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Reporting on race

Two recent reports about so-called racial relations in Britain and the USA offer a striking contrast. Neither refers explicitly to anthropology, but they raise questions about how, in an era of concern about human rights, political action can promote cultural change.

The British report came about because in London in 1993 a young black student, Stephen Lawrence, was murdered; the police investigation was bungled, a campaign led by the dead boy's parents attracted press publicity and a new Home Secretary appointed an official inquiry. The chairman, Sir William Macpherson, was a recently retired judge; he was assisted by a former police chief, a black bishop who had been a lawyer in Uganda, and a doctor who chairs the Jewish Council for Racial Equality. The inquiry's task was 'To inquire into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 to date, in order particularly to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes.'

The US report, *One America in the 21st Century*, was the product of an initiative by President Clinton. In 1997 he appointed an Advisory Board on Race to advise on 'matters involving race and racial reconciliation... promote a national dialogue... increase understanding... bridge racial divides... [and] identify solutions' The Board, under the chairmanship of Professor John Hope Franklin, had seven members and a substantial staff.

The chief difference between the Macpherson and Franklin reports is that the former had a specific focus in a particular scandal centring upon a mother and father whose anguish and grievance could evoke sympathies crossing lines of race and class. Macpherson had to investigate the conduct of police officers, as individuals and as a team, and to propose remedies. There is also a difference in the use that is being made of the reports. The British government has been capitalizing upon the headline-grabbing qualities of the report to amend legislation and introduce changes in education, housing, and other fields so as 'to realise the broader vision of an anti-racist society'. The Franklin board, given a very general brief, failed to extract from its material a message that could catch public attention, like the image of the US as 'moving towards two societies, one white, one black - separate and unequal' in the Kerner Commission's report thirty years earlier. The Franklin report commends various trends but has not (as yet) been able to spur the government into action.

Before commenting on the content of the reports, it is relevant to recall Durkheim's contention that crime is a normal rather than a pathological social phenomenon, because the same may be said of discrimination. The formation of groups and societies depends upon the unequal treatment of members and non-members, and is subject to regulation as a normal form of behaviour. In some circumstances it is prohibited as unlawful, and in some circumstances it is condemned by moral codes. Applied to racial discrimination and hatred, criteria of health and sickness are far from clear-cut, so the identification of psychological and social features as pathological is problematic. This is not to say that racial prejudice and discrimination are never pathological, but that much discriminatory behaviour resembles criminal conduct more than it resembles a sickness. Sick people are not normally blamed for their sickness, but those responsible for discrimination should be accountable.

The relevance of this distinction emerges from the Macpherson report's consideration of the recording of a racial incident by the police, officially defined as 'any

ments in international law, a former head of state of Chile is not immune from extradition to face charges of torture. Following the same path, in 1995 the US became the 139th of the UN's 185 member states to ratify the racial convention. Its initial report has been overdue since 1996, but soon it will have to submit to the examination of its record in this connection, which will be a new discipline. Even though it enters extensive reservations when ratifying human rights treaties, and played an unenthusiastic role in the negotiations which led to the drafting of a statute for a new international criminal court, the US supports the international tribunals trying persons accused of human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Recently the highest British court has intervened to protect the rights of women subjected to forced marriages in Pakistan. The US government has similarly protected the human rights of an African woman threatened by genital mutilation in the country of which she is a citizen. So the UK and the US are moving in the same direction.

A human rights framework is better than any national one because it rests on values superior to those of particular countries and regions; it advances legally enforceable definitions of discrimination and obligations of protection; and it dispels the confusions generated by obsolete doctrines of biological difference. The first phase of the human rights movement was one of standard-setting, of persuading states to accept obligations detailed in treaties. The second phase has emphasized oversight of state implementation of these obligations. It leads on to the question of whether other states may intervene in the affairs of a state responsible for gross violations. NATO

intervention in Kosovo is a case in point. Whether the differences between Kosovars and Serbs are racial or ethnic is of no consequence in international law because they are treated as alternative expressions for a single distinction.

The UN is to convene, in 2001, a World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and some of the five regional groups of member states are planning preparatory conferences of their own. In 2001 there will surely be discussion of the lessons to be learned from events in Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda and Indonesia as well as South Africa. Because the idiom of ethnicity is more inclusive than the idiom of race, it will be utilized more often, so that governments will increasingly report on ethnic rather than racial relations. This should help overcome some of the errors generated by theories of racial difference (errors for which many members of a former generation of anthropologists were responsible). Having traditionally sought a universal view of humanity, anthropologists might well consider what they can contribute to the development of human rights perspectives. In my view this development will require the cleaning up of the language in which such matters are discussed, despatching such objectionable expressions as 'mixed race'³ and unpacking the separate meanings that are muddled together in the assumption that the many problems of inter-group relations can properly be categorized as 'matters involving race'. The ultimate objective of 'reporting on race' is to effect conceptual as well as behavioural changes until it is no longer necessary to report on 'race'. □

Michael Banton

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Shamans in the city

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Introduction

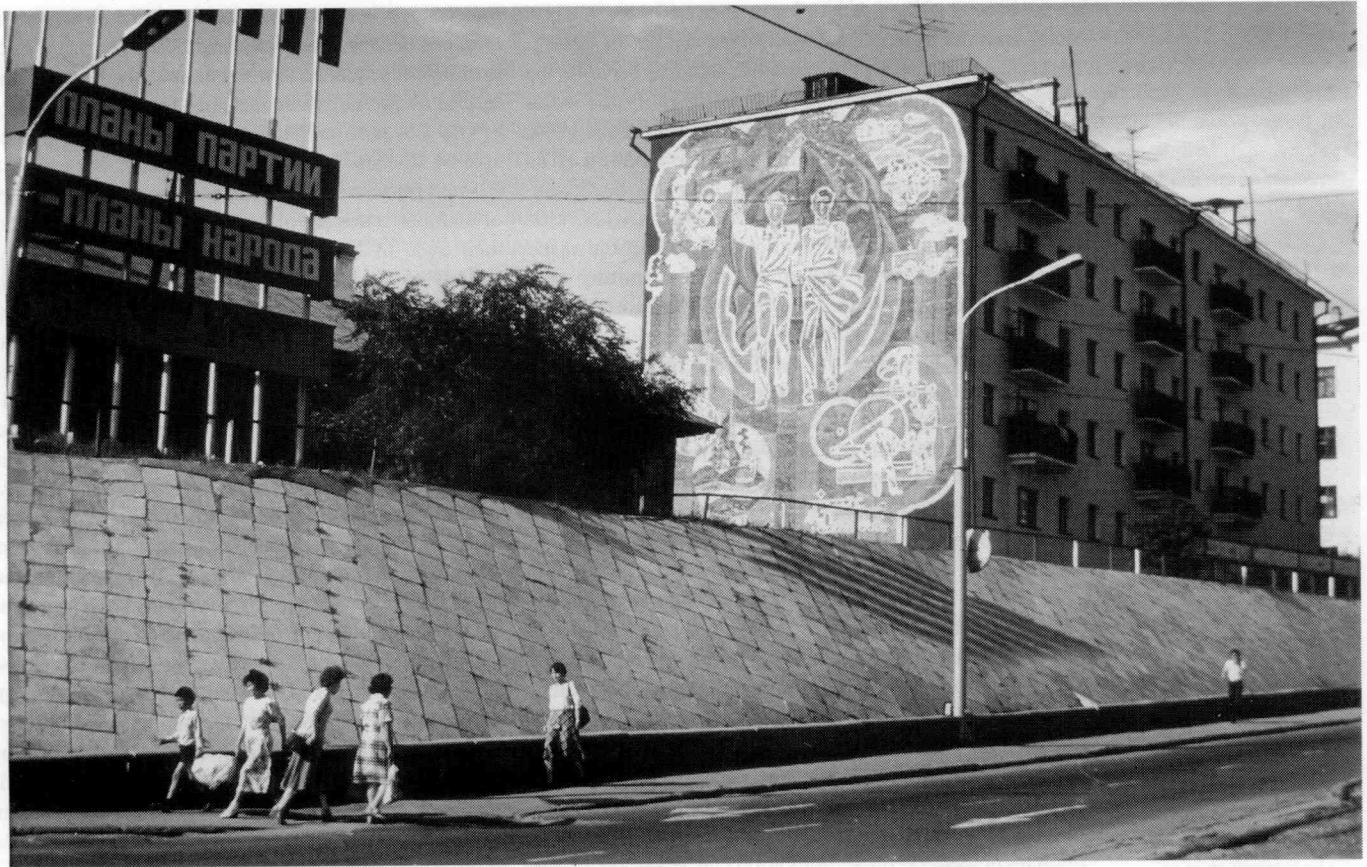
In many Siberian cities it is now normal for anyone with a misfortune or a quandary to visit a shaman. This article discusses Buryat shamans in the city of Ulan-Ude. It does not pretend to analyse shamanic activities in full, but has a quite particular aim, to explore the idea of the city as a place for shamanizing, that is, a place where magical events happen. Although 'urban shamanism' is now a familiar term in the literature (Balzer 1993, Hoppal, 1996, Kendall 1996), little attention has been paid to the meanings places in the city have for shamans and their clients,¹ nor to the way they imagine the relation between the city and surrounding lands.

Buryat shamans used to live dispersed in remote steppes and valleys. The shamanic landscape comprised numerous 'natural' sites, such as sacred mountains, springs, trees or lakes, where ancestral and other spirits were said to dwell. From the 1930s and continuously through the Soviet period shamans were repressed, sent to prison and camps and killed, though shamanic practices continued in the countryside in secret (Zhukovskaya 1996). The shamans described here are those who appeared as if from nowhere in the late 1980s, the magicians of the city. Who are these shamans and what feats do they accomplish in the post-Soviet city?

In brief, the most prominent urban shamans are city born and bred, tend to emerge from the middle-class intelligentsia, and are women as often as men. Their

self-designation as 'shamans' indicates that they claim shamanic descent (*udha*) in either the father's or the mother's line, and they have created a professional association to differentiate themselves against the tide of diverse pretenders, 'ekstra-sensy', and diviners whom they call charlatans. Nevertheless, their reputations derive from particular psychological and psychic help given to individuals, such as spiritual cures or seeing some future event. Group rituals are far fewer than in pre-Soviet times and mostly take place outside the city in honour of ancestors and deities.

Shamans see themselves as forced by powers outside their control (spirits) to serve needy and desperate people. These clients, mostly well-educated and till recently instructed in atheism, are now beset with economic disaster and new uncertainties. They, and often the shamans too, experience a crisis of practice. As a Khakass shaman said, 'Since the sources of true shamanism hardly survive, people who have shamanic abilities cannot really understand what they should be doing. We are pressurized by civilization. It is difficult to combine an atheistic education and a shamanic calling ... some people cannot bear it. A person may lose their mind, or commit suicide' (Korotkova 1998). I heard the same from Buryat shamans. In these circumstances, the people who do become shamans have to be extraordinarily self-confident, resilient, and above all creative, since they must weave together whatever images will produce belief and trust



An example of the urban Buryat landscape, some apartments with murals.

from bewildered disheartened clients. The situation produces what is called 'post-modern shamanism' (Hoppal 1996).² The difficult-to-believe physical feats of the old stories (walking on water, etc.) have been largely jettisoned in favour of vastly expanded 'historical' claims to inspirational power. One contemporary Buryat shaman declared that his roots include, on his mother's side forty-two Khordut shamans going back to Burkhan Khan, King of the Torgut, and on his father's side a line to the 12th Dalai Lama, Geser of Amdo, through the sky-god Esege Malan to Khormuzda and the 'three Zoroastrian fire-worshippers, the Syrian, German and Central Asian', and through the Huns to Attila, all of these existing in a cosmic space which he called the 'noosphere' (Khamgushkeev 1997).

One curious fact emerged from conversations with shamans and rituals I observed in 1996: no shaman ever mentioned that activity by which anthropologists used to define the shaman, flying to 'the other world', i.e. to the sky, or the underworld, or generally to distant cosmological realms. Rather, as was always the main tradition among Buryats, it is the spirit powers that come to the shamans. Meanwhile, the shamans travel in this world, the city and its surroundings.

I shall suggest that the city is not just a backdrop, nor simply an underlying structure. In a sense, of course, the city is a context for shamanic activity. But at the same time shamans themselves 'actualize space' in De Certeau's phrase and thereby create new contexts of the city. In talking about themselves shamans describe their moments of occult triumph, and if we think about what they say it turns out that the incidents of mastery take place in certain culturally highly salient places, such as school, the rock-concert, or the Buddhist monastery. This wizardly domination of place in narrative, a fabulous domination, one might say, contrasts with the shamans' lives and professional practices. These, as we shall see, are partly concealed and partly laid out for consumption. Different contexts are created by narrative and by practice. Yet in both cases, I suggest, shamans vitalize urban contexts by

transmogrification, re-envisioning them in relation to other spaces and times, and turning them into sites of energy where social relations are re-fashioned.

Narratives of the city

A discussion of shamans' narratives involves juxtaposing their accounts with the everyday social activity of the city and the ways in which ordinary people talk about that and the feelings they have about it. Talking about a place is a way to describe social relations going on both inside it and beyond it. Alaina Lemon (1997) developed this point in her work on images of the Moscow metro. 'When it comes to social mediations of space, we need more levels of agency than that proposed in a dyadic relation of individual to built structure: such constructions cross media and genre, and involve many speakers even indirectly' (1997:5). The point is that ordinary people too talk about the city poetically, and, as they mention an object, what they say reverberates with disjunctions between what is and what might be, or ought to be. Their narratives become energized when they cross-cut from the familiar to its politically-charged implications for authority, identity or decency. I suggest that the shamans work in a multivalent way that almost unconsciously catches hold of these everyday 'loaded' images, and attaches them to yet another set of preoccupations, the unseen forces which shamans alone perceive.

Let me take the example of the city bus. A woman of Ulan-Ude wrote to the local newspaper:

A lot of people were waiting at the bus stop. At last the long-awaited communal transport arrived. There were amazingly few people inside, so it was even possible to get a seat by the window. Well, maybe this had been a window, but there was a sheet of iron instead of glass, with a couple of small holes in it. Looking round the bus, you saw a few of these holes, but they were mostly frozen up. Well, it's winter, so what can you expect? Maybe for this reason, it was dark and gloomy in the bus, not a smile, the faces preoccupied. It was quiet, the passengers were silent, and so was the driver. Everyone was thinking their own thoughts.

After a few stops I began to wonder: where are we going? I

crouched to peer through a hole: 'Aha, a known apartment block, I'll have to get out soon.' Meanwhile, the bus had filled up; as usual people took up not only sitting and standing places but also crowded into any possible space for hanging.

At one stop the bus remained standing for ages. It seems one of the doors wouldn't shut. And over the intercom the driver yelled: 'Where are you climbing, fuck your mother! Free the fucking door!' My heart grew sad and I clambered out before my stop. The bus drove off, with its frozen windows, grim people and angry driver. (Perevalova 1994).

This is the narrative of the shaman Nadya Stepanova:

I took a job, I entered the Communist Party, but still I had visions and visions, appearances and appearances, from morning to night. I went in the tram and I saw through the people. In the bus, and I saw everything. I couldn't sit in public transport, I couldn't be with people. What people were thinking and were going to say, I knew it all. I had to go to work on the bus, but after two stops I couldn't take any more, because people have so many evil thoughts. I couldn't stand in a queue. God, I couldn't be anywhere. Once I got off at a stop by a building-site, and the spirits showed me a vision, 'If you don't become a shaman a blue tip-up lorry will come out and kill you.' Vrrr! They showed me a vision of how a massive wheel crushes a human body. So then I decided to become a shaman.

The shaman's narrative here, I think, achieves a forceful validity because it intersects with the familiar image of the bus, which ordinary people can already conceive in a politically-charged way as a microcosm of social ills. The woman took the trouble to write to the paper because she saw her account as the 'prose of life', the bus as the blinded ship of post-Soviet fools. The shaman claims not just to notice angry people but to 'see' them, that is to experience them because she feels inside herself their 'evil thoughts', and she then takes a momentous decision.

The post-Soviet city

Some Russian writers have argued, in a fit of patriotic zeal, that Brezhnev-era towns were post-modern before post-modernism was invented, and that Russians were the first to live through the era of 'fatal banality' and simulacra described by Baudrillard (Boym 1994: 223). Be this as it may with regard to the metropolis, I do not think it is true of the provincial Siberian city. In Ulan-Ude, for example, the capital of the Buryat Republic, modernism reigned and to a great extent still does so. That is, the idea of the city is a modernist one, planned for the purposes of administration, industrialization, education and higher living standards. The city has a centre for government, surveillance, parades and high culture, a commercial area including conserved merchants' houses from the 19th century, then great expanses of communal apartment-blocks, factories and barracks. But in awkward terrain there are interfilations of higgledy-piggledy wooden cottages, known locally as 'impudent houses' (*naxalovki*, from *naxal*, a cheeky person), because they were put up without permission. The city is extraordinarily spread out, partly because it embodies the modernist values of space, light, and grandness, and partly because new factories and institutes were repeatedly sited on the outskirts. The main Buddhist monastery is located some 30 km away. In a Soviet city no-one had a choice about where they lived: you were in the housing queue and you took what you got. For this reason, though a few people live near their work, large numbers have to travel for miles. The bus and the tram are not incidentals to urban life, people spend hours on them every working day. Now, it is mainly commerce and religion that has overturned the accustomed journeys of Soviet times (the bread shop here, a kilometre away the meat shop, the post-office another ten minutes on the bus). Teeming markets, wholesale depots, street traders, the odd

department store, and private services have sprung up, to be swept away by the authorities, then they appear somewhere else again. Defunct Soviet institutions, closed for lack of cash, are metamorphosed: an old swimming-pool now turns out to be a clothes market, a Culture Club now houses an association for lay Buddhists.

The Siberian city, far more than the West European city, stands apart from its surrounding landscape. The suburb as an idea hardly exists. Unfenced pastures start right outside the walls of the apartments. The 'countryside' in Siberia is wild, a forested realm where there really are elk and bears, and where if wolves come and eat your sheep that is bad, but only to be expected. With the tumultuous rivers that pour through it, the built city with its river-banks, bridges, and paved areas, could be seen as a bulwark against the wild. But in fact the city, especially the post-Soviet city, is not entirely a sheltering place.

Bachelard (1994[1958]:6) wrote about the house that it 'shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.' He continued that 'daydreaming has a privilege of autovalorization. It derives direct pleasure from its own being. Therefore the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as day-dreams that these dwelling-places are relived as day-dreams.' Bachelard aimed to show that the house considered poetically has the power to integrate the thoughts, memories and dreams of human-kind, this binding principle being the day-dream. Now the city is unlike the house, in that it alternates violence with shelter, transit with the haven, and the alien and disturbing with the familiar. These days the Soviet master-narrative which gave the city its structural sense and purpose has gone. The individual life, even the family life, with its musings cannot construct an encompassing discourse of the city; or to put this another way, people's everyday experience underdetermines new constructions of the order of the city. I am not trying to argue that the imagination of shamans is somehow a kind of functional response, 're-ordering' the city by providing an integrative principle. Rather, the shamans seem to me to shift the plane on which the city is imagined, cross-cutting from the citizens' direct concerns to a vision in which the city is re-calibrated in space and time; in this shamanic vision the wholeness and bulwark-like quality of the Soviet city is lost, to be re-partitioned and relinked with its hinterland and the wilderness beyond, and thus it is also re-chronologized in relation to ancestral time. The city so imagined is dissolved outwards and backwards in a way that is deeply destabilizing to the public institutions of order, though at the same time these partial shamanic visions are comforting to individual people for a while. I say 'for a while' because the shamanic rituals and explanations have to be constantly renewed.

'Personal myths'

The episode at the bus-stop quoted above is part of the life narrative of the shaman Nadya Stepanova, a genre for which Pluzhnikov (1996) has suggested the term 'personal myth'. This is the auto-account that gives validation to the claim to be a shaman: it describes extraordinary episodes really experienced by the person, magical events that happened in places everyone knows, yet which conform to the cultural standard of the shamanic illness, struggles with spirits, and final acceptance of the role of shaman. I talked mainly to two well-known Buryat shamans, Nadya Stepanova and Eshin-Horloov Dashibalbarovna Tsybykzhapova [also called Zoya]. Both are women aged around 50, Nadya perhaps the more traditional and Zoya

the more exuberantly militant. Both described school as a crucial first site in the personal myth, the place where childish competitiveness revealed to each that they had extraordinary powers. In Zoya's case it was abnormal physical strength, when she nearly killed another little girl in the playground. Nadya, when only a small girl, could 'see' what would happen and what other people thought. When she was tested along with the class, she could stand up and before her eyes a whole page would be there, with all the blots and uneven letters, and she could effortlessly read it out to the teacher.

When she was a little older Nadya was visited by more disturbing visions, a creature with striped, hairy arms, a black man constantly following her, and religious elders in the family said she would become a shaman. Nadya's mother refused this future for her daughter and set off for her ancestral village in Kabansk district to hold a ritual to cut off shamanic spirit links. She came back to the city and said the ritual had been done. Immediately Nadya had a huge flow of scarlet menstrual blood. This the mother interpreted as a cleansing of spirit powers. But still Nadya was tortured by visions, and still her mother would not even consider the possibility she should become a shaman. Nadya reached the age of around 30 and her mother was struck paralysed. They took her mother to the hospital, which now became the place of proof of the occult, for here the doctors measured the mother's blood-pressure and it was completely normal. Nadya told me, 'It was 120/80, and the doctors were amazed. I didn't really understand at the time. I thought she was somehow guilty, but now I know that this was proof the gods had punished her, because she was against me becoming a shaman.'

The mother died and soon Nadya herself become ill with terrible headaches, a burst ear-drum. She went to the hospital, and now the doctors were unable to cope. They said she had appendicitis, 'Go and get in the queue and have it out.' Nadya laughed. 'But my blood-pressure was sky-high, over 200. They saw I was in a bad way and gave me injections, but it went even higher, 260, 280. 'Go home', they said. 'Go home to die,' I thought. 'Go, go,' they said, 'we can't do anything for you.' So I went home naturally, and there my husband invited a clear-seer (*yasnovidayushchii*). He said I must become a shaman.'

In these incidents, the school and the hospital – two paradigmatic Sovietizing institutions – are set up as doubly validating places. On the one hand, the teachers and doctors provide the evidence for shamanic power, which here bases itself on super-excellence, or confounding the grading provided by the normal authority of reading and measuring. On the other hand, the teachers and doctors are quite simply vanquished in the play of power.

The other shaman, Zoya, described to me stark shamanic battles. One took place at *tusovka* basement, a hang-out for a youth gang, at a rock-concert, when Zoya was coming to terms with her visions and abilities before she formally became a shaman. She said, 'When I came in there was a Russian lad, Volodya. He says he is a clear seer but he turned out to be just an ordinary black sorcerer. As soon as he saw me he started to move his arms and twist and I "saw" he was sitting on my heart chakra, and was pressing, choking me. [...] To my luck some friends of mine came in, and it got lighter in that basement, so they started the concert. As soon as the music started something pulled me. I couldn't sit down, I moved to the music. At that, the sorcerer stood up. And all the rest of that crowd, a hundred or more, were sitting, and we two alone, we danced to the music. They started to pray, "Om, Mani, Badme, Hum", and suddenly he tore off his shirt and stands before me, naked to the waist, threatening with his fists. And I, also in a trance, throw off my skirt, fling off

my boots, and face him! [laughs] The important thing is, I was standing in front of a group that had come in, Radi Yogis³ visiting from Khabarovsk, ten of them, and I stood in front like their leader. And then it started, real oriental martial wrestling, my legs and arms moved I don't know how, and he did the same. It was fantastic, and those lads behind me smiled and silently prayed, and when they reached "*O Gospodi, s ushi prosti menya greshnego*" (O God, forgive me a sinner), he fell over on his knees on the floor and he did not get up. That was fantastic!'

After this defeat of the Russian sorcerer, Zoya travelled and performed with the Radi Yogis around Siberian towns. One day as she was sitting at home by her altar praying, three men appeared, two Buryats and a Mongol Buddhist lama. They had found her by consulting Buddhist astrological texts, which also predicted that she would be able remove evil spirits that had caused a son and daughter-in-law to be killed in an accident. Subsequently, Zoya travelled all over Russia with this Mongol lama, conducting prayers and cures. 'Let's go to Moscow, you can be my interpreter', he said. Zoya laughed when she described this to me. 'I was then the Party Secretary of the Irrigation Department of Buryatia! It was like a fable – three travelling gnomes arrive by magic and force that sitting person to do something.'

'But like it or not', she continued, 'It was the time of perestroika and they were closing down all sorts of Soviet institutions, so I took up work with that lama.'

It would take many pages to describe Zoya's adventures as she travelled the length and breadth of Russia with the lama. The main point is that in these 'personal myths' we see a constant shifting from the mundane to the occult, e.g. from the Russian lad called Volodya to the black sorcerer, from the basement hang-out to the site of a great magic victory. For Zoya, the shedding of the Soviet identity of Party Secretary for that of travelling assistant exorcist is at the same time quite matter-of-fact (she could see the writing on the wall for her job with the Communist Party) and also mysterious, since it was by astrological divination that the three strangers had discovered Zoya's obscure dwelling.

Travels: conquering significant spaces

Zoya eventually jettisoned the Mongol lama, who had become obsessively interested in her as a woman, and one of her greatest moments, I think not at all by accident, took place in the Buddhist monastery at Ivogla just outside the city of Ulan-Ude. Buddhism from the 18th century onwards largely swamped shamanism in many areas of Buryatia. Entirely destroyed in the late 1930s, Buddhism was established again in etiolated form by the Soviets after the Second World War. Thereafter it was subordinated to the state. Today the Buddhist establishment is divided but the religion is identified with Buryat national aspirations (Zhukovskaya 1992) and the government still attempts to keep it in close control.

That Zoya's first public shamanic deed took place at the monastery was therefore important. She told me:

In 1991, when I was not yet a curing shaman and didn't understand myself, there were four of us, all Buryats, who went to the monastery to pray. We were in the main hall of the temple, and suddenly I don't know what is happening to me, but I stand up and I raise my arm. And I see there is a great round drum hanging, and it draws me to it. I ask the old lama sitting there, 'May I go up?' 'You may,' and he wipes his eyes and looks at me aghast. And I go up, though not with my own woman's steps but with a majestic male stride, – it was Geser Khan, you see – and I take hold of the drum and make three booming strikes. My body was visited by Geser Khan, come down to earth!

Geser Khan, I should explain, is *not* a shamanic spirit,



but a hero of oral epics widely known in Asia, especially in Tibet, and often depicted as an enemy of Buddhism. So here was a woman shaman, possessed by a male spirit, and not any male but a virile, militant hero, who dared strike the sacred drum of the dozing lamas.

Significantly, in several of the post-Soviet Asian republics, not only in Buryatia, but also in Tyva, Kyrgyzia, the Altai, Kalmykia and Kazakhstan, it is this type of mythic hero who has been appropriated from epic narrative and turned into the spirit of the nation (Hamayon 1997). In Buryatia in summer 1995, some years after Zoya's adventure in the monastery, local authorities decided to hold a series of ceremonies in honour of Geser, and a banner embodying his spirit was ritually honoured throughout the country, passing from district to district in a series of ceremonies.

Zoya was alert to such cultural currents of the times. Her homeland in Eastern Buryatia is not one of the Buryat regions where the Geser epic is known, and in fact she used not a native Buryat but a Russian pronunciation of his name. 'Geser Khan' is therefore, like other deities called on by Zoya (the Goddess Green Tara, the Archangel Michael, Japanese Samurai, and some beings she called 'Autopilots of the Cosmos'), an image appropriated from the media that has aroused people's curiosity.

Both Nadya and Zoya operate with a combination of individual shamanic spirits and international or universal 'deities'. With Nadya the construction seems more traditional, i.e. ancestral clan spirits on the one hand and a deity she calls Blue Eternal Sky on the other. In Zoya's more eclectic practice, the individual spirits are the clients' previous incarnations, hidden earlier selves which lie within the personality and haunt this life. Zoya 'draws them out' and voices their songs or shrieks of pain, often to the shock of clients whose 'past' is thus rudely revealed.

Shamanic practice

I want now to turn from what shamans say about themselves to what I was able to observe about how they live and their activities. Perhaps Zoya was so impressed with her own boldness in the guise of Geser Khan because it

contrasts with the general invisibility and secretness of shamans' lives as people. It is true that there is an Association of Shamans in Ulan-Ude, founded by Nadya around 1992, with some forty members. The Association has premises in a former student hostel. Here shamans each have a consulting-room, and they hang notices on the door stating their names, hours of work and divinatory techniques (e.g. 'seeing' in vodka, using playing cards, or arrangements of stones). The point of this is to let the clients know what items they should bring to the session. (In Tyva, I am informed, a similar association of shamans in the city of Kyzyl in 1993 was more commercial: the notices read: Shaman X, cleansing demons from the home: 20,000 rubles, Shaman Y sending off the soul of the dead: 50,000 rubles, and so forth).⁴ In Ulan-Ude in the early-1990s long queues would form at the Association from 5 or 6 in the morning, and a row of cars would be waiting outside in the hope of taking a shaman off to treat a patient at home. But by the summer of 1996 the Association had fallen somewhat by the wayside, if not closed entirely. The shamans in it quarrelled, and many well-known shamans never joined anyway. Nadya ceased to be the President. So to visit a shaman like Nadya or Zoya you have to seek them out, you have to know people who know them, who can lead you to where they are staying.

Shamans seem to live in the interstices of the city: Nadya's family has an 'impudent' house in Naxalovka, and both she and Zoya work professionally from transient borrowed flats or hired rooms in the great, grey expanse of apartments. Svetlana Boym (1994: 140) has written of how there was no mediating space in Soviet Russia between the public and the private, no space of conventional socialization; you were either in the space of official decorum or in the nooks of domesticity. Any other space, like the hallways or backyards of apartment blocks, was a space of alienation, belonging to everyone and no-one, and often a hang-out for drunks and strewn with rubbish and graffiti. Boym was writing about houses, but if we extend her idea to the city and post-Soviet times then I think we can perceive several such alienated spaces. Of course there are many public institutions which have now closed, such as kindergartens, swimming baths or clubs, and these have now been taken over by impermanent commercial enterprises. But in the suburban dwelling zones, where people live, a prime example of alienated space is the former student hostel. It is from a tiny third floor flat in such a place that Nadya operates, in a huge, dusty, half-inhabited block, past a grim and silent guardian, along unlit corridors and beyond heaps of lumber and fallen plaster.

If the shaman's working place in the plan of the city is anonymous and difficult to find, the use of space within is a strange transformation of the domestic. Nadya's working flat is an ordinary one, with a kitchen cum living-room and a toilet. But in contrast to the inturned, curtained cosiness of domesticity, here the kitchen window is flung right open – because from it Nadya throws her libations of vodka and milk to the spirits. The gas stove is used for offerings of meat and fat to the fire god. The chair opposite the window is where the client sits in bowed, suppliant pose, while Nadya stalks the room loudly calling on the spirits. One woman came with pains in her legs and back. Like Lévi-Strauss's famous shaman-trickster, Nadya purified the patient's body with sacred smoke, and then kneeling down, she went over the body sucking out the harmful 'something'. Suddenly, she leapt to her feet with dramatic retching noises and rushed to the toilet, and we heard her flushing whatever 'it' was away.

In this transformation of the hostel flat into a

1. See, however, Kuczynski (1988) on African marabouts in Paris.

2. Hoppal means by this phrase shamanism that has survived modernity. He distinguishes the continuous traditions of places like Korea from the revived traditions of Siberian regions like Sakha or Tyva, and both of these from 'neo-shamanism', the reinvention of shamanism in Europe, America and parts of Russia where shamanic practices were almost obliterated.

3. One of the numerous cultic groups at large in Russia in the mid-1990s. The government has since tried to limit the activities of such groups.

4. Agnieszka Halemba, private communication.

5. Stefan Krist, private communication.

6. Terms for spiritual energies in Buddhist idiom.

professional work-space, we seem to see a new stripped-down privateness to the shaman's activities. Certainly, elaborate costumes, drumming, and above all the presence and participation of an audience – the 'society' which according to some theories of shamanism is supposed to be so essential to validating the shaman's efforts – has all gone. Perhaps this can again be related to post-Soviet sensibilities. Years of enforced communality, living in hostels, barracks and communal flats, has left people hyper-sensitive to privacy, afraid of being spied upon, embarrassed, or roughly judged or envied by the surrounding crowd. Boym perceptively suggested that what people seek nevertheless is often an alternative sociality, rather than complete solitude. 'Secrecy in the communal apartment,' she has written, 'was a game of searching for alternative communalities.' Boym described how in her own collective kindergarten the children had a secret ritual of burying little fetish objects, and this was a shared knowledge, a bond between friends. It was designed against the teacher, who invariably found it out in the end. 'This secrecy is not solitary', Boym writes (1994: 146). I think that the privacy of the visit to the shaman is somewhat similar, though here the alternative bond is not projected inwards to buried fetishes but projected outwards as a compact to counteract the evil perceived in the city and the wilderness beyond it.

Zoya described how an unknown woman who intruded into her home one evening turned out to be a 'stalking vampire, like a vacuum cleaner who sucked up alien energies', how as she was going out this woman left behind 'two dark-blue eyes and a dark-blue nose', and the din as this being (*sushchestvo*) flew into Zoya and penetrated her: 'Gospodi, mama! if you could only imagine what it was like – a burning light bulb, as though every atom within me was burning like light bulbs, a terrible pain. Inside me was such a colour-music (*svetomuzyka*), even on television you cannot imagine such a thing.'

Here, an urban imagination (vacuum cleaner, light bulb, atoms, television) heightens the image of intrusion and crystallizes a fear that seems to be more common than in the past, of sorcery or spells attributed to the evil intentions of living people rather than to ancestral spirits. Zoya said someone must have sent to woman to attack her. This seems to be a general dread, not limited to the city (see Lacaze (1996), writing about a remote region of Mongolia, who explains the increased fear of maledictions (*xaraal*) as the outcome of a 'revenge perspective' among ordinary people).

The urban shaman nevertheless mainly sees the causes for misfortune in ancestral beings; this opens up the alternative sociality of personal links between clients and spirits in the wilderness beyond the city. I was present when another woman patient came to Nadya's consulting room with a sad problem: her daughter had had a miscarriage and she had come to discover the cause. Having called her own spirits and made a libation, Nadya asked the woman for the name of her grandfathers on both sides, her grandmothers, great-grandparents, and the villages where they lived. The woman grew distraught, because she did not know. Nadya tried to visualize the ancestors, to provoke the woman's memory, but it did not work. In the end, the woman was dismissed and Nadya told her to come back only when she had the information. Other people told me that this woman must have been a fool, because everyone knows that you have to visit your relatives and find out about your ancestors before going to a shaman.

Taken together, the preoccupation with 'evil thoughts' and ancestral causes provide interesting illumination of the social relations of the city. First, the people in the city

are crowded together, but not with people they choose or want to live with. Those who do have individual flats, nowadays the majority, exchange barely a civil nod with the people who have been allocated to live next door. The city neighbourhood is hardly an operative idea in present Russia. It is true that the fall of Soviet power has seen a return of street-life to the city (bazaar, hawkers and sellers), but so far these have not created friendly conviviality – more the opposite, suspicion, conviction that one will be cheated by anonymous others, and a determination to find some other, private and 'reliable' way. Secondly, most Buryats came to live in the city from the 1960s onwards, and therefore virtually all of the ancestors and ancestral places are located outside the city, at scattered villages and settlements miles away.

So by insisting that clients recall their ancestors, what the shamans are doing is re-linking individual city people through half-forgotten familial ties with sacred-scary places in the countryside. This has to be done in order to discover the cause of misfortune in shamanic idiom. The shamanic construction of causality is that otherwise inexplicable happenings are brought about by the vengeance of neglected spirits, these being the souls of dead humans transformed by ancient injustices into the touchy 'masters' of mountains, rocks, trees, or springs. Nadya told me that a shaman needs to find out who a client's ancestors are, first, in order to know who that person is, an identity quite separate from the client's job, class, education or personality as evidenced in the city. The naming of ancestral sites narrows the field for the shaman to discover which spirit of the wild may have caused to trouble. When the offended spirit has been revealed, the shaman commonly orders the client to go out to the mountain (tree, etc.) residence of the spirit and perform the ritual called *alban*, which means duty, service or tribute. *Alban* is a sacrifice, usually conducted by another country shaman, with the aim of giving acknowledgement and respect to the neglected spirit (Zhukovskaya 1996). Even out on the mountainside, this ritual is not collective in the sense of gathering the whole local community together; it was described to me how a shaman in the Aga District performed five separate rites in a row, each for a different family.⁵

By insisting on these country links, the shamans reconceptualize and segment the city, so it is now composed of individuals belonging to familial or descent groups whose origins lie far away. Another way of putting this is that the city becomes a place whose citizens' mysterious misfortunes are caused from outside and within a time frame that reaches far into the past.

All this is happening when the balance of city-rural relations is deeply problematic. During most of the Soviet period, with its food shortages and queues, residents of the city used to rely on country relatives for meat, butter, flour, cheese and so forth, all staples of diet. Rural people relied on city relatives for manufactures, favours with officials, and the chance to squeeze into the city as a family member. But during the stable post-Khrushchev years perhaps it would be true to say that the ties slackened, since city food supplies were adequate and residence permits were brought into force to prevent rural-urban migration. In post-Soviet times the balance has tipped further in the favour of the city. The city is the only place where there is money, markets are full of goods and food, even if many people cannot afford them, and urban people all have vegetable plots for subsistence. Residence regulations have been tightened further, explicitly to keep the country cousins out. It is country people who are dependent now, desperate for the circulating life-bloods of the contemporary world: money, electricity, petrol and

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- information, all of which come from the city.
- Yet the shamans are insisting on something more than an urban-rural exchange, since the ancestral sites are shared with networks of kin (some of whom may live at the village while others will be scattered all over the place) and the fortune of all of them depends on observance of the rituals. Appadurai (1996: 179) has written of how *rites de passage* 'produce locality' in a world where the notion of neighbourhood is threatened. Even in small-scale societies, he writes, locality cannot be taken for granted, but rather regular work is needed to maintain it (1996: 180). This insight is useful in discussing the post-Soviet case, where the locality being produced is the more fragile for having to unite spatially dispersed people, and furthermore is entangled in city-countryside dependencies and enmities. It is significant that villagers now often invite city shamans to revivify spirit relations. Nadya told me, for example, how she was invited in 1995 to a village in Bichura District, where people had forgotten their ancestors, to help their local shaman with a ritual to 'smooth over the fault'. Three mountain spirits were called forth. 'They arrived,' said Nadya, 'Dirty, small. There was a taller white one, looking displeased. They all came in greasy clothes, in patches. And the place was dirty too, bottles, stuff thrown everywhere. I was sorry for them. I told the local shaman, 'You must clear up this place. The spirits are complaining.' Through my conversations with them I opened up cleanliness (*chistota*), cleanliness of thought, of deeds, and of desires.'
- Both Nadya and Zoya were consecrated as shamans in rituals at their parents' villages, where their own ancestral spirits have residence. But relations here are quite tense and ambiguous, as we saw when Nadya's mother tried to cut off the link. When the citified shamans go uninvited and without a special tie to worship, say, at a famous sacred mountain, they are bound to fall foul of one of the innumerable rules for correct ritual behaviour. This is pounced upon by the local shamans, who say the city shamans are not genuine and blame them for all sorts of misfortunes. For example, a three-year drought in the distant Tunka Valley is said to have been caused by the dreadful ritual mistake of a self-declared Buryat shaman, formerly a professor of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, who being a woman, climbed up a sacred mountain prohibited to women.
- It is possible that this professor was quite frightened by the torrent of hate unleashed by her act, as she now declares she is not a shaman, just someone who studies and appreciates shamanism. Here we could remember what Raymond Williams (1973) wrote about the characteristic attitudes of people in the rapidly industrializing city. There is a confidence that humanity can re-make the world but at the same time a new fear of wild places. If we are justified in drawing a parallel with the Soviet city, which reinforced a confidence in re-fashioning the world with the ideology of communism, we should remember what Williams added: that the power to re-make the world is always ambiguous, as is the choice whether to re-make it or not, since it must always run up against the pieties and habitudes of previous generations.
- Now, in post-Soviet Russia the days of modernizing utopian dreams are definitively gone. '*Glasnost*' (openness) as Boym remarks (1994: 228), was not an ideology of newness. But curiously, in the hands of urban shamans, I have observed, there is not much of a return to history either. Rather, the past is sucked up into the present, horizontalized, and de-linked from time. Thus though the shamans of the city have to operate with the spirits of the wild, they tend to play down their ancestral historicity (e.g. they do not cite genealogies). In fact, going through my notes I noticed that it was mostly I who used the word 'ancestors', while the shamans more often talked of a range of atemporal spirit beings ('gods', 'powers', 'masters' etc.). Furthermore, there is a tendency when shamans talk to the anthropologist, as opposed to the client, to downplay the spirits of the wild and foreground other, de-localized international, or abstract powers. Zoya explained to me:
- I came to understand that a person born in a given place, like it or not, inevitably absorbs the energy of that place. So I am grateful to the ancestors, as you call them, because they awakened me, raised me up, pushed me, and made me. And so it happened that the more I rose up and grew from that energy I also activated them and also raised them up together with myself. And it turns out, whether they like it or not, that it is not I who am dependent on them, but they who are dependent on me. You see! It is not they, the dead, who command me, but I who command them. And you see, it is not just them, but all kinds of forces that go through me, *idaky* and *sakhiusy*⁶ and shamanic spirits, all of them.
- And in what we might see as an echo of the city's pre-eminence in sources of energy, surrounded by the desperate country people, she continued:
- That growling dirty voice of mine, when I was singing, that was the dirty spirits, the shamanic ones, who don't want to go away, and attach themselves to us living people their own descendants, and destroy our energy.
- This statement is quite clear, but in much of what the shamans said it was impossible to tell whether they were talking about traditional shamanic spirits or the unkind, cruel thoughts of living people, the evil powers which so oppressed Nadya on the bus. With both of these urban shamans there was a kind of narrative in which wild spirits were conflated with human evil, and thus were to be overcome in an internal spiritual battle. Perhaps this is a new departure in shamanism, and certainly it is at odds with the construction of the *alban* ritual in which clients are instructed to worship and respect the spirits in the mountains. For Zoya, in a turn that I think would have been quite foreign to the people of the village, the shaman ancestor spirits even became the enemies of shamanism (i.e. the new shamanism as she conceived it). She described a battle with evil forces within her:
- And what do you know, one wonderful day, in the cloudy shadows, it was as if there were two Eshin-Horloo [her Buryat name], one in white clothing and one in black. And the one in white, stretched her hand to set fire to the one in black, to annihilate her, and it turned out that I was neutralizing, with my own will, consciously all that was within me that was negative towards shamanism.
- She continued that the shamanism of the dirty spirits is a terrible thing, which must be re-created and re-thought, working together with the light forces of nature. And she quoted to me a poem she had composed last summer, which was a strange thing, a shaman's poem as it were against shamanism:
- Ne budut nad mirom zloveishchyi bubny stuchat'*
A budet molitva svyataya,
A budet v serdte sily, kotoruyu nam nado znat'
Chto by istina stala siyaya
 (No longer will evil drums ring out over the world
 But there will be sacred prayer,
 And in the heart will be powers, which we need to know,
 In order for the genuine truth to shine out)
- If all this suggests a new energized shamanism purifying the old, its other face is a yearning towards powers of world significance. In the following account Zoya interestingly sees herself not in active, mobile shamanic mode, but as grounded, receptive, childlike. 'At six in the morning,' she said, 'I was just awake you understand, lying there, and I began to see the face. A huge, dark-blue

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face, nearly a metre, the face of Archangel Michael. I felt I could talk to him, telepathically. I said, 'Show me the world'. I felt someone was turning me over on my back. I saw myself, as a one-year old girl, a tiny girl, looking upwards somewhere, and people in a whitish mist were swimming like fish, all naked, in a whitish fog, that's how the world appeared to me. I was not frightened and I felt I knew that being. Oh, he had a handsome, bearded European face and I knew it was the Archangel, no-one else. From these meetings with him everything changed for me.'

Perhaps, the city itself as a pool of diverse, rather de-racinated clients, constitutes the wider neighbourhood of interpretation which desires such images. Note that the poem was composed in Russian, and that three-quarters of the city population is Russian. I once asked a Buryat friend whether the Buryats accept as genuine such 'deities' as Geser Khan, the Archangel Michael, or the Autopilots of the Cosmos. To my surprise, he replied that there was no question; Buryats would be disappointed if their shamans did not have such gods, because this demonstrates their breadth and capacity. Here we have to understand first, that after generations of Soviet schooling many urban Buryats, especially the young, know extraordinarily little about their earlier culture and are easily convinced about what it may have contained, and second, that Buryat people, including shamans, see shamanism as a religion on a par with Christianity and Buddhism (Khagdayev

1998) and they are proud that Russians and people of other nationalities consult Buryat shamans.

To conclude: it seems that people enjoy the shamans' magical incidents of destabilization of Soviet and Buddhist contexts (the school, the hospital, the monastery) and their re-vitalization as sites of spiritual vigour. By these narratives and events the city is 'actualised' as a new, occultized locale. But it is thereby also put into a wider context; in other words, perception of evil and misfortune in the city implies an awareness of relational flows of spirit power from outside. This seems to resonate with the economic-political relations of the city with the countryside. The tendency for general disintegration in post-Soviet society is very pervasive, and the notion of the city as bulwark against outsiders has been reinforced by post-Soviet legislation (against migrants, foreign traders, refugees). Shamanic practice undermines this particular division. But the city shamans' perception, of their own cleansing and re-vivifying power in the villages, often runs up against the continuities of country people's practices. Here I have tried to give an impression of how these complex relations are actualized in both narrative and practice. Urban shamans on the one hand create city people as *re-territorialized* subjects, attached by familial ties to sacred places in the wild outside, and on the other themselves become channels for *de-territorialized* gods of the contemporary world, which exert benign power in international space. □

The politics of teaching

and the myth of hybridity

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Projections

The challenges relating to the production of academic anthropological knowledge, the reiteration of cultural differences, and the political issues which surround the historical predicament of colonization and its postcolonial legacy, have been acknowledged as an integral part of our academic discipline in the field and in our writing,¹ but little has been said relating to the relevance of such issues in the context of our everyday academic pursuits in universities. In addition, although much ink has been expended discussing the displacement of knowledge, and the lack of coevalness, that exist between the anthropologist and the observed, little attention has been directed towards the effects of this displacement in the context of teaching anthropology. That the action of writing anthropological texts is not the same as taking notes, and that both these processes are, in turn, different from doing fieldwork, had long been acknowledged. Presenting to students material from such texts, written by others, or indeed introducing material from one's own fieldwork, reflects yet another level of displacement. The lecture theatre or seminar room could thus, in some contexts, be seen as a site of fieldwork in miniature, where the enactment or expression of orientalisms and occidentalisms are also evident. As an extension, the issue of essentialization (of identity, of 'tradition', of political context) also gains particular poignancy. I shall focus more specifically on the teaching of African material within academic institutions, and the anthropological discipline in particular, although the issues raised here are probably by no means unique to

this particular ethnographic region or this academic discipline. One of the major issues to be addressed relates to the kind of knowledge to be imparted, and to the obviously different expectations (and constraints) of students and lecturer. What should the role of the anthropologist be in the context of academic teaching? Are we simply there to communicate knowledge grounded in the discipline itself, or should contemporary issues which are (at least in the lecture theatre, as opposed to the field) no more than tangential to our subject be incorporated into the teaching situation?

My first experience of teaching anthropology in a British academic institution confronted me with these issues at a most personal level. Having at the time recently returned from an extended period of fieldwork in West Africa, I was offered the opportunity of teaching at a British university. It became clear during my very first encounter with my students that I was not involved in the simple teaching of an academic subject relating to Africa, but that issues of identity, of cultural belonging, and of definition of self and other, at personal, dialectical and political levels, and condensed in a racialist discourse, were deeply implicated. The group I taught comprised approximately thirty students, most of them seemingly 'white' of various European backgrounds, some exchange students on Erasmus programmes, along with six students of African, Afro-Caribbean or 'mixed' origin, as they described themselves during mutual introductions on our first teaching encounter. All these latter students were, by their own accounts, born in Britain. Admittedly, my orig-