to the successful functioning of the group; as such, harsh sanctions against pretender shamans make eminent sense.

The Pacific Northwest and California

Moving south along the western coast of North America, one would next encounter shamanic features in the Pacific Northwest, most of all in the Canadian province of British Columbia. Here, as in California, the shamanic idiom corresponds fairly closely in practice with what a westerner would call medicine: ailing individuals are brought to the shaman, whereupon he (or, in California, she) employs a standardized procedure to effect a cure. Extraction of a malignant foreign body and the use of sucking tubes figure prominently, but what differentiates Northwest Coast shamanism is the prevalence of the purification ring. "The most important ceremonial implement of the shaman is the purification ring," writes Franz Boas in his *Kwakiutl Ethnography*. "The essential feature of the use of the ring is that the patient must pass through it" (Boas 1966: 136). This metaphor of ritual cleansing also appears in descriptions of a shaman who has just begun his training; the novice is referred to as "one who has gone through"

(1966: 120). In keeping with the shaman's status as a pillar of the (extant and spiritual) community, "all cures are public, and the acts of the shaman are accompanied at the appropriate time by rapid time-beating" on the part of the audience (1966: 136).

California shamans share with their neighbors to the north the idea that their primary contribution to the life of the group lies in the realm of healing. However, shamans also officiate at seasonal ceremonies intended to ensure health and luck for the upcoming months. These ceremonies emerge from a conception of an all-pervading force in the universe, something that the community must harness a part of, with the help of its spiritual technicians. "Power can be dealt with rationally through a system of reciprocal rules (expectations), which were established or handed down to man in early cosmic times. Without individual or community action by man through such rituals as world renewal ceremonies, the balance of power in the universe would be upset, and one side of the system might be disproportionately favored over another" (Bean 1992c: 23). Thus, in order to be able to heal, the shaman must first establish a base of power from which to draw. Bean's use of the phrase "action by man" is not accidental: these renewal rituals are the province of males, as "a network of male priests officiated at annual cycles of rites that were considered essential to the maintenance of world order; the health of individuals; productivity and the availability of plants, animals, and fish; assistance from spiritual beings; prevention of natural disasters, and the like. Women shamans acted in curing capacities" (Bean 1992b: 36). This sexual division of shamanic labor is a feature unique to the area.

In California one finds that the practice of shamanism is in places intimately tied to the use of entheogenic substances. Far from being inseparable from the induction of a

trance state, the relative positioning of entheogens in this discussion of trance methods is instructive: “Various means, including sensory deprivation, are used to induce trance: rhythmic sound or activity, as in music, dance, or meditation; electrical stimulation of the nervous system; fasting; and drugs” (Bean 1992a: 14). In the case of the Kumeyaay of southern California, the botanical skill linked to these practices translated into a knowledge of medicinal plants that astounded the first Spaniards to enter the region (Shipek 1992: 89).

The nuts and bolts of California shamanism are similar to the practices of the peoples of the Northwest Coast, with a few important additions. As well as using sucking tubes to remove intruding objects, the shaman often has present an interpreter/spokesman to translate the utterances that will emerge from his or her diagnostic trance. Often, these utterances are made in Northwest Coast languages, which are seen as prestigious (Shepherd 1992: 192-3). Tobacco is another common feature of the ceremonies: “A shaman always smoked before starting to cure, taking five puffs of his pipe and inhaling the smoke. This made his cure more effective since it made his spirit more active and strong” (Hines 1993: 246).

The American Southwest

Any discussion of shamanism in the American Southwest is guaranteed to be contentious, as there is nothing approaching a consensus on the practice’s presence or absence in the region. Broadly speaking, a case can be made for shamanism’s existence among the Navajo, but not among the Hopi, and the fact that the label continues to be misapplied is an example of the results of accepting without question the classificatory systems inherited from earlier generations of scholars.

Having asserted that shamanism has long been an important facet of Pueblo religious life, Jerrold Levy explains that, “the Hopis differed from this pattern in several important respects. Hopi shamans did not use the trance state, did not have spirit quests or confirmations in sodality...or group rites, and did not believe in illness caused by soul loss” (Levy 1994: 307). While Levy makes use of the term, it is far from certain that, absent a tradition of ecstatic contact with the supernatural, there exists such a thing as “Hopi shamanism.” Levy later raises this question himself (1994: 309, 324), and is not convinced that the phrase can be used without extensive qualification. Though they made similar use of the tube-sucking cure for illness, Hopi shamans’ political standing was not nearly equal to that enjoyed by their Zuni, Tewa and Keresan counterparts (“the Hopis, along with the Shoshonean speakers of the Great Basin, were ambivalent about shamans” –1994: 320). Additionally, it was not the Hopi shamans but rather lay people who were visited by spirit helpers bearing diagnostic advice (1994: 320); only once they had been informed of the location of the foreign object could the shaman begin his work. Given these shamans’ severely restricted function and abilities, it makes little sense to lump them in alongside shamans with far-reaching powers and significant stature in their communities.

By contrast, while the term “shaman” is rarely, if ever, used to describe Navajo spiritual practitioners, it would seem a better fit here than in the Hopi case. Navajo healers employ one of three methods for diagnosing a patient: “star gazing,” “listening,” or “hand trembling, whereby the diagnosis is interpreted through an involuntary motion of the hand.” All of these methods “typically involve a mild trance state” (Milne and Howard 2000: 548). The authors seize on hand trembling in particular as the “last

remnant of the shamanic trance” (2000: 548), which they believe was once present in much more dramatic form (2000: 549). While they admit that hand trembling diagnosis, at first glance, seems well short of a properly shamanic practice, they insist that it “can be considered a shamanic rite – that is, in addition to involving a mild trance state, it is a skill that is seen as a gift, a talent that cannot be developed but rather, that occurs spontaneously (usually in the context of a healing ceremonial) and is then ‘controlled’ with the help of an experienced diagnostician” (2000: 549). Unlike the Hopi shamans, Navajo hand tremblers initiate direct contact with a supernatural being, when a “prayer appealing for Gila Monster’s guidance is spoken, and the hand trembler goes into a mild trance. It is Gila Monster, one of the Holy People, who communicates information about the patient’s condition to the diagnostician. Dialogic exchange continues throughout the diagnostic encounter, with the healer acting as interlocutor between the patient and Gila monster” (2000: 550).

Problematizing Shamanism’s Encounter with Modernity and Globalization

One of the traditional hallmarks of shamanic practice’s appearance in the anthropological literature has been its overwhelming tendency for it to occur in nonstate or egalitarian societies, often those with a hunting and gathering subsistence base. The fact that the preponderance of documented and analyzed shamanic modes has been presented in these terms has led many to conclude that shamanism is to state hierarchy as oil is to water, or vice versa. This interpretation, while understandable, appears less and less tenable each time new material is published showing shamanism existing alongside (and even being actively cultivated by) centralized state apparatuses. Even within ethnographies purporting to demonstrate this incompatibility can be found evidence that

the two phenomena share what is proving to be a long history of parallel and collaborative function. While this argument will make little headway against the kind of purism that insists upon absolute orthodoxy and consistency as requisite features of “proper” shamanism, it takes as a founding premise the notion that change does not index degeneration or the loss of cultural tradition and worth.

One way in which the state (used here in a general sense) gives us the impression that it does not get along well with shamanism is by directly vilifying it and engaging in subtle (or not so subtle, as with the Korean government’s “anti-superstition” programs (Kendall 1981: 174) campaigns to bring the “superstitious” and “backward” practice to a final and long-overdue end. Not surprisingly, these efforts are regularly located within a discourse of modernization and the end of shamanism is closely associated with clearing the way for societal progress. The Korean case is particularly interesting in that the attacks on shamanism can easily be read as veiled attacks on traditional female agency within the structures of both the household and the society at large (1981: 184-5). This modernist critique of shamanism emerges from two corners of the dominant sector of Korean (male) society: the (psycho-)medical profession and the administration itself.

In 1970s Korea, in keeping with recent scholarly fashion, psychiatrists have taken it upon themselves to evaluate local shamanic healing in terms of the empirical results it achieves; not surprisingly, it comes up wanting in their eyes, though they grudgingly admit its potential worth for some “traditional” members (read: old and superstitious) of the Korean population (1981: 174). These clinicians take shamanism to task for what they perceive as its ineffectiveness. Yet, even in its formative stage, such a case makes a misguided assumption: that shamanism as a system or practice or phenomenon is seeking

to emulate the medical paradigm in which the psychiatrists themselves are steeped. This outwardly gentle polemic conceives of shamanism as a set of obsolete answers to questions that modern scientific ideational and methodological shifts have essentially put to rest (e.g., there's nothing mysterious anymore about the underlying causes of disease). The government's attacks have relied on far blunter rhetorical instruments. Without even feigning an interest in shamanism's possible efficacy, it has tended to take as the basis for its complaints the embarrassment potential of shamanism for a government attempting to present itself to the world as modern and sophisticated (1981: 174).

In *Guns and Rain* (1985), David Lan presents the pressures faced by the Dande mediums and their ancestral spirits under the white settler-controlled Rhodesian government in the late 1970s. Here again, the threat was two-pronged, originating with one element of the Christian missionizing organizations as well as (to a lesser extent) with the Rhodesian government itself. While many local people were able to negotiate a viable syncretic mix with the Catholic church, a serious religious challenge came in the form of the Protestant Evangelical Alliance Mission. While the third Christian presence in the area, the Apostolic church, roundly denounced those who played host to the ancestral spirits, they never scoffed at the ancestors as did the Evangelicals; in fact, they took them extremely seriously, holding exorcisms of their own for individuals who had been possessed (1985: 39-40). If anything, this stance served to reify the local belief system: if even the Christians are afraid of the ancestors, the reasoning might have gone, then even if I am Christian as well I had better do my best to keep them happy.

The Rhodesian government's take on Dande spirit mediumship was predictably condescending and misinformed (1985: 157), but distrust and outright loathing of the

government on the part of black Rhodesians was so widespread that this factor was of little practical significance. The fact that the Dande spirit mediums helped to dismantle a state system, not to replace it with a new egalitarian order but with *another* state system of centralized authority, puts to rest the notion that shamanism's interests are inevitably at odds with the state's.

Looking back at the long history of shamanic practice in northern Asia (home of our shamanic gold standard) Caroline Humphrey (1999: 2002) examines the threats posed to the practice by the Mongol and Manchu empires over the course of the last millennium. Under Chinggis Khan, it looked for a time as if shamanism and the institution of the state were ideologically irreconcilable (though she asserts that, while empires certainly constitute ideologies of their own, shamanism does nothing of the sort: 1999: 192). Chinggis was building a superstate, with an aggressive ideology to match, and crucial to both of these was the notion that the empire's bright future "had to seem *evident*" (1999: 205, emphasis mine) and not open to the musings and predictions of the shamans. When one particularly prominent shaman made an unfortunate prediction about the leader's dim prospects for long-term survival, he was promptly killed. Though this anecdote seems to fall in line rather nicely with the incompatibility hypothesis, it is worth bearing in mind that the episode took place during the formative, consolidating years of the superpower. As such, it can be written off as imperial teething trouble, worrying at the time but no more than an unpleasant memory later on.

In fact, when the empire was in its mature phase (and had passed to the custodianship of the Manchu Dynasty), shamanism came back into favor in no small way. As the territorial boundaries expanded ever farther, there was great concern on the

emperor's part that Manchuness was being lost in the diversifying mix. Especially as the imperial forces pushed westward into Islamic territory, with its seemingly radically different cultural and religious makeup, the need to recalibrate the empire with its (rulers') roots seemed more pressing than ever (1999: 215). Thus, there was a systematized attempt by the emperor (through his mandarins' legwork, naturally) to document and reincorporate Manchu shamanism into the official imperial canon. The experiment was a failure in some ways, as the case can be made that it had the effect of alienating an already disaffected Chinese population, in whose lands and around many of whose institutions the Manchus had hereto based their social and religious practice. However, evidence of the reinvigorated Manchu sensibility's staying power among the elite (into the twentieth century) serves as a testament to its effectiveness for that sector of the population, if not for the entire big, happy, Mongol Empire family (1999: 216).

Another point to consider is the degree to which the officially sanctioned shamanism represented a departure from "traditional" forms (and a move toward Confucianism, most prominently in the introduced ancestral focus: 1999: 214-5): trance was effectively written out of the handbook (the existence of a set of codified prescriptions for shamanic ritual, in effect a liturgical handbook, itself seems a radical enough shift). Then again, a change in outward form is not necessarily indicative of a change in substance or function, and to say that incorporation into the Manchu/(Mongol) regime 'killed' Manchu shamanism is to make unwarranted assumptions, concerning both the nature of shamanism itself and its discursive relationship with the larger culture of which it is a component. Neither the top-down attempts to appropriate peripheral shamanism nor the dialectical contribution of Manchu ancestor-worship represent a challenge to the notion

that shamanism and the state can coexist (nor do they represent an adulteration of shamanism). Indeed, the two processes effectively lead to the reproduction of the state from both above and below, with both sides seeing something in shamanism of great value or utility.

The irony of the Korean situation is that, just as did the Mongols two hundred and fifty years ago, the government has shifted gears on shamanism and now treats it as a part of Korea's unique heritage, and a part worth legislating to protect, at that (Atkinson 1992: 317). This act seems to bring the government's stance in line with that of a large sector of Korea's population. "In contemporary Korea issues of national identity and the preservation of a cultural heritage infuse intellectual discourse", Kendall writes (1981: 174), and "scholars seek the source of a unique Korean experience." The government's attitude can be approached in terms of Kendall's earlier assertion that "despite a plethora of shamans in East Asian cities, anthropologists have commonly considered 'shamanism' a religious attribute of simple societies" (1981: 172). Understandably, Korea is not terribly interested in being perceived as a "simple society," and as such has attempted, off and on, to bury aspects of its culture which it finds particularly problematic (and upon which it feels it can have some impact: one wonders if the fact that Korean shamans are typically female, and thus less engaged with Korean politics and the power structures, made any difference in this decision). However, like a pendulum, its attitude has reversed in the wake of globalization's inexorable homogenizing steamroller; maybe being 'simple' is not so bad after all, as long as it entails being 'different,' or to put it another way, 'recognizable.'

For many, hearing the word ‘shaman’ itself is sufficient to conjure distinctly archaic (if not frankly ‘uncivilized’) and wild images: using the term can be compared to pulling out yellowing photographs tucked away somewhere in an attic or an archive, reminders of a simpler past. Just as the modern(ized) world is the proper domain of advanced medical technology and dignified, decorous religion, so is shamanism, with all its histrionics and incantations, imbued with a tenacious pastness from which it seems impossible to escape. That the phenomenon and the cultures with which it has been linked have been so persistently tagged with descriptors like ‘preindustrial’ would seem to drive the last nail into the historical coffin. Shamanism has not survived into the present as a photocopy of the shamanisms of a century or more ago; then again, neither have languages, subsistence technologies or any other cultural traits one would wish to isolate and examine. Modernity has indeed left its stamp on shamans and their worlds, but to expect otherwise or ask why this should have happened is to project a false expectation of timelessness; unlike museum exhibits or textbooks, flux (edited reproduction) is the default state for lived cultural realities. Far from being signs of degeneration or effectively ‘lost’ phenomena, today’s shamanisms, though phenotypically and functionally altered, provide a degree of continuity with the past and an accommodating lens through which to view what is often a threatening and disorienting present.

In her *Unmaking of Soviet Life*, Humphrey (2002) discusses the appearance of shamans in Buryatia “as if from nowhere in the late 1980s, the magicians of the city” (2002: 202). By “of the city,” Humphrey refers to far more than their spatial location: these individuals work with and within the urban environment no differently or less

intimately than Rasmussen's Inuit shamans did within their nomadic polar milieu. Here, as the physical landscape has evolved, the shamanic landscape has evolved apace to suit the new material and social idiom, and shamans performatively alter this city-space, making it not merely a grid of concrete structures, but a symbolically pregnant and even spiritually dangerous place, unquestionably *linked* with the wilderness and traditional home territories, but just as unquestionably *different* (2002: 203-7). Kendall (1996) treats modern Korean shamanism in a similar vein, focusing on how a transforming economy and consonant transformations of value and symbolic systems ("a matter of calibration, not radical transformation" – 1996: 522) shape the terms on which shamans and clients interact. This adaptation is most clearly evident in shamans' narratives.

The Buryat shaman Nadia's supernatural experience on a city bus melds elements of the archetypal 'shaman's call' with a distinctly modern setting. At one point on her journey, she finds that she is aware of the thoughts of the other passengers on the crowded bus, and finds this insight extremely difficult to handle (Humphrey 2002: 207). The fact that she later acquiesces and becomes a shaman puts the rough outline of her story alongside thousands of other recorded shamanic narratives; the particular manifestation of her calling makes it distinct. That Nadia's shamanic illness is couched in a transgression of the urban norm of anonymity and the inviolably discrete nature of the individual actor and his or her consciousness weighs this episode down with modern implications. Nadia knew that something was out of order as soon as the blankly staring faces and lumps of flesh, which city dwellers so often perceive their fellow residents to be, became people to her and jump-started her empathy. This hurdle to shamanic consciousness seems uniquely urban, as there is likely to be less risk of depersonalization

(or certainly of the phenomenon attaining the less-than-miraculous status which enables us to write it off as stress-related) in, say, a hunter-gatherer society. When the representatives of modern Soviet medicine at the local hospital effectively throw up their hands upon being presented with the (later) physical manifestations of her illness, her status as a modern shaman is assured: not only does Nadia have shamanic powers, but these coexist with and show the capacity to vanquish (or at least fare well against) the trappings of Soviet modernity (2002: 208).

Just as Nadia's experience on the bus highlights the degree to which modern society is suffused with individualism (Humphrey suggests this is part and parcel of a post-Soviet/anti-communal backlash – 2002: 213, though the shamans seem to play a key role in this process), so do the novel features of her ritual practice. Gone, apparently, is the ritual attention once paid by Buryat shamans to the health and wealth of the community – shamanism is now a cash-and-carry, individually-focused affair. One thing shamans do which is far from new, though its implications are, is to maintain links between living members of the community and the ancestral spirits (2002: 215). This practice continues, but given the fact that the shamans' clients now live at some considerable distance from the ancestors' worldly haunts, the dynamic is altogether changed. By reinforcing these tribute- and reverence-based links with rural ancestors among these urban dwellers, the shamans ensure that the city remains an amalgam of people bound by divergent ties to disparate far-off places and spirits, rather than a unitary, cooperative totality. There is no communal whole here, as so long as “the city is recalibrated in space and time” (2002: 207) along these individualistic lines, its parts are effectively encouraged to refuse to form a sum.

Along with the ancestral ‘usual suspects,’ Humphrey finds that urban shamans are incorporating a diverse multicultural stable of spirit helpers into their rituals, the Archangel Michael being a prime example (2002: 220). By going beyond the bounds of traditionally-conceived Buryatness for their spiritual assistance, these shamans are able to impress their clients with a wide-ranging repertoire, but there is a deeper significance to consider. Shamans have here become commentators and interpreters as well as *agents* of modernity. When they help clients maintain bonds with long-dead kin and the old homelands and lifestyle, they remind clients of their urbanness and how it acts as an impediment to the fulfilment of traditional obligations. In tapping the symbolic resources of an increasingly global community, they build bridges between the Buryat and the wider, modernizing world. Humphrey comments at length on the shamans’ role in keeping urban people’s minds trained outside the city limits, on their ancestors and their responsibilities to them (2002: 215, 221). I would submit that, although subtly, the shamans are broadening their clients’ perspectives much farther, to include the entire world, for better or worse.

In her analysis of traditional culture’s resonance with Sakha people in the late Soviet era, Marjorie Balzer (1993) engages shamanism not as a practice or phenomenon but as an idiom, a fluid and symbolic system that can be adopted whole or piecemeal (1993: 158), and is nearly analogous to ‘tradition’ or ‘Sakha culture’ itself. She discusses her encounters with two Sakha men who sit at different ends of the spectrum regarding their identification with shamanism (Sakhaness writ large) and shamanic imagery. For Andrei, shamanism is not a lifestyle choice but an ever-present bank of distinctively Sakha symbols from which to draw inspiration for his dramatic work, as well as to lend

authenticity to his efforts to raise the cultural awareness of his fellow Sakha. In his case, this connection with the shamanic world can be seen as seeking a source of helpful energy, traditional story motifs and community consciousness, rather than shamanizing for its own, more exclusively religious and spiritual sake. Coincidentally or not, Andrei was for years a registered Party member and had a distinctly Slavic element present in his upbringing and education (which took place in Moscow at the higher levels). His uncle Vladimir, on the other hand, falls more closely in line with what Sakha and Western conceptions of the traditional, full-time shaman tend to look like. His life is arranged with the spirits and his shamanic powers and obligations firmly at its centre, and his Soviet/Slavic acculturation does not begin to approach Andrei's. Rather than a theme which he incorporates into his life when he feels it would benefit him, shamanism is for Vladimir the linchpin and purpose of life (1993: 146-156).

For all that estimable license in the degree to which one embraced shamanism was permissible at the time of Balzer's fieldwork (the mid-1980s), the situation was beginning to congeal into what could be termed, perhaps cynically, "too much of a good thing." On Vladimir's initiative, a shamans' association was in its formative stages, and he was "hoping to impose a new social order on a traditional profession that has been, to outsiders, quite chaotic and competitive" (1993: 148). It could be argued that that very chaos and competition have made shamanism what it is (mostly in memory and stories) for the contemporary Sakha: heterogeneous and defined by the idiosyncrasies, varying personal abilities and community links of the different practicing shamans. Whatever shamanism has been, and it has been many things to the Sakha at different points in time, it has never yet been strictly liturgical and codified. N.L. Zokhovskaya deals with a

similar situation regarding a Buryat community's decision to hold a jubilee commemorating 250 years of Buddhism on the basis of what the author finds to be dubious historical justification. However, as becomes clear in the article, the meaning of the celebration itself is of central importance, and details like dates become little-lamented casualties of an exuberant process of cultural renewal and self-actualization (Zokhovskaya 1997). In the same way, Vladimir's decision to take his shamanic verve in this direction cannot be judged any more than can Andrei's shamanic dabblings; there is no such thing as aberrance in these cases, only divergence from received (remembered, or recreated) tradition.

In a later work, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity*, Balzer (1999) shifts geographically to western Siberia and conceptually to problematic issues surrounding the notion of syncretism. After a thoroughgoing treatment of the (pre-Soviet) history of Khanty/Slavic contact and the long process of colonization and conversion drives, Balzer discusses the relative ease with which members of *both* of the two groups were able to navigate between the respective religious systems, taking part in the sacraments and rituals of both almost interchangeably. Balzer attributes this apparently freewheeling atmosphere to "the congruence of Slavic peasant and Siberian shamanic beliefs," and says that this fact, along with an eventually permissive Russian Orthodox clergy, "provided fertile ground for syncretism" (1999: 65-6). Far from being a relatively common case of an oppressed group incorporating elements of the oppressor's faith in the face of persecution and aggressive conversion efforts, this appears truly to have been egalitarian. But *is* this, in fact, syncretism? If the Slavic and Khanty faiths were similar enough symbolically and ritually to be mutually intelligible, do we have any use for the

term, which connotes a sharing arrangement, some kind of mix-and-match Frankenreligion which is significantly dissimilar to both its constituent parts? That Balzer is able to denote this coexistence as syncretism seems to be more a function of an overly zealous and divisive system of classification (e.g., Slavic ‘civilized’ religion as opposed to Khanty ‘primitive’ religion, though the two are but a hair’s breadth apart) than of a conceptual gulf between the two.

Thus, when Balzer says that currently, “shamanic values...are being resurrected” (1999: 201), this cannot be seen as a rebirth following a period of extinction or even preponderant dormancy: the difference is one of *emphasis*, as it has always been for the Khanty since they have had contact with other groups. More and more Khanty are becoming enamored of the idea of traditional religion and its system of values. It may be more precise to say, however, that they are hungry for something distinctively Khanty to assert for themselves; just as with Zokhovskaya’s Buryat analysis, the devil is not so much in the details as in the overarching sense of ‘authenticity’ to be had.

All of these cases show shamanism as it is used as a tool to cope with the demands of the modern world. Whether its supernatural potency is turned toward the economic sphere of people’s lives, to concerns about appeasing the ancestors, or toward efforts at retaining cultural characteristics despite the homogenising juggernaut of globalization, it is here always employed in distinctively modern ways. Methodological (the shift to individualized rituals, for instance) or even institutional (such as forming a shamanic licensure board) changes do not make any of these practices “not shamanism.” Rather, they provide us with a new window through which to view modernity and processes of cultural adaptation.

The waters are muddied, however, when shamanism is adopted (some would argue that ‘co-opted’ is a better term) by a westerner, stripped of any cultural particularities, and marketed to a general audience as a kind of self-help technique. Michael Harner, a Ph.D. anthropologist with extensive fieldwork experience in South America and northern Scandinavia, has done just that with his Foundation for Shamanic Studies, “a non-profit incorporated educational organization” with a Web site at www.shamanism.org. Billing itself as “your source for information and products relating to the study of shamanism,” the site is partly a catalogue offering such paraphernalia as synthetic-hide drums and instructional videotapes, and partly a platform from which Harner defends his unique relationship with shamanism. The Foundation regularly offers courses in shamanic practice, one of which is described with this passage attached:

Now you can join more than 5,000 people each year who take our rigorous training in core shamanism, the near universal methods of shamanism without a specific cultural perspective. 200-plus training programs are given each year in North America, Europe, Latin America and Australia.

Founded by internationally renowned anthropologist Michael Harner with a three-fold mission to study, to teach, and to preserve shamanism, the Foundation for Shamanic Studies has built a reputation of consistency and dependability by providing reliable training in Core Shamanism to interested learners worldwide.

Dr. Harner has been recognized as a pioneer in the field of anthropology and shamanism since the early 60's when he chose to immerse himself in tribal spiritual traditions rather than restrict his study to more traditional academic techniques.

This excerpt reveals a handful of significant assumptions on the part of its author, who may or may not be Harner himself. First and perhaps most importantly, the assertion that shamanism can be taught (or even exists) “without a specific cultural perspective” locates Harner and the FSS in I.M. Lewis’ universalizing camp. In defiance

of the culturally specific character of the world's many shamanisms, Harner has managed to render down a staggeringly complex galaxy of practices and traditions into an easily digestible homogeneous form. Reference is made to the Foundation's "three-fold mission to study, to teach, and to preserve shamanism," which begs the question: What exactly is preserved by this kind of commercially-driven reductionism? Though the case can be made that the FSS's "beginner's version" of shamanism, with its decidedly New Age approach and appeal, introduces people to shamanism who otherwise would not be aware of its existence, one is left with a larger uncertainty: is this a good thing?

While the commercialization of shamanism certainly affords the *practice* a large amount of public exposure, the same cannot be said for its *practitioners*; Harner's writings are full of references to "the shaman," and clearly this label is meant to function on its own. However, a context-free treatment of shamanism effectively writes the shamans themselves (Harner himself excepted, naturally) out of the equation, with the result that they meld into an unindividuated, faceless archetype, a sterile repository of the "tradition" which we need Harner to distill and explicate. It is not "shamanism" that is being preserved here, but rather Michael Harner's E-Z Shamanic Shortcut to Personal Spiritual Fulfilment. As Seen on TV. In light of Harner's extensive fieldwork, and especially given the fact that his early research allowed him to live and work with groups in such widely divergent areas as northern Scandinavia, the Amazon basin, and western North America, his ability to discount intercultural variation seems strange. How, after "he chose to immerse himself in tribal spiritual traditions" could he have decided that they were all similar enough to lump together?

Just as interesting (and problematic) as Harner's relationship with his shamanic sources is that with his intended audience. A look at the methods he uses to define and discuss shamanism with Western neophytes, as well as the methods he uses to promote and sell shamanic merchandise, reveals much about Harner's concept of the people he is trying to reach.

What is Shamanism?

Over tens of thousands of years, our ancient ancestors all over the world discovered how to maximize human abilities of mind and spirit for healing and problem-solving. The remarkable system of methods they developed is today known as "shamanism," a term that comes from a Siberian tribal word for its practitioners: "shaman" (pronounced SHAH-mahn). Shamans are a type of medicine man or woman especially distinguished by the use of journeys to hidden worlds otherwise mainly known through myth, dream, and near-death experiences.

Consistent with Harner's view of shamanism as an undifferentiated global phenomenon, this definition comes close to depicting it as the product of a strategy-planning session by "our ancient ancestors." This fits in nicely with Harner's larger agenda, in that it paints shamanism as a technology, not unlike metallurgy or agriculture. As such, it is a resource available to anyone with the interest and willingness to study it (after the little matter of the bill, of course).

Workshops and Training Courses

"Shamanism is a path of knowledge, not of faith, and that knowledge cannot come from me or anyone else in this reality. To acquire that knowledge, including the knowledge of the reality of the spirits, it is necessary to step through the shaman's doorway and acquire empirical evidence."

Michael Harner, Ph.D., FSS Founder and President

Here we see Harner stressing shamanism's status as a fundamentally *individual* phenomenon: the emphasis on individual discovery and achievement is reminiscent of the language used by motivational speakers and self-help authors. According to this passage, shamanism need not be esoteric. It is an inherently acquirable skill, and its accessibility to Westerners or anyone else is not mitigated by cultural factors; the process of becoming a shaman can thus be conflated with vocational school. Harner's translation of shamanism into Western terms does not end there, as he ends with the curious phrase, "step through the shaman's doorway and acquire empirical evidence." Clearly working hard to underline his claim that shamanism is in no way predicated on faith, Harner wanders into the Western idiom of post-Enlightenment natural science. By manipulating shamanism to fit a foreign mould (it is at least questionable that practicing shamans conceive of their otherworldly experiences in terms of evidence-gathering, or that the presence or absence of evidence, in our sense of the term, is relevant to shamanism at all), even in such a seemingly minor way, Harner begins to stray from his professed mission to "preserve" shamanism intact.

CDs and Audio Cassettes

Shamanic Journeywork® Recordings

Improved and Digitally Remastered

Each one of these tapes has been specifically designed for serious Journey Work as explained by Michael Harner in his classic work *The Way of the Shaman*. Not For Recreational Use or for Listening To While Driving.

The above entry appears in the merchandise area of the FSS Web site. The author (and again, it may be inaccurate to implicate Harner here) appears to protest too much, mentioning twice in the course of two brief sentences the fact that the recordings are

“serious” tools for shamanizing. The over-capitalized final sentence is faintly comical, a reminder of Harner’s awareness of his customers’ world: these are, after all, litigation-happy Americans.

Below is an advertisement for the FSS’s flagship service, a “Three-Year Program in Shamanism and Shamanic Healing.”

New East and West Coast Three-Year Programs in Shamanism and Shamanic Healing Starting in 2004

Sixth East Coast Program Starts September 18-23, 2004. Directed by Michael Harner and taught by Alicia L. Gates, assisted by Amanda Foulger, David Corbin and Nan Moss. Location: Upper Hudson River Valley Area, New York.

Ninth West Coast Program Starts October 3-8, 2004. Directed by Michael Harner and taught by Alicia L. Gates, assisted by Amanda Foulger. Location: Northern Marin County, California.

Originated by Michael Harner, this course is the most advanced training in shamanism and shamanic healing offered by the Foundation and generally is considered unparalleled in the world. It involves intensive extended training in progressively higher levels of very advanced shamanism and shamanic healing, including rare methods and little-known principles.

In these residential programs, the same group of participants meets for a week twice a year for three years, with practical assignments between meetings. The program is devoted to the objective of advancing the participants' knowledge and practice as far as possible during the three years. Enrollment is limited.

PREREQUISITES: the FSS Basic Workshop and at least four days of advanced FSS workshops, except for applicants who have completed the annual FSS Two-Week Intensive Course in Advanced Shamanism and Shamanic Healing. Those having the Two-Week Course will receive special consideration and are not required to take other advanced workshops. For information on the Two-Week Course, to be given in northern California March 21 - April 1, please contact the Journeywork Institute (flanagin@pacbell.net).

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO APPLY: Journeywork Institute is handling registration matters for the Foundation. To apply, send a deposit payable to the "Journeywork Institute" in the form of a check or money order in U.S. currency in the amount of \$295. Mastercard and Visa credit card payments are also accepted by fax, telephone, or regular mail. Specify either "East Coast or West

Coast Program 2004". Further information will be sent to you. There are expected to be far more applicants than can be accepted, so please apply as soon as possible.

The text accompanying the shorter-duration programs warns interested pupils to make sure that they are having good luck contacting their “power animals” before signing up. While there is a case to be made that what Harner is engaged in creating is no less real or valid than the traditions he absorbed during his fieldwork (a New American Shamanism, as it were, sterile and McDonaldsized to the hilt), that he has merely translated the phenomenon to make it relevant and functional for Americans, this argument rings hollow. By jettisoning some of the foundational principles of shamanism (as practiced outside the Bay Area), Harner obliterates his sources. For instance, shamanism is nowhere a goal to which anyone can inspire, or for that matter, an elective goal in any sense. It is, rather, a calling, something to which people feel themselves drawn, like it or not. With this in mind, a fees-based course picked out of an internet advertisement begins to look radically different. Harner is a scholar of some achievement, and while he may be able to replicate faithfully the nuts and bolts of shamanic training as he has observed them, his denial of the necessity of the shamanic calling changes the rules of the game from the very beginning. While the methods Harner teaches are doubtless of some usefulness to his students (seeing as he hasn’t gone out of business as of yet), it seems improper for him to take on the mantle of a “shamanic” teacher.

Conclusion

It makes little sense to say that shamanism is compatible or incompatible with modernity, the state, or globalization: aside from reifying shamanism as a uniform

institution, such prognoses miss the larger point. While shamanic practices may not look the same in the wake of these encounters, they are no more or less liable to change, no more relics of the timeless past than any other cultural feature. Anthropology's relationship with shamanism is as old as the discipline itself, but given a willingness to accord shamanism the same constant reexamination and latitude for change that it practices reflexively in its efforts to reinvent itself, this longevity should not necessarily be a problem. Put another way, there is no danger of shamanism not surviving modernity; the only thing under threat is the Western academy's concept of the practice, and this is something best renewed often anyway.

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