

# Margins of Power

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## The constitution and contestation of Darhad shamans' power in contemporary Mongolia

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zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde vorgelegt von

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The picture on the title page shows the shaman Moko's son who, the morning after his father's seance, donned his father's shamanic headgear and shamanized with a cooking pot lid (Ulaanbaatar, 29.10. 2003).

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Ichinhorol, Byenda, Enhjargal and Dangaa, Tsevegдорж, Пүрев *emch*, Seseer, Erdenchimeg, Jüree, Oyun, Höörög, Chuluunbaatar, Jumrai, Sanjim and Chuluujii, Oyunbadam and Erdenee, Gombo and Tsendelii, J. Bat, Erdenchimeg and Zayaa, Bayandalai and Tsetsegmaa, Bayarhüü, Buyantogtoh, Renchindavaa and Sesegee, Baljinnyam *bagsh*, Mishig *darhan*, Ganbaa, Dejid, Avid, Batbayar and Bayaraa, Battogtoh, Otgoo, Bayarmaa and Chukuu, Ulaana, Achahaa, Maama, Gulig, Erdenbayar and Tungalag, Dolgorsüren, Төмөрбаатар, Dorjпalam and Nyamsüren, Puntsagyondon, Hoiga and Oyuntsetseg, Hürel, Tsehee and Ölzii, Ölziisaihan, Jargalsaihan, Basbish and Maroshya, Oyunsüren, Oyungerel, Seseer, Gürbaazar, Argshaa, Bayraa, Dүjii, Buyant, Gajii and Zayaa, Dashpuntsag and Byambaa, Gansüh and Otgonnyam, Tuya, Terbish and Oyundalai, Төмөр, Erdensüh, Önröö and Төмрөө, Battsetseg, Davaanyam and Hongorzul. I apologize for misunderstandings and for interpretations they might not share.

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## Note on transcription and translations

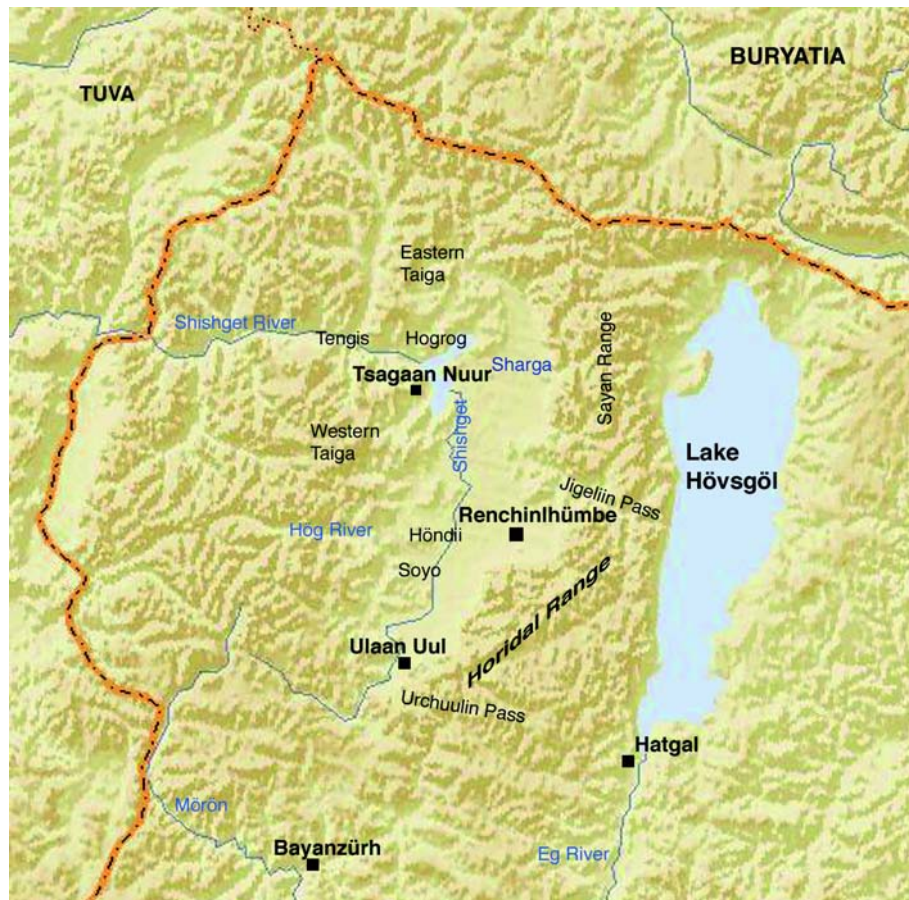
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The transliteration of Mongolian terms is based on the Mongolian Cyrillic script and mainly follows the rules proposed by Gaunt and Bayarmandakh (2004). I diverge from it for well-known terms and names (for example, I write “Chinggis Khaan” and “Buryat”). When I refer to other literature, I often follow the transliterations used in the cited works. The translations of chants and interview passages based on my records and notes of conversations conducted in Mongolian are mine; I usually translate the contents into English and add the central terms in Mongolian. Throughout the text, I distinguish between “Mongolian” and “Mongol”: I use the term “Mongolian” to refer to the twentieth century nation-state, but I employ the term “Mongol” to relate to a cultural idea of Mongolness including Mongols outside the borders of present-day Mongolia. Similarly, I write “Tyva” to refer to the Tyva Republic of the Russian Federation (often called Tannu-Tuva in English) and I apply the term “Tuva” to address the reindeer herders who are associated with the former Tannu-Urianhai, although they are Mongolian citizens. Following Humphrey and Sneath (1999), I use the term “Inner Asia” to refer to Mongolia and neighboring Mongol influenced areas like Buryatia, Tyva, and Inner Mongolia. With the term “shaman” I name those female and male inspirational practitioners who are, in Mongolian, termed *böö* (gender neutral term), *udgan* (female shaman) or *zairan* (male shaman among the Darhad); or who are simply called *bööldög хүн*, “shamanizing persons”. Like the shamans, I address with the word *ongod* both a singular spirit and the plural of it.

# Maps



Map 1: Mongolia.



Map 2: The Darhad area: the Shishget depression and Lake Hövsgöl.

## Introduction: power of the margins

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*My thesis is concerned with the constitution of shamans' inspirational power and the control of the shamans' social power by discursive strategies of marginalization. I study the practices of contemporary Darhad shamans in northern Mongolia in relation to the wider social context. I show how discourses in local, national, and international arenas produce the shamans' power and at the same time confine it to the social, geographical, and temporal margins. By this discursive marginalization, the Darhad shamans are, as a contrasting foil, related to the very constitution of the twentieth-century nation-state. While in socialist Mongolia the shamans served to characterize the Darhad as the "backward" antipode of modernization, they have recently become revalued as a "national tradition" associated with "purity" and "the wild". Individual Darhad actors use these margins of power to establish precarious reputations as powerful shamans. In this introduction, I outline the development of my main arguments and give a brief summary of the organization of the chapters.*

In the introduction to *"Shamanism, History, and the State"*, Thomas and Humphrey (1996) advocate the recontextualization of shamanic practice within its respective historically constituted political and social conditions. They criticize that scholars have been preoccupied with the search for the essence of shamanism, for the shaman's ecstasy, psychology, and healing and that they have surrounded the figure of the shaman with a coherent "belief system". Instead of viewing shamans as residues of "archaic" forms of religion the authors suggest approaching shamans "as political actors, as mediators of historically constituted social contradictions and resistances" (Thomas and Humphrey 1996: 1). This request was anticipated by famous ethnographies that are situated outside the area of "classical" shamanism studies in Siberia and Inner Asia, in particular on the margins of Columbia (Taussig 1987), and Indonesia (Atkinson 1989; Tsing 1993). These authors have related shamans' practices to the wider social processes, to competing agencies of power in local arenas as well as to the larger context of the state. Following their example, I set out to study the practices of Darhad shamans in relation to power and the state under the particular conditions of postsocialism. To do so, I spent a year between 2002 and 2004 in the Darhad homeland, the Shishget depression to the west of Lake Hövsgöl in the northern part of the province Hövsgöl; I completed my research in the provincial capital, Mörön, and Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, shamans reemerged on public stages in Siberia and Inner Asia. The resurgence surprised outsiders, as for several decades shamans' practices had been thought of as a historical phenomenon of archaic societies, brought to extinction by socialist repression. Only during the 1990s did socialist scholars disclose that

they had discreetly met with shamans throughout the Soviet period (see Hoppál 1992a). When shamans emerged in public arenas of Siberia and Inner Asia after 1990, the international scholarly interest “re-discovered” their practices as objects of field studies. Usually, the reappearance of shamans is explained as a reaction to the demise of socialist anti-religious policy and is related to the new democracy and freedom of religion that motivated shamans to emerge “from the shadow to the light” (Merli 2006, title; Hoppál 1996; Balzer 1999). This explanation is only partially satisfying because it presumes the return to presocialist religious practice to be “natural”. Moreover, the reference to Western democracies is puzzling, as these have not been associated with the adherence to religion but, on the contrary, with increasing secularization.

The example of the recent reemergence of shamans in South Korea suggests that the causal argumentation needs to be differentiated. In South Korea, shamans’ practices had also been ridiculed as “backward superstition” for decades until they came to the attention of folklorists and historians. Subsequently, shamans performed collective rituals on public stages during the 1980s and came to be celebrated as part of “traditional culture” and “national treasure” (Kendall 2001). The almost parallel change in the appreciation of shamans in Korea points to the more general implications of the resurgence of shamanism in Siberia and Inner Asia. In particular, it points to the connection of shamans’ practices to new processes of modernization rather than reducing them to an effect of the demise of socialist anti-religious policy.

Intending to study the relationship between the practices of Darhad shamans and the particular context of contemporary Mongolia, I first approached the political economy. It seemed obvious to me to relate shamans’ practices to the ruptures of the postsocialist economy shaping individuals’ lives, something which Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (1999; 2007) has already addressed. Furthermore, I aimed to explore the dimensions of shamans’ power and its relationship to political authority and the state. Humphrey (1995: 138) hypothesizes that shamans are powerless when political authority is strong and attract followers when political authority is weak: she remarks that “with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the consequent weakness of the Mongolian government, there has also been a resurgence of shamanism in north and western Mongolia”. At first sight this comment is convincing when one searches for the relationships between shamans and state power. Indeed, shamans have spread mainly among the Buryat in northeastern and the Darhad in northwestern Mongolia – besides the new feature of shamans emerging in the capital Ulaanbaatar (Merli 2006). That shamans dare to stage their activities in the center of political power seems all the more supportive of Humphrey’s hypothesis. However, the problem I faced in working with her hypothesis was how to conceptualize a “weak” or a “powerful” state into concrete research questions. Mongolians may complain about the present-day social disorder and compare it to socialist rule, judging the present-day state as

weak and the former socialist state as powerful in regard to maintaining order. However, can the repressions of the authoritarian socialist government be interpreted as a sign of a “powerful” state or should they rather be read as characteristic of a “weak” state that was obsessed with controlling its citizens? Another criterion may be the extent of the country’s independence. Yet today, Mongolia is just as dependent on international donors who shape its political rhetoric today as its policies were dictated by the Soviet Union before (Rossabi 2005). In sum, I could not conceptualize a “weak” or a “powerful” state in a way that would enable me to connect it to the shamans’ practices. Moreover, I thoroughly doubted that it was possible to make a meaningful connection between the poor shamans of the borderlands and the central state power. Much time passed until I recognized that the relationship was located in exactly this asymmetry.

### **Darhad shamans emerging in postsocialist Mongolia**

During fieldwork, I easily found evidence of contemporary shamans supporting clients in their daily struggle to overcome the unpredictability of the postsocialist economy. Although the Mongolian economy started to recover in the second half of the 1990s, the increasing social inequalities and poverty startled international consultants (Griffin 2001c). I approached the shamans’ divinations and their inspirational explanations as a commentary on the perceived social disorder and their healing as a supportive practice for the disadvantaged. However, the explanatory satisfaction of this perspective turned out to be limited.<sup>1</sup> I felt increasingly uneasy about the focus on the characteristics of the postsocialist economy because it misleads us to conceive of the present-day living circumstances as being entirely distinct from the situation in socialist days. Analyzing the scholarly and NGO assessments about the living conditions in postsocialism, I was surprised how the socialist past has become molded into the very opposite of postsocialism. Only a few years after the “transition” to democracy and market economy was welcomed as promising a prosperous future, the disappointment about the outcome of the changes has led to an idealized view of the socialist past. Usually the assessments present the socialist achievements with a few sentences, praising the standard of education, full employment, improved health care, and the absence of poverty (for example Government of Mongolia and UNDP Mongolia 2003: 6). The reviews are usually oblivious of the enduring repression and the absence of personal freedom outlasting the Stalinist terror of the 1930s, the low average living standard financed by Soviet subsidies, and to the fact that the standard of living did not increase until the later years of the socialist period (Cassidy 1970; Kaser 1991; Baabar 1999; Rossabi 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn for pointing out the limits of this perspective. She expressed her doubts about a narrow view of the “resurgence” of shamanic practices as a reaction to the introduction of market economy and the economic and political anxieties it generated (personal communication, 22.01.2005).

A more differentiated view acknowledges that socialism was not a homogeneous period and that postsocialism is not entirely distinct from the preceding socialist past. Rather, postsocialism may be approached as a heterogeneous amalgam of socialist legacies and the maintenance of presocialist habits, blended with global neoliberal transformations and with the new esteem for traditional cults and values. Concerning my research focus, I increasingly came to doubt whether the reasons why individuals seek the support of shamans have substantially changed. I assume that shamans also in socialism and before (as far as they were accessible) provided their services to mitigate families' afflictions – including matters pertaining to the household economy (see Heissig 1970). The conditions and risks of the domestic economy, however, have changed for the urbanized segment of the shamans' clients: a contemporary urban audience is not concerned with the maintenance of their herds but rather with unemployment, risky business operations, and transnational migration for informal work abroad.

My fieldwork encompassed a wide variety of themes and I deeply immersed myself into the shamans' this- and other-worldly realms, into their daily lives, their biographies, and their relations with neighbors. I attended numerous seances, became familiar with the shamans' relationships to spirits and with the individual personalities of these spirits. During their seances held in suits of armor draped with symbolic weapons and sable fur, singing and playing on drums made of deerskin, the contemporary Darhad shamans seem to emanate from historical records. In the capital, the Darhad shamans enjoy an outstanding reputation among the Mongolian shamans. Supported by the book on Mongolian shamanism of the Mongolian historian O. Pürev (2002), the Darhad shamans are celebrated as the "black", the most powerful, and the "genuine" shamans of Mongolia. They are imagined as the most "pure" tradition of "shamanism" which is least influenced by Buddhist doctrines. Their prominence is furthermore connected to the perception of their homeland, with the beautiful scenery of Lake Hövsgöl and the snow-covered mountains of the Hor'dal Sar'dag National Park, as the country's remotest and most pristine region. Darhad shamans are well aware of their nation-wide reputation and they therefore travel to town to provide their services to an urban clientele. They participate in collective rituals staged for tourists in the capital or in tourist camps on Lake Hövsgöl.

The reputation of the Darhad shamans as the most genuine shamans in Mongolia is based on the "discovery" of the few old women shamans among the Darhad during the 1990s. In the meantime, a majority of middle-aged and young male shamans have emerged in the Shishget depression. During my fieldwork I became acquainted with almost sixty shamanizing persons of the Darhad and the Tuva reindeer herders; half of them shamanized for clients, the other half were disciples and people shamanizing for their own sake solely. Some of these shamanizing people were renowned when I started my explorations in summer 2002. Others became known as practicing at the time of my

fieldwork and yet others were hardly known for their inspirational practices even in their neighborhood. In the late 1990s, only a few shamans were known among the Darhad (Shimamura 2004a) which means that the increase in the number of shamans probably occurred later than among the Buryat in Dornod (Buyandelgeriyn 2002; Shimamura 2004b).

Despite their reputation as “traditional” shamans, contemporary Darhad practitioners are not the spiritual mediators of bounded communities of the periphery untouched by modernity. During my fieldwork, people living in the Shishget depression often took a skeptical stance against the shamans in their neighborhood. The dominant assessment in local arenas presumed that shamans had no magical power “any more”. Local people disparage the emerging shamans as mainly striving for economic success and not being capable of the powerful magic of earlier shamans. It was quite common to meet neighbors of shamans who had never attended a shaman’s seance. The neighbors’ disparagement of present-day practitioners challenges both the national celebration of Darhad shamans as the “most powerful” and the international scholarly perception of the Darhad as shamanists.

The contradictory discourses in local and national arenas inspired me to conceptualize the “economy of reputation” of shamans: instead of premising the status of shamans in local communities as a given, I analyzed the strategies of local people in building a reputation as a shaman. Moreover, I connected the shamans’ practices to the heterogeneous discourses both enabling the becoming of shamans and constricting their power. Thereby, I translated the language of earlier scholarly approaches into a contemporary idiom. I substituted the view on shamans as functionaries of traditional communities of believers with an approach focusing on practice, performance, and discourse.

I became increasingly concerned with how people and discourses connect the periphery with the center. I studied how the Darhad shamans built their reputation by traveling to the center and providing their services for an urban audience. Furthermore, I realized how the celebrating discourses in the capital and the denigrating discourses in the Shishget borderland, although contradictory, actually work together. The local skeptical rumors obviously aim to marginalize the shamans so as to control their social power. The discourses praising Darhad shamanism as a powerful tradition enable Darhad individuals to perform as shamans. At the same time, the celebrating discourses contribute to the marginalization of the shamans. By praising the Darhad shamans as the most “pure” tradition from the “remotest” part of the country, the imagination of the “wild frontier” and the “archaic” past is ascribed to the practices of shamans. Pedersen (2006b) attributes Darhad shamans with a “marginal trajectory” arguing that they are oriented towards the taiga. In contrast, I experienced Darhad shamans as connecting the taiga, where their

spirits reside, with the urban center, where they accumulate clients and establish their reputation. I contend that marginality is not an essence of the shamans, but that it is discursively produced.

### **A rethinking of the socialist past**

My examination of the Darhad shamans' practices and their economy of reputation was distracted by three confusing findings concerning the Darhad past. To render these findings meaningful provided me, from an unexpected angle, with insights on my original question concerning the relationship between shamans and the state. First, I realized that in contradiction to the widespread assumption of socialist repression, shamans were practicing relatively openly during the early 1960s. Diószegi (1961) listed in footnotes about as many shamans as I met during my fieldwork, and he even cited some of them by name. This means that in 1960 practicing shamans were so well known that it was possible for a foreign anthropologist, who was visiting the area for a few weeks only, to contact them. This insight undermines the blunt opposition of shamans being repressed during socialism and reemerging "into the light" in postsocialism.

The second contradiction concerns the presence of Buddhism in the Darhad past. On the location of the village of Renchinlhümbe in the midst of the Shishget depression there was, until the 1930s, a huge monastery with the name Zöölön. From the second half of the nineteenth century until 1930, between 1000 and 1600 men (a quarter of the population) were considered as monks; they lived either in the monastery or as herders with their families (Sanjeev 1930; Tseveen 1997 [1934]).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the very name of the Darhad was related to Buddhist authority: the Darhad became the first lay subjects (*shav'*) of the Javzandamba Hutagt, the highest Buddhist lama in Outer Mongolia, in the late seventeenth century (Badamhatan 1965). The name "Darhad" is commonly related to the meaning of "being exempt from taxation" or "having special rights and liberties" (Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 287); this suggests that these people enjoyed exclusive privileges as Buddhist subjects. With the rise of the nation-state in the 1920s, the Buddhist subjects were subordinated to lay authority and made into citizens (Badamhatan 1965). During the religious purges which peaked in 1938, the Zöölön monastery was destroyed; around a hundred monks were executed and the others integrated into lay life (Badamhatan 1965; Pedersen 2006a). Strikingly, Buddhist insignia have rarely been reintroduced into Darhad homes, in contrast to the recent spread of Buddhist home altars throughout postsocialist Mongolia. Nevertheless, the review on the historical affiliation of the Darhad to Buddhism challenges the present-day perception of the Darhad as maintaining the most "pure" tradition of "shamanism", that is the least influenced by Buddhism, in Mongolia.

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<sup>2</sup> This makes an average of one monk per household. The proportion of monks among the Darhad corresponded to the overall average in Outer Mongolia (Majskij 1959 [1920]).



The third problematic subject was the distinction between Darhad and the thirty-five families of reindeer herders in the neighboring taiga mountains. The reindeer herders were named “Tsaatan” (lit. “those with reindeer”) in socialist Mongolia. International scholars have recently renamed them “Dukha”, claiming the new name to be the old self-designation (Farkas 1992; Even 1994; Wheeler 1999). The Darhad are perceived as part of the Mongolian majority in the area, herding ordinary pastoralist livestock, while the reindeer herders are viewed as a Tuva-originated minority. Both groups are associated with shamanism. I was first interested in the shift in the denomination and later I traced the very delineation of the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha.

To find meaningful answers to these three questions, I studied historical sources and, in particular, scrutinized the Mongolian socialist reports about the people of northern Hövsgöl province. During this inquiry I compared the ethnographic accounts about northern Hövsgöl of the 1930s with those of the 1960s, of the Buryat scholars Sanjeev (1930) and Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]), and those of Badamhatan (1962; 1965) and Diószegi (1961; 1963). I examined how the relationship between the Darhad and the Tsaatan was conceptualized and analyzed how the relationship between shamans and Buddhism was depicted in the different socialist sources.

The term “Darhad” probably emerged at the end of the nineteenth century to name the Buddhist subjects (*shav*), while the term “Tsaatan” was mentioned for the first time in 1935 in the Mongolian state newspaper (Badamhatan 1965; 1962). In the accounts of Sanjeev and Zhamtsarano, the latter term is not mentioned. Zhamtsarano however mentioned that in the Urianhai administrations and the Buddhist estate, some people bred reindeer. Until his time, the people in the area were distinguished and named after their administrative affiliation (Tseveen 1997 [1934]; Ewing 1981; Vainshtein 1980 [1972]). Only later, through the accounts of Badamhatan, did ethnicity become highlighted as a marker of distinction.

Searching the historical accounts for the earlier relationship between shamans and Buddhism, I realized that I was seeking answers to the wrong question. The interesting problem is not the influence of Buddhism on shamans. Obviously, the numerous Buddhist monks and their doctrines influenced the practices of shamans, as monks and shamans were competing in the same magico-religious fields (Kollmar-Paulenz, forthcoming). The practices of modern-day Darhad shamans evidently include many terms and symbols that point to Buddhism. The more fruitful perspective however derives from inverting the question and asking about the social conditions and the processes of how the Darhad came to be perceived as shamanists. From this inverted point of view I recognized that only from the 1960s onwards, starting with the accounts of Badamhatan and Diószegi, have the Darhad been exclusively associated with shamanism. In contrast, the reports of the early 1930s (by Zhamtsarano and Sanjeev) had mentioned both the practices of Buddhist monks and those of shamans. Only after the persecution of Buddhist monks and the destruction of

the monastery was the perspective on religious practitioners narrowed down to the shamans. The former existence of Buddhist institutions in the area was discussed by Badamhatan and Diószegi as a foreign force exploiting the Darhad.

### **The Darhad as a foil for the twentieth-century nation-state**

I claim that the association of the Darhad with shamanism has wider implications and is related to the very formation of the twentieth-century Mongolian nation-state. Zhamtsarano and Badamhatan's accounts are not only the most outstanding Mongolian reports about the Darhad in the socialist era; they moreover represent the most prominent examples of socialist ethnography in the respective periods and the only ones translated into European languages.<sup>3</sup> Badamhatan's monographs built the base for the author's later career as a pre-eminent Mongolian socialist ethnologist of later decades (Bulag 1998). Following the example of the Soviet Union, socialist Mongolian ethnography represented "nationalities" (*yastan*) as delineated groups in order to advance "ethnic processes", the amalgamation of these groups into the progressive socialist Mongolian nation (*ündersten*; Bulag 1998). Ethnography thereby created delimitations within the relatively homogenous Mongol population. Moreover, the ethnographic practice contributed to giving the Mongols within the state borders of Mongolia the attribute of "genuine Mongols" and to dislocate the Mongols outside the borders in China or the Soviet Union, which were perceived as "hybrids" (Bulag 1998).<sup>4</sup> Although Mongolia traces its symbolic legitimation back to the thirteenth century and Chinggis Khaan's empire, the Mongolian nation-state founded in 1924 was in fact a political entity unprecedented in history which excluded the majority of people previously considered as Mongols (Bulag 1998; Kaplonski 2004).

By representing minorities located in the borderlands of the state, socialist ethnography delineated the borderlands in cultural terms and distinguished Mongol minorities within the state's territory from their neighboring Mongols outside the borders. Badamhatan's monograph about the Darhad situated on the northernmost fringe of the country became the model of a Mongolian socialist ethnography showing a backward nationality (*yastan*) as a foil for the formation of a progressing Mongolian socialist nation (*ündersten*). In his representation, the shamans' practices served as the salient feature which characterized the Darhad as "backward" and distinguished them from the majority Halha Mongols. The socialist construction of "Darhad shamanism" might well have been fueled by the fascination of Mongol studies with shamanism, presuming a Buddhist "camouflage of

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<sup>3</sup> Badamhatan's monographs were translated into French (Badamxatan 1986; 1987). Zhamtsarano's account was originally published in Mongolian under the name Tseveen in 1934 and was translated into English (Čeveng 1991). Sanjeev (1930) wrote his report in Russian.

<sup>4</sup> By the term Mongolian I refer to the twentieth-century nation-state and its citizens, whereas I use the term Mongol in a wider cultural sense of Mongolness, including Mongols outside Mongolia.

recent-day Mongolian Shamanism under a Lamaistic disguise” (Heissig 1953a: 4; and already Pallas 1801: 17; see analysis by Atwood 1996 and Kollmar-Paulenz 2003b).

It is ironic that of all borderland peoples it was the Darhad who were chosen to represent the model example of a backward *yastan* for the socialist nationality project. Until the early twentieth century, the Buddhist estate *ih shav'* was in fact located to the north of the Manchu Qing border posts delineating Outer Mongolia from the northern Tannu-Urianhai tributaries (Badamhatan 1965). Although the Khiaktha treaty of 1727 set the official borders between China and Russia to the north of Tannu-Urianhai in the Sayan mountains, the Qing border posts were built south of Tannu-Urianhai (Ewing 1981; Forsyth 1992). This actual border practice in effect separated Tannu-Urianhai from Outer Mongolia, although it was likewise subordinated to Qing rule. This means that the people living around Lake Hövsgöl belonged to Tannu-Urianhai until the early twentieth century (Atwood 2004). The people of Tannu-Urianhai (called Urianhai by the Mongols and Tuva or Tuba by themselves) had earlier been tributaries of the Mongols, who at times also pledged allegiance to the Russian Tsar, and who submitted to Qing authority in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Ewing 1981; Atwood 2004). In the struggles for predominance following the demise of Qing rule in China, the former Tannu-Urianhai tributaries were divided in the early 1920s: the major part of the former Tannu-Urianhai territories formed the new Tyva Republic (also called Tannu-Tuva), which formally remained independent for two decades and was officially integrated into the Soviet Union in 1944.<sup>5</sup> Of the former Mongol tributaries only the territories to the west and the east of Lake Hövsgöl and its people became integrated into the nascent nation-state of Mongolia (Leimbach 1936). In the 1960s, it was precisely the Darhad from the earlier Tannu-Urianhai territories who were chosen as a foil for the Mongolian national project.<sup>6</sup>

The exact borderline between the two Republics of Mongolia and Tyva was defined in 1921 but was disputed until the late 1950s (Tseden-Ish 2003). The borderline cut through the homeland of small groups of reindeer-herders that had lived in the taiga mountain areas for a long time. After the definition of the borderline, the reindeer herders were officially identified as Tuva belonging to the Tyva Republic. However, the people themselves preferred to live in the Mongolian taiga areas. As a consequence, groups of reindeer herders were repeatedly forced to move to Tyva and, subsequently, returned to Mongolia (Farkas 1992). Badamhatan's monographs contributed to the national delineation

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<sup>5</sup> To distinguish between the political domain and the people's affiliation, I use the term "Tyva" when referring to the twentieth-century political entity and the term "Tuva" when relating to the reindeer herders who are associated with the former Tuva/Tuba of Tannu-Urianhai but who are now Mongolian citizens.

<sup>6</sup> Russian explorers called the Darhad "mongolized Urianhai" in the late 19th century (mentioned by Tseveen 1997 [1934] and Badamhatan 1965). The association of the Darhad with the former Urianhai is until today repeated by some scholars (for example Johansen 1989). Badamhatan (1965) perceived the Darhad as a conglomerate of Buryat, Tuva/Urianhai, and Mongol tribes.

in the borderland: he identified the Darhad as Mongolian steppe pastoralists while describing the reindeer herders as Tuva, associated with the surrounding taiga and the neighboring Tyva Republic (Badamhatan 1965; 1962).

That the association of the Darhad with shamanism is connected to the constitution of the socialist Mongolian nation-state undermines the dominant view on socialist persecution of shamanism. I do not challenge the view that shamans were repressed in socialist Mongolia. Shamans state today that their parents and grandparents feared repression and therefore ceased their shamanic practice. However, some local people qualify the extent of repression, arguing that although officially forbidden, shamans were known and their practices were accepted as long as they were performed in private. I have already mentioned that the account of Diószegi (and that of Badamhatan, too) indicates that in the early 1960s shamans were officially accessible. Furthermore, it seems that only few Darhad shamans were murdered in socialist days. Therefore, I doubt whether a systematic persecution of Darhad shamans similar to the assassination of Buddhist monks took place.

The “religious question” was a major political concern of the 1920s and 1930s and it was preoccupied mainly with Buddhism, which had been closely associated with state rule and, thus, was seen as a challenge to the new socialist state (Moses 1977; Baabar 1999). The policy against Buddhism first started with attempts at reforming the Buddhist institutions in the 1920s, followed by the increasing supervision and control of the monasteries; it ended, on Stalin’s order, with the assassination of over twenty thousand monks and the eradication of the monasteries mainly in 1938 (Trapp 2007). At the same time, shamans were not highlighted as religious actors: they were neither mentioned in the anti-religious law nor in the protocols found in the central party archives.<sup>7</sup> I assume that shamans were just too insignificant in number and already too marginalized to constitute a target of anti-religious repression in socialist Mongolia.<sup>8</sup> Humphrey (1996b: 2) argued that the services of shamans were also requested in socialist days: “Socialist ideology may even have perversely encouraged [shamans’ practices], as its heroic construction of positive achievements left many gaps, usually disasters, for people somehow to understand. So in the public inertia of fear there was nevertheless an inner shiver.” However, the marginalization and persecution of shamans started long before socialist rule. Banzarov (1981 [1846] and Heissig (1953a) pointed to the burning of shamans’ spirits (*ongod*) and the persecution of shamans by Buddhist monks in Outer Mongolia during the early seventeenth century.

After long centuries of marginalizing persecutions, shamans have been welcomed and celebrated as “traditional culture” since the early 1990s. The Darhad shamans have been

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Trapp, personal communication, 03.11. 2006 and 30.05 2007.

<sup>8</sup> A similar argument is put forward by Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (2007). However, she argued that Buryat shamans nevertheless suffered under the persecutions as the Buryat in general belonged to the main victims of socialist terror.

mobilized as one of the identity markers for the transformed nation-state. After the socialist meta-narratives lost ground, Mongolia excavated presocialist traditions to fuel the transforming nation-state with new symbolic legitimization (Humphrey 1992; Kaplonski 2004). However, shamanism is not a dominant concern in the capital. The associations and scholars promoting shamanism as “national tradition” are rather outsiders in the fields of cultural identity production. The supporters of shamanism are displaced by the resurgent authority of Buddhism, by the Chinggis Khaan cult, and *tengerism*, the heaven-cult associated with the legitimization of political rule, all of which have regained their prominence since the early 1990s (Kollmar-Paulenz 2003a; Boldbaatar 1999; Bira 2003). With the exception of the urban shaman Byambadorj, who carries out rituals on behalf of the government, it is again Buddhism which today legitimizes political authority with religious blessing (Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik 2006). Darhad shamans, in contrast, deal with the afflictions of ordinary people and the powerless. Again, the symbolic importance of the Darhad shamans for the center lies in their marginality. The Darhad shamans now associated with the “pure” and “the wild” periphery are perceived as “archaic” representatives of “*hödööni savdag*” (“rural force”), as a rural source of power nourishing the proliferating “polluted” urban center. The imagination of “purity” has to be viewed in relation to the recent spread of Mongolian nationalism where it constitutes a dominant concern (Bulag 1998; Kaplonski 2001).

The dichotomous picture of shamans being repressed by the former socialist state and recently having been freed by postsocialist democracy gives way to the perception of the continuities between socialism and postsocialism. Since the 1960s, the shamans of the Darhad have been used as a symbolic foil against which the nation-state has defined itself. In the 1960s, the shamans were the symbols of “backwardness” imputed on the Darhad in order to propagate socialist progress. During the 1990s, the “backwardness” of shamans was revalued as a part of “traditional culture”. Along with other ritual specialists, Darhad shamans from the periphery embody Mongol *yos*, (“custom”, “rule”) to strengthen the nation for the reshaped course of modernization. Seen from this angle, “Darhad shamanism” is not an archaic tradition that somehow managed to survive down to the present day, but rather emerges as a thoroughly modern phenomenon, intimately connected to the formation of the twentieth-century nation-state.

### **“Shamanism” as heterogeneous discourses**

I started this dissertation with the intention not to write about “shamanism” but to focus on shamans’ practices. I was highly skeptical about the idea of an “-ism” surrounding shamans with the connotations of a “coherent whole” or a symbolic “system”. Similar to Hutton (2001), I saw it as a “Western imagination” and, following Humphrey (1996b), I refuted it as a homogenizing category; instead, I aimed to focus on the heterogeneities of shamans’

practices in relation to the wider social context. However, my endeavor required a re-introduction of the term “shamanism”, precisely in order to envisage the permeating scholarly and popular discourses, which are, to use a phrase of Foucault’s (2004 [1969]: 54), “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”.

The term “shamanism”, which pretends to encompass a united phenomenon, in fact bears – even if it is dedicated to the rather uniform practices of Darhad shamans in Mongolia – distinct imageries. Badamhatan for example used the term *böö mörgöl*, “shaman worship”. The term *mörgöl* derives from the verb *mörgöh*, which includes such different meanings as “to butt” and “to venerate”. These two meanings are both related to the shamans’ practices. The term *mörgöl* designates the bundles of tassels tied to the Darhad shaman’s gown. The shaman presents one of these bundles when bowing respectfully before her or his *ongod*. With this *mörgöl* the shaman moreover lashes the client’s shoulder to free them from spiritual contamination. Thus, the notion *böö mörgöl* used by Badamhatan relates to the shamans’ gown, to the shamans’ veneration of their *ongod*, and to the shamans’ relationship with their clients. Badamhatan focused his account on the shamans’ paraphernalia, their invocation chants, the legends surrounding historical shamans, and the shamans’ *ongod*. Only briefly did he associate the shamans with a specific world-view.

Thirty years later, the Mongolian historian Pürev (2002) addressed the Mongolian shamans with the term *böö shashin*, (“shaman religion”). The author endowed the shamans with an air of religion and a cosmology.<sup>9</sup> One of Pürev’s (2004) predominant concerns is to show “Darhad shamanism” as the major tradition in Mongolia and to project a continuous development originating at the court of Chinggis Khaan right up to the present. By an international scholarly audience writing on Mongolia, the Darhad are often cited as exception of those Mongolians who are not Buddhists but adhere to shamanism (Even 1991; Kaplonski 2004: 177). Thereby, people who have been educated in the socialist secular doctrines are imagined as a local community of believers, presupposing a concept of “belief” as an unambiguous state of mind. However, as Pigg (1996) has argued for Nepal, the belief in shamans and their magical capacities is accompanied by doubts and disbelief.

The search for the relationships between shamans’ practice and scholarly discourses brought, as a corollary, a new perspective to my work. My immersion into the spiritual realms of shamans and the encounter with the spirits’ individualities affected my understanding of scholarly concepts taken for granted before: notions of “social structure”, “symbolic system”, “community”, or “cosmology” lost their innocent self-evidence; the terms dissolved as entities and mutated into imaginative and intangible, yet nonetheless powerful concepts – similar to the shamans’ spirits. Spirits enact their presence during the

<sup>9</sup> According to Kollmar-Paulenz (2005: 85), the term *shashin* only emerged with the second spread of Buddhism in Mongol history, to denote one’s own and other religious doctrines and rituals.

seance through story telling; the shamans' reputation is built and questioned likewise through story telling. To transfer the flavor of my fieldwork experience into my ethnography, I similarly base my analytic explorations on story telling. By molding my ethnography into a travel account, my representation expresses the porous disciplinary boundaries of anthropology and its proximity to the earlier explorers' accounts as well as to present-day tourism. In addition, the allusion to traveling reflects a dominant theme of fieldwork among mobile pastoralists and among shamans who venture on inspirational journeys during their seances.

## **Chapter arrangement**

The composition of my thesis reflects my engagement with the summarized questions oscillating between shamans' practices, and local, national, and scholarly discourses. Chapter 2 starts with an introduction into the field and my fieldwork. I connect the overview over the Shishget depression in northern Hövsgöl with the recent discussion about the ethnographic "field" as a practice of the ethnographer (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a). Furthermore, I introduce my local guides and the spiritual intrusions they faced on our journeys. The skeptical stances of my guides towards the practices of shamans gave me a first hint to carefully consider questions of "belief" and to abstain from essentializing the Darhad as "shamanists".

Chapter 3 analyzes the dominant features of the scholarly discourses about Siberian and Inner Asian shamanism which have been preoccupied with the outline of a "belief system" since the late nineteenth century. Strikingly, the reports reveal that explorers and scholars had only limited personal access to shamans (for example Radloff 1884). The majority of twentieth-century accounts on "shamanism" are re-evaluations of the infrequent face-to-face interactions and scarce long-term fieldwork with shamans. Thus, the more limited the direct interaction was, the more the imaginations of "shamanism" as "belief system" proliferated. In the second part of this chapter I discuss the absence of such a "shamanistic belief system" or "shamanistic cosmologies" among the Darhad. Instead, Darhad shamans enrich their relationships with ancestor spirits with the invocation of notions laden with inspirational power.

Chapter 4 introduces the interaction of shamans with their clients. I present individual cases of affliction and a shaman's diagnoses, and I relate these to the critical assessments of the impact of the economic transformations upon the livelihood of the population. The assessments focus on the "postsocialist economy of risk" which caused poverty and precarious living conditions for a considerable part of the population. Shamans, along with other inspirational specialists, approach the suffering and risk of individual households; they connect the disordered lives to the imagination of order in the past. Thereby, the

shamans from the periphery engage their ancestor spirits residing in the taiga landscape to fight the powerful magic of the “invisible hand”.

Chapter 5 analyzes the Darhad shamans’ seances. The chapter is based on the translation and interpretation of a transcript of a short seance conducted by a young shaman. I discuss the seance as a communication between the *ongod*, the shaman, and the audience. The analysis of the text of the chants shows that the spirits’ messages remain largely cryptic, thus indicating that the meaning of the seance is not encoded in the verbal messages alone. By integrating the non-verbal aspects I elaborate the performance of power relations during the seance.

The following chapters trace the constitution and contention of the shamans’ reputation. Chapter 6 addresses the traditional legitimization of shamans – the illness narratives and the reference to shaman ancestors – which are so often reported in the literature. Starting with would-be shamans that fail to properly perform a seance, I show how individual capacities and strategies, as well as the legitimization through a shamanistic genealogy by the scholar O. Pürev (2002), are articulated with the spirits’ call in the becoming of shamans.

In Chapter 7, I focus on the supposedly “new” characteristics of the shamans’ “economy of reputation” in postsocialism. I follow the trips of Darhad shamans to town, their interaction with shamans’ associations, and their participation in the collective staging of shamans’ performances for tourists and an urban audience. In contrast, rural discourses in the Shishget periphery question the shamans’ inspirational power. I show that the disparaging rumors spread independently of the concrete experiences with shamans and that they express primarily local distrust directed at the shamans’ journeys to the capital. The discursive containment nevertheless does not exclude requesting a shaman’s service in the case of affliction.

Chapter 8 enriches the shamans’ economy of reputation with a historical perspective by discussing legends about shamans of “olden times”. Locals invoke the magical power of earlier shamans to belittle the abilities of the practitioners in their neighborhood. The imaginations of historical shamans as outlaws supports the criticism on the shamans’ connections to the center and constricts contemporary shamans in a marginalized position. Scholars in contrast invoke the same legends to support the very identification of the Darhad with shamanism. Stories about monks competing with shamans are used as arguments to expose Buddhism as a foreign invader who only by force and against the resistance of the shamans was able to “penetrate” the Darhad area.



In Chapter 9, I discuss the delineation of the Darhad as well as the neighboring few families of reindeer herders, called Tsaatan, Tuva, Dukha, or Urianhai, and I illuminate the relationship between the perception of the borderland population and the constitution of the twentieth-century nation-state. Although one could focus on the joint history and the similarities in the way of life, reports since the 1960s have emphasized the differences and essentialized these distinctions. While Badamhatan focused on the Darhad as a “backward nationality”, the interest in postsocialism shifted to the thirty-five families of reindeer herders, envisaged as “indigenous people” living “close to nature”. For the perception of the Darhad as well as of the Dukha reindeer herders, the existence of shamans plays a decisive role. The Huular shamans, however, who represent the major group among the Darhad shamans but who are said to originate from Tuva, undermine the clear distinction between the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha.

Chapter 10 accomplishes a hypothesis that threads itself through the preceding chapters: the production of the shamans’ authenticity. I argue that the “authenticity”, or “genuineness”, of shamans is a dominant theme both in local and in scholarly discourses. The celebration of the “reemergence” of shamanism in postsocialism is accompanied by critical undertones doubting the authenticity of shamans who have established themselves in shamanic centers in the midst of capital cities (Hoppál 1996; Johansen 2001b; Stépanoff 2004). Contemporary shamans’ practices are contrasted with “traditional” shamanism, either situated in remote local communities or in the early twentieth century. However, already the presocialist accounts reported about locals disparaging their shamans as having lost their magical power, and authors complained about the decline of shamanism due to the influence of Buddhism and Orthodox Christianity (for example Pallas 1801). This means that the questioning of the authenticity of shamans is not a characteristic of the postsocialist reemergence of shamanism but has been – at least since the eighteenth century – a condition of shamans’ practices: only in the context of general doubts about the authenticity of shamans is the genuineness of individual shamans produced.

National and international discourses constituting “Darhad shamanism” empower individual Darhad to perform as shamans. The discourses praising the shamans as an “archaic tradition” of the “pure”, “wild” periphery displace shamans to the social, spatial, and temporal margins. This marginalized space is the source of shamans’ inspirational power: shamans transgress the boundaries of the human by extending the limits of the human mind, by translating between humans and non-humans, and by connecting the domestic and the wild. At the same time, the shamans’ social power is held at bay in this marginalized position. What Taussig (1987: 221) said for the shamans for Columbia holds also for present-day Darhad shamans: “[B]ut I am also intrigued by the generality of this attribution of wildness to what one could call colonizable species, with wildness imputed on the other, objectified, then taken back as a magical substance”.



## Intruding into people's lives

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*This chapter introduces into the field and discusses the way I conducted my fieldwork. I first portray the Shishget depression, also called Darhad area, in the northern borderlands of Mongolia. Although it seems that the Darhad area is the perfect and self-explaining field to conduct fieldwork on Darhad shamans, I question such a taken-for-granted idea of the field. I follow those recent authors perceiving the field not as natural entity and delimited space out there waiting to be discovered by the ethnographer (Amit 2000: 6). Instead, I assume the field as constituted by my travel encounters. In this field, I was an actor as a guest and did not disappear as a person behind “participant observation”.*

I open my account by presenting the men who introduced me into the field: Chinbat, Davaanyam, Buyanölzii, and Vanchii. The four local men contributed substantially to my research; engaged as local guides, they not only led me through the area and to shamans. They were my primary partners in reflecting the experiences in the field. They shared their impressions, understandings, and interpretations with me and they even helped me with explanations when I did not get the point of a story or the intricate details of a conversation. Furthermore, they contributed with their networks and their personal biographies to my study. Visiting shamans because they accompanied me, they personally became involved in the subject of my research. Without asking the services of shamans, they were provided with inspirational explanations about misfortunes and illness in their families. I experienced how the guides had a distanced stance on shamans, how they on occasion immersed in the possibilities of spirits, how they doubted again and regained their distance. Their ambiguous stances towards the inspirational practices of shamans was the first hint to consider local people's opinions on shamans carefully and not to hastily essentialize them as “shamanists”. By introducing my guides here at the beginning of my account, I pay tribute to their outstanding importance for my fieldwork. Moreover, the glimpses of their lives shall give a first impression about the precarious livelihoods in a rural area of Mongolia, about how the political and economic ruptures of the early 1990s broke into individuals' lives and how diversely people have been reacting to these challenges.

Chinbat was the first person I came to know in the Darhad area and he was centrally involved in the selection of my research subject. I initially met Chinbat on a chilly evening in early September 1999 by Lake Hövsgöl, a few kilometers to the north of the village of Hatgal. At that time, I was a tourist arriving there after a two-month horse trek through Mongolia. Chinbat stayed with us for some days, camping by the lake, fishing, and telling stories, and we left him with our four horses and the dog. Three years later, I met him again. I just had obtained my diploma and visited Mongolia to undertake some preliminary

explorations for potential PhD fieldwork. Before starting work, I went to Hövsgöl to spend a vacation; I aimed to end my earlier itinerary and to reach the northern border of Mongolia. Together with Swiss friends I engaged Chinbat as a horse guide and during that journey he introduced us to shamans. Half a year later, in February 2003, when I set out on my first “official” field trip as a doctoral student, I met Chinbat by chance on the market in Mörön, the capital of the province Hövsgöl and Chinbat subsequently accompanied me on the field trip.



*Photograph 1: Chinbat by the river Tengis (22.06. 2003).*

Chinbat was born in 1973 into a poor, single-parent family; he had just finished school when the socialist economy collapsed. In the economic disruption of the early 1990s, when prices for essentials rose astronomically, his mother quickly lost her few head of livestock she had received from the dissolution of the collective farm. Chinbat moved from the countryside to the nearby village of Hatgal to marry. When I first met him in 1999, he was living without having a steady job with his wife and their son in a house belonging to the administration. In summer, he approached backpacker tourists to offer his services as a guide. Soon after, he started work as a local policeman in Hatgal. When I met Chinbat again in summer 2002 it seemed that his life had taken a turn for the worse. His wife had left him with their son; she first went to the capital Ulaanbaatar and finally, which Chinbat only came to know from rumors, she moved to the United States to marry an American who had previously worked in Hatgal. During our joint journeys Chinbat often talked about settling into a regular life, building a new family and a home again, but in the meantime he was on the move between Hatgal, Mörön, and Ulaanbaatar, living with friends and subsisting on occasional work. People we visited liked Chinbat for the stories he entertained them with, and the women were delighted by the savory dishes he prepared with vegetables and spices we brought from the provincial capital Mörön.

Chinbat introduced me to Davaanyam, an excellent driver, who drove us through the wintry Hövsgöl. Later, Davaanyam also accompanied me on horseback. When Davaanyam was seventeen years old, he went through the ten months of driver's education to become a professional driver like his father, who drove trucks for a state enterprise in Hatgal during his entire working life. In socialist days drivers were the "heroes of the road"; to be a driver was a reputed occupation including the privilege of mobility and the highly-valued ethos of helping other drivers in difficulty. After obtaining his driver's license, Davaanyam entered the three-year military service in 1987. Finishing his duty for the state, the disintegration of the socialist organization forced him to abandon his professional ambitions. Instead, Davaanyam moved to his grandfather's earlier pastures in the nearby district of Ulaan Uul; he founded a family, started herding, and engaged in livestock trade that spread after the privatization of the earlier collective farms' assets. When I met Davaanyam for the first time in 2002, he was staying with his second wife and their then two-year-old daughter on Lake Hövsgöl, spending the summer waiting on customers at their small open-air store. In the other seasons, Davaanyam worked as driving instructor in the countryside for a driving school in Mörön. Davaanyam not only knew the tracks best and was able to drive in difficult off-road conditions, he also had acquaintances almost everywhere we went, and if not, he had easy access to people and was able to build a trustworthy relationship.



*Photograph 2: Davaanyam, somewhere on the way (22.09. 2003).*

Davaanyam introduced me to Vanchii, a well-known and reputed herder in his mid-fifties who lived with his wife Hürel and their family in Soyoo in the northern part of Ulaan Uul. Vanchii was adopted as an infant by an elder sister of his mother's and, after he finished the four years of school available in Ulaan Uul, he became a goat herder of the *negdel*, the collective farm. At the age of twenty-one, he went to the capital Ulaanbaatar for his military service during which he was trained as a driver and he became a truck driver. In the mid-1970s he returned home, worked as a herder for another two years and then he moved to

his genetrix who had settled in Dornod in eastern Mongolia, where Vanchii became an accountant for a state farm. In 1980, Vanchii again returned to his native land in Ulaan Uul and married a milkmaid with four children and they received two more children. Vanchii again worked as a herder and he became the chief of the Soyoo *bag*, a herder's unit of the collective farm, for the last five socialist years. With privatization, Vanchii became an independent herder. During the period of my fieldwork the couple lived together with their youngest two daughters and an adopted grandson. The older children alternately joined their camp with their separate households. In the meantime, the second youngest daughter has married Davaanyam's nephew, who once during my fieldwork had accompanied us to the Vanchii's family.



*Photograph 3: Vanchii on the way to his hay fields (25.08. 2003).*

Buyanölzii is the oldest of Davaanyam's seven brothers and sisters. I experienced him as a silent man in his early fifties, who lived as a herder with his family on pastures belonging to the district of Renchinlhümbe. Buyanölzii finished four years of primary school in Hatgal and later worked as a repairperson in a state repository in the village. After he got married, he became a herder for the same state enterprise. Buyanölzii's wife Battogtoh, who had finished eight years of school and had started a higher education, became a milkmaid. In the course of privatization, the family with two children received two cows only and with a meager ten head of livestock property, they moved northward to Renchinlhümbe. Buyanölzii engaged first in livestock trade and later the family became salaried herders of the livestock of Renchinlhümbe's school, taking care of additional private cattle in winter. Through years of hard work, they managed to increase their herd and to live in modest comfort. The household included their two sons, and adopted daughter, and a young woman from a befriended family who lived with them.



The herders Buyanölzii and Vanchii accompanied me for weeks on my journeys through the area, Davaanyam and Chinbat, who had no herding obligations, came with me for months. Furthermore, I stayed for longer visits with the families of Vanchii and Buyanölzii.



*Photograph 4: Buyanölzii, during a break on one of our journeys (27.08. 2003).*

### **The intrusion of shamans' spirits in the guides' life**

The four guides left no doubt that they did not believe in the shamans' inspirational capabilities and that they did not seek personal advice from the shamans but only visited them because they worked for me. However, by accompanying me to shamans and by being present at the shamans' seances, they were intruded upon by the shamans' spirits. The first time I realized that shamans' spirits followed my guides was in August 2003. Davaanyam brought me from Lake Hövsgöl to Renchinlümbe to his brother Buyanölzii, where we arrived during the preparations for the wedding of the older son. The day after the wedding, Buyanölzii and I headed for the taiga mountains to the northwest. After half a day's ride, we arrived at the shaman Baljir's in Dood Tsagaan Nuur, where we attended three seances Baljir performed for clients and relatives the following days. After one of the ceremonies, the shaman revealed to Buyanölzii that *har yum*, "a black thing" from the past was annoying his family and the shaman asked whether Buyanölzii had ancestors who were shamans. Buyanölzii answered that he knew neither about shamans nor lamas among his ancestors. Baljir insisted that there was a spirit of an ancestor shaman around and Buyanölzii again denied having shaman ancestors. Leaving Baljir, we went northward over two passes and arrived at the shaman Baldandorj in Harmai close to the village of Tsagaan Nuur. Again, the shaman asked Buyanölzii about shaman ancestors, and again Buyanölzii denied.

Some weeks later, Davaanyam and I visited the old shaman Badrah, living in the open steppe to the north of the village of Renchinlhümbe. Badrah, slowly recovering from a cerebral apoplexy, was sitting on his iron bed in his small wooden house, as he always did when I visited him.<sup>1</sup> The old shaman told Davaanyam that he was *udamtai*, that he had shamanic roots and that one of his brothers should devote a horse as a riding animal for the shaman spirits. Like his elder brother, Davaanyam denied knowing about ancestor shamans. Then, Davaanyam started to talk about mysterious illnesses and even death in his wider family: Davaanyam told the shaman about the falling ill of his nieces. In that summer it was the second oldest daughter of his elder sister Oyundalai, who, only a few months before her wedding, had fallen ill in such a way that the doctors in the hospital could perform neither a diagnose nor a cure. Davaanyam said that the young woman could not sleep at night and that she was *tatah unah* (literally “to twitch and to fall”, a notion which is usually used to describe the illness before a person becomes a shaman). Furthermore, Davaanyam described how the young woman got anxious and aggressive and that she armed herself with big knives or a horse’s whip when she heard people approaching her home. Badrah spun his diviner mirror, a golden metallic plate the size of a palm hanging on a blue *hadag*, a silk scarf. The shaman observed the rotating relief on the mirror and diagnosed that the young woman’s soul had left her body and that she needed an enlivened jaw harp to recall her soul back into her body and to protect her from further intrusions. Davaanyam then asked the old shaman about the recent passing away of a maternal cousin (*nagats*) who died after he refused to obey a voice, ordering him to become a shaman and threatening him with his death if he would not follow the command. The old shaman again twirled his mirror and explained that the cousin had received a treatment “from the wrong side”, which could either mean from a lama or from an incapable shaman, and that now the dead cousin’s soul was haunting members of the family.

After this encounter, Davaanyam discussed the tragic events in his family with other shamans too. Little by little I heard more details of his cousin’s death and Davaanyam added further accidents into this web of mysterious events: he told how one of his nephews, who grew up as Davaanyam’s younger brother after the death of his mother, died as a young man only shortly after their father passed away. Davaanyam recalled, that, strangely, both of them had died after they fell off a white horse. Stories like these accompanied our journeys. Articulated in many encounters, these tales grew into interfaces of an expanding network of people, spirits, of deceased people and family histories framing my fieldwork.

### **Rethinking the field of fieldwork**

Gupta and Ferguson (1997b: 2) point out that although the experiences “in the field” are central to anthropologists’ intellectual and professional identities, the field as the very

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<sup>1</sup> Badrah passed away in 2006



groundwork of anthropological representations has been “left to common sense, beyond and below the threshold of reflexivity”. Even though the centrality of fieldwork for academic anthropology is related to the paradigmatic turn from evolutionism to structure-functionalism in the early twentieth century (Stocking 1983), the importance of fieldwork has not diminished with the questioning of the classical representational paradigms. James Clifford (1997a) designates fieldwork as the central marker of anthropology to delimit the discipline against other academic fields and as an important disciplining practice to enter the academic discipline of anthropology. Gupta and Ferguson (1997b) even claim that fieldwork and its associated genre ethnography is more important for the discipline today than ever. This centrality of fieldwork raises the question of how the field as space where fieldwork is done can be perpetuated while the representation based on this practice – the constitution of homogenous cultural wholes – has become fundamentally challenged.

Gupta and Ferguson (1997b: 3) postulate that to rethink the representations of anthropology requires the reconfiguration of the “taken-for-granted” idea of the field, arguing that “‘the field’ of anthropology and ‘the field’ of ‘fieldwork’ are thus politically and epistemologically intertwined; to think critically about the one requires a readiness to question the other”. Clifford (1997b: 19-21) relates the ideal type of mid-twentieth-century fieldwork to a “habitus of dwelling” whose “specific disciplinary practices (spatial and temporal constraints) have tended to become confused with ‘the culture’”. Arjun Appadurai (1988b: 37) challenges the idea of “the field” as an anthropological imagination of non-Western people as “natives” who are “incarcerated” into ecological niches and “immobilized by their belonging to a place”. One of the outstanding emerging new strands of reconceptualizing the field is to recognize that “the others” are as mobile as “we” anthropologists are, and to trace “them” on their transnational paths, a practice leading into “multisided” transnational fieldwork (Marcus 1995; Appadurai 1991). My attempts to rethink the field are concerned with the field in an ostensibly more classical setting, a hardly accessible rural area at the margins of a nation-state. I imagine the field how Clifford (1997a: 68) characterizes the field of Anna Tsing’s (1993) *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*: “Her field site in what she calls an ‘out of the way place’ is never taken for granted as a natural or traditional environment. It is produced, a contact space, by local, national, and transnational forces of which her research travel is a part.” I approach the field not as an autonomous entity which can be discovered by the ethnographer through immersion, but a field which is substantially part of the ethnographer’s own construction (Amit 2000). To move away from an idea of the field as an “illusion of the panopticon” (Appadurai 1988a: 20) – a geographical space where the ethnographer metaphorically dwells in the village with his tent, the vantage point from which “the culture” “took place under my very eyes, at my own doorstep, so to speak” (Malinowski 2002 [1922]: 8) – I follow Clifford (1997b) in approaching the field and my fieldwork as travel encounter. Clifford suggests we “rethink

cultures as sites of dwelling *and* travel, to take travel knowledges seriously” (1997b: 31, italics in the original). However, the relationship of travel and ethnography is not a new one; until the beginning of the twentieth century it was the narratives of travelers, explorers, colonial administrators, and missionaries who produced ethnographic descriptions. Clifford (ibid.: 39) locates the history of anthropology in and against the practices of dominantly European travel practices and narratives; the author self-critically explores the ambivalences of the notion of the traveler with its “historical taintedness, its associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like”.

With these connotations in mind, I use the trope of travel in spite of and against these connotations – to evoke a field of encounters which includes practices of traveling as well as dwelling. I assign the trope of traveler not only to the ethnographic I, but equally to the guides I traveled with, to the shamans, and to other people we met on our explorations, to local people as well as to traveling foreigners. I do not pretend an equality of experiences, but imagine heterogeneous and ambiguous experiences of travel. Chinbat for example, who for most of the time since I first met him has been tramping around, led a marginalized life. Vanchii on the other hand presented to me the people we met and places we passed through with the habitus of chiefly authority. Throughout his life he was a traveler, moving between occupations and different regions in Mongolia. Davaanyam was traveling through the wider area as merchant, driving school instructor, herder or as hunter, and he introduced me into his ramified network of kin and former and contemporary alliance relatives. In contrast, I got to know his brother Buyanölzii as a stay-at-home who preferred staying with his family and rarely moved around to visit people or to explore the area. However, twice a year



*Photograph 5: Buyanölzii's family leaving their summer camp... (27.08. 2004).*

Buyanölzii and his family relocate with their entire household and livestock herds to their summer or winter camps respectively, crossing the mountain area of the Hor'dol Sar'dag National Park, covering a distance of almost 150 kilometers in risky climatic conditions.



*Photograph 6: ... and arriving on the Hor'dol Sar'dag pass on the way to their winter camp (31.08. 2004).*

It seems to be paradoxical to assign a trope of movement which is contaminated by the historical routes of bourgeois European explorers to people who are usually called “nomads”: to whom, if not to herders in Mongolia, would the designation “nomads” be appropriate? Humphrey and Sneath (1999) take a critical stance against the use of the image of “nomadism” for mobile pastoralists in Inner Asia, arguing that the category is imagined as a timeless tradition and is based on suppositions that nomads are free and egalitarian, continuously roaming around with their herds in search of the best pastures, whereas they perceive pastoralism as a series of local knowledges and techniques located in particular historical circumstances. Using the trope of traveler addressing mobile pastoralists is here set against such essentializing images of nomads; it is further put in opposition to the postmodern appropriation of the mystified “nomad” as metaphor for the own fragmented and detached self (for example Baudrillard 1988; Braidotti 1994; Deleuze 1987). Clifford (1997b: 39) labels this “Nomadology” as “postmodern primitivism” and Kaplan (1996) locates this use of the trope as the perpetuation of a colonial discourse. The trope of the (theoretical) nomad refers to the romanticized image of (pastoral) nomadism, both of which not only neglect dimensions of temporary dwelling, belonging, and home but also ignore the integration of pastoralists in historical political entities, with their particular channeling of herding techniques and limitations of different kinds of people's movements. To invoke the metaphor of travel for mobile pastoralists is therefore a countermove to this appropriation, consciously using an image from a European tradition addressed to “the other”.

Moreover, I prefer the trope of “travel” because I have in mind local movements going along and intersecting with movements adhering to techniques of pastoralism. These movements include trips to the taiga mountains for hunting, collecting berries, seeking medical plants, or gathering pine nuts; they include traveling to buy livestock products or to sell commodities, treks on horseback with tourists and drives by jeep to the southern towns in search of medical treatment or work. These voyages usually include a spirit of adventure, which seems to be not so different from the connotations surrounding the metropolitan traveler. Further kinds of travel are those of the shamans. The shamans’ traveling embraces the inspirational journeys on their drum to the enigmatic lands of the dark and their earthly car rides to the towns in the south seeking clients and reputation. The imagination of travel in Mongolia is dominantly male: men are thought to conquer the wild outside, while women are assigned to the *ger* (the Mongolian felt tent), the family, and the home. However, women travel too, in or without the company of men, be it as merchants, visiting relatives, or as shamans.

### **Exploring the field of travel encounters**

Since the early twentieth century, the area to the west of Lake Hövsgöl is commonly known as the “Darhad area”. It covers roughly 25’000 square kilometers centering on the depression of the sources of the River Shishget including the adjacent Sayan mountain ranges, encompassing the district of Renchinlhumbe and Tsagaan Nuur, further the district of Ulaan Uul (of which only the northern part lies in the depression), Bayanzürh to the southwest of Ulaan Uul, Hanh to the north of Lake Hövsgöl, and the village of Hatgal to the south of the lake. The area borders the Republics of Tyva and Buryatia belonging to the Russian Federation.

Although it seems self-evident to do fieldwork on Darhad shamans in an area called Darhad, I argue that my field is not a given geographical space called “Darhad area”, but that the field came into being through the encounters with people on our journeys. In particular, I was traveling in the search of shamans. Thus, I did not delineate my field in a geographical sense, but rather the demarcating criteria were “Darhad shamans”. Initially, I had in mind to study the Tuva shamans from Chandman Öndör and Tsagaan Üür to the east of Lake Hövsgöl for comparison. However, on a first visit by car in winter 2003, the informants I was advised to meet by my Mongolian supervisor L. Chuluunbaatar (who originates from the area), told me that there were no shamans left in their neighborhood. Discouraged by this information and the impression of huge distances, I abandoned a potential comparative approach.

By following the networks of people we already knew, my guides and I explored the area and constituted our field. First, the guides introduced me to the shamans they knew; then,

the shamans connected us to their disciples and teachers. On my preliminary explorations in summer 2002 I met with four shamans living far away from each other. Ippei Shimamura, a Japanese anthropologist studying Darhad and Buryat shamans in Mongolia had encountered six Darhad and Tuva shamans during his fieldwork in the area in 1997, and I hoped to contact several shamans more.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I became acquainted with almost sixty shamanizing persons, half of them providing services for clients and the other half either disciples or people shamanizing in private only (see Chapter 6). A considerable part of them came to be known as inspirational practitioners only recently.

My guides and I were traveling through the Darhad area during a total of twelve months – in spring and summer 2002, in winter 2003, in summer and autumn 2003, and in summer 2004. We rode more than 3000 kilometers on horseback along herders' pathways and furthermore took several drives by jeep into the area. Often, we started our horse journeys in Hatgal, at the southern edge of Lake Hövsgöl. Hatgal was founded in the early eighteenth century as a trading post between the Russian and the Manchu Qing empires and became one of the central reloading points for goods from the Soviet Union to northern and western Mongolia during socialism.<sup>3</sup> During socialist development, Hatgal was transformed into an industrial center with a wool washing plant, a wood processing industry, cloth and shoe manufactories, and a big petrol station supplementing the storehouses. With the collapse of the socialist economy, the industry of Hatgal broke down, the people lost their work and half of the former population of more around 7000 people left the small town during the following years. Today, decaying factory buildings and abandoned private houses recall the prosperous socialist past.

Starting our explorations in Hatgal, we traveled northward along the western shore of Lake Hövsgöl, along the numerous tourist camps, passed herders' winter quarters further north, and headed westward on the swampy herders' migration path over the Jigeliin pass to the open valley of Renchinlhümbe. Another track between Hatgal and Renchinlhümbe we used led us through the mountain ranges of the Hor'dol Sar'dag National Park. The third herder migration route we followed led us on a narrow track through the western part of the Hor'dol range over the Uurchuulin pass, plunging down to the settlement of Ulaan Uul. The only road for cars into the Shishget depression leads over the Öliin pass with its thirteen *ovoos* (ritual stone cairns) further in the west, leading also to Ulaan Uul, where the road divides into two tracks, one going to Renchinlhümbe and the other one to Tsagaan Nuur, the northernmost settlement of the Darhad depression.

Both the districts (*sum*) of Renchinlhümbe and Ulaan Uul are the administrative centers of vast herding areas; the districts are the successors of the former collective livestock

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication 19.10. 2003, and (Shimamura 2004a).

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by Byambajav, the head of the local administration of Hatgal (05.07. 2003); see also Tatár (1991).

farms, the *Altan Tal negdel*, the “Golden Steppe” collective farm of Renchinlhümbe and the *Jargalant am’dral negdel*, the “Happy Life” farm of Ulaan Uul. The district of Ulaan Uul numbers today 3800 inhabitants, and Renchinlhümbe numbers 4500 persons. Around a fourth of the households of each district lie in the administrative center, while the vast majority live as herders scattered along water sources over the depression and on the mountain slopes, occupying between four and six different seasonal camps and pastures. The *sum* population is subdivided into *bag*. Usually the *bag* members consist of a neighborhood of herders staying together in winter and/or in summer. The herders stay in the open steppe areas in summer and leave the cold depression in autumn; they move to better-protected narrow valleys for the winter. The longest migration routes lead herders into the valley to the south of the Hor’dol mountains. Other herders belonging to Renchinlhümbe stay on Lake Hövsgöl during winter, the herders from Soyoo stay in the valleys of the river Hög in winter, while the herders in the north, in Hogrogo and Tengis, remain in the wider area. Thus, herders pursue different migration routes, depending on the area and depending on the size of their herds; it is a tendency for the household with big herds to undertake longer migratory movements and the ones with few animals to stay in the same areas throughout the year.<sup>4</sup>



*Photograph 7: The administration building in the village of Renchinlhümbe which burnt down in 2006 (14.06. 2003).*

The average number of livestock in the two districts of Ulaan Uul and Renchinlhümbe is around eighty head per household; this average includes the households in the villages, which usually also keep some cattle on their property.<sup>5</sup> Tsagaan Nuur, with 1400

<sup>4</sup> Badamhatan (1965: 25) mentioned that in the past herders used to spend the summer in the Shishget depression and moved between 200 and 300 kilometers south to Bayanzürh for the winter. Migrations of such a distance are no longer common but the longest migration routes over the Hor’dol still cover distances of 150 or even 200 kilometers.

<sup>5</sup> Information provided by the administrations of Renchinlhümbe (by the deputy head of the

inhabitants the smallest of the Darhad districts, includes, similar to Hatgal, an only very limited area of pastures within its administrative borders; the main part of Tsagaan Nuur's area consists of woods and taiga mountains. This land composition is a legacy from the late socialist days: Tsagaan Nuur was originally a *bag* of the collective farm of Renchinlümbe and was separated as an own *sum* with a state farm for fishing and hunting – but without substantial numbers of livestock – in 1985 only.<sup>6</sup> This administrative reorganization turned out to be unfortunate for the population of Tsagaan Nuur. A few years later, with the disintegration of the collective economy, Tsagaan Nuur's inhabitants were left with empty hands. The inhabitants of neighboring Renchinlümbe and Ulaan Uul received livestock during the privatization of the collective farms in the early 1990s. In Tsagaan Nuur, there was almost nothing to distribute; its population did not profit from the privatization of the livestock assets in Renchinlümbe, to whose collective farm it had belonged to for around thirty years. Until the present the population of Tsagaan Nuur is considerably poorer than the average household in Renchinlümbe – which is indicated by the average number of only thirty head of livestock per household. The three villages of the district consist of several elongated rows of spacious compounds with wooden houses; in the middle of these alignments, the public buildings of the administration, the school and the school dormitory, the telephone office, a small hospital, and some small shops are located.

During our journeys, we moved across the boundaries of the three districts, criss-crossed the labyrinth of small lakes connected by rivers in the vast plain north of Renchinlümbe, set out to the western and northern margins, visited shamans in the northernmost pastures in Tengis, in Hogrogo, and in the western taiga borderlands of the river Hög; we explored the “Red Taiga” to the west of Ulaan Uul, hung around for longer periods in the touristy areas on Lake Hövsgöl, we stayed with herders in their open summer locations and called on them in the more remote autumn or winter quarters, and we followed the narrow tracks to visit the reindeer herders in the areas known as “Western” and “Eastern Taiga”.

My field was not congruent with the geographical Darhad area. I left aside the district of Bayanzürh after a first visit by car to the well-known female shaman Baljir, who was drawing her last breath. We only passed through the southern areas of Ulaan Uul and I have never visited Hanh. However, my field was not restricted to northern Hövsgöl: I followed the shamans and their networks to the provincial capital Mörön and the country's capital Ulaanbaatar where some of them have temporarily or permanently settled.

To perceive the field as travel encounters derives from the presumption that what happened in the field was evoked through my presence and interaction. What my guides

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administration Baasanjav, 13.06. 2003;) and Ulaan Uul (by the head of the administration Tsevelmaa, 05.09. 2003), and were based on census data of December 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Information about Tsagaan Nuur was provided by the deputy head of the administration Dashdorj, 24.06. 2003).

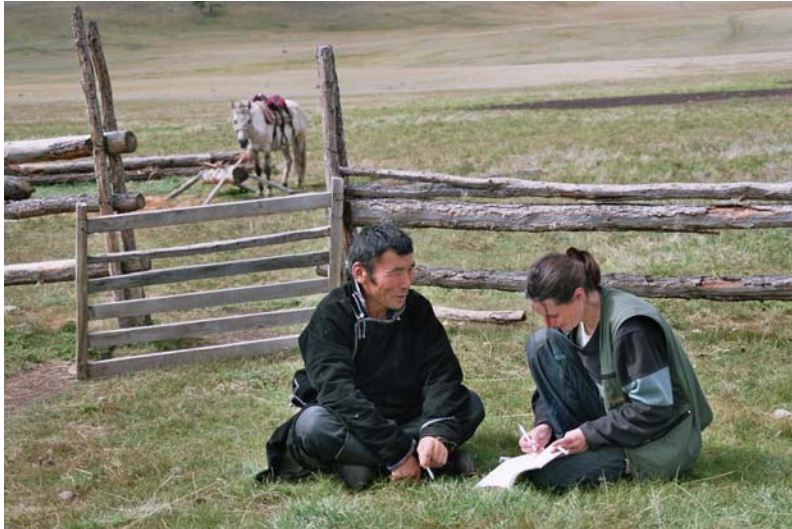


and I experienced was contingent on our choice of which direction to take, of how long to stay in a place, or of whom to visit next. These ad hoc decisions started from a rough itinerary, which was consecutively adjusted following pieces of advice and rumors. Our experiences profited from the serendipity of coming to the right place at the right time, for example to attend a shaman's healing ceremony, to come across unknown people telling enchanting stories, or to be welcomed with a cup of hot milk tea or a meal after hours of exhausting rides in cold weather. Our experiences included bad luck as well, leaving us with the feeling of coming too late, missing somebody we went far to meet with, or just being stuck in a place while certainly the very absorbing things were happening elsewhere. The duration of stay in one place was dependent on the hosts enjoying our visit or getting tired of us, and on my research interests which pushed me further or let me stay longer in a place. Some of the shamans we visited several times and for longer periods, at others' we stayed for a short interview only.

To dislocate the metaphor of dwelling with one of traveling requires relocating the oxymoron of participant observation with the understanding of fieldwork as being a guest and visitor. My participation in the daily life of the herders was rather sketchy; of course, I did sometimes wash the dishes, fetch water, milk yaks, clean a slaughtered goat's bowel, or muck out the sheep's gates. These occasional ventures into daily working tasks were a welcome change from my interviewing and were, due to my clumsiness, an amusement for my hosts, but they were not a contribution I would call participation. As a guest, I was not expected to participate in daily work, but I was expected to contribute to conversation and entertainment. People appreciated stories of our expeditions, and the frequent question whether their homeland, which is reputed as "Mongolian Switzerland", really looks like my home country, was an invitation to talk about similarities and differences not only of the landscape, but also of the living conditions in both countries. Favorite subjects of inquiry were issues related to pastoralism: what kind of animals we have in Switzerland, whether we have camels, the amount of milk a cow gives, whether we also have four seasons and snow in winter. People were interested in the standard of living in Switzerland and people asked me how much I earned for doing this arduous traveling just like I asked them how many head of livestock they had. In particular the shaman Davaajav, a fifty-year-old man living on the northernmost pastures in Hogrogo with the blatant trait of tremendously thick eyeglasses fixed with an elastic too high around his head, was eager to hear news from far away. When I asked him a question he asked two back; he inquired about my biography, my family relations and working situation, and was curious to hear about what daily life could be like in Switzerland; when I finished answering one question he added a "mmmhmm" and with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes he plunged into the next subject. In the field, not only "they", my interlocutors, were "the exotic", but also I was "the other" and I was expected to entertain with news about "the somewhere" else. People in particular



appreciated the visits of my partner, which provided a small insight into my personal life far away. By receiving him with exceptional attention, they made me into a part of the ordinary scene.



*Photograph 8: The shaman Davaajav talking with the author (10.08. 2004).*



*Photograph 9: Davaajav studying the map of his homeland (10.08. 2004).*

Foreign travelers have always praised the hospitality of the Mongols (for example Kowalewski 2002 [1835]; Bosshard 1950 [1938]), and indeed I experienced hospitality as elementary right (for visitors) and duty (for hosts): it is nothing else than ordinary also for a stranger to open the door of a Mongolian *ger* without knocking, to enter the home and to sit on a bed on the western (visitors') side. The host will hand over a cup of milk tea and usually start the conversation by asking where the guest is coming from and going to. To

receive frequent guests signals the wealth and reputation of a family. On the rare occasions we were camping in places supposed to be uninhabited, we were usually called on by people traveling by or living in the neighborhood. This unconstrained attitude in contacting strangers makes it easy to do one's fieldwork along travel encounters. It was not that we were always welcomed for longer stays, and it was not that my guides or I were pleased to stay overnight at every household we entered into. However, it was exciting to enter a household we did not know before: would the encounter after an initial mutual scanning turn into a joyful and stimulating gathering, or would it remain a tedious tight-lipped exchange of ritualized phrases? When I returned to Ulaanbaatar I realized how easy the access to people was in the rural Darhad area. In town, I was quickly forced back into the convention of having to phone someone, to explain my interest and to ask for a formal interview. I could no longer just go by and drop in; often I had to beg several times for a date, frequently I had problems to find people in the mazy outskirts of town. The visits in Ulaanbaatar usually were limited to the time of a formal interview; it felt awkward to remain longer in an urban apartment, whereas it was just ordinary to hang around at a herder's place.

### **Notions of “rapport” and “conspiracy” in arrival anecdotes**

A central focus of the “writing culture” debate is concerned with the constitution of ethnographic authority detected in the openings of ethnographies. Mary Louise Pratt (1986: 32) argues that opening anecdotes are often staged as personal travel narratives of the arrival in the field and play “a crucial role of anchoring [the following formal ethnographic] description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork”. One of the outstanding examples for this staging of authority is Clifford Geertz' (2000 [1973]) masterly told arriving anecdote in “*Deep play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight*”. Geertz described how he and his wife followed local people fleeing from a police raid against an illegal cockfight and he portrayed the story as the “turning point” of their presence in the village: the couple, before negated as “nonpersons, specters, invisible men” became “suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement” – the author rejoiced: “we were quite literally ‘in’” (ibid.: 412, 416). Geertz staged this arrival anecdote as a conspirative act through which he attained rapport, “that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work”: “It led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate” (ibid.: 416). James Clifford (1988: 40) comments that “[t]he anecdote establishes a presumption of connectedness, which permits the writer to function in his subsequent analyses as an omnipresent, knowledgeable exegete and spokesman”, which Clifford characterizes as an established convention to stage the attainment of ethnographic authority. George Marcus (1997) analyzes Geertz's arrival anecdote from the angle of the

use of the notions of “complicity” and “rapport” and advocates using in a changing mise-en-scène of anthropology an idea of conspiracy that is freed from the notion of rapport. The author locates the “regulative ideal” of rapport for the relationship between anthropologist and informant in a colonial context where rapport is instrumental for the ethnographer, “exploiting this intimacy as an investigative tool” (Amit 2000: 3).

I already have told one of my arrival stories describing how I came to know my guides, in which conspiracy shaped our explorations into the mysteries surrounding the shamans we visited. On our journeys from one informant to the next interlocutors, we dissected what we had seen and compared the different stories we had heard; often the guides had become involved in the more troublesome variant of an event of which I had heard a sanitized description. I will now present further arrival stories, disclosing how I became acquainted with the shamans in summer 2002. I will then discuss the involvement of “rapport” and “conspiracy” in the interaction with shamans and relate this discussion to my representation in this thesis.

The first shaman I encountered was Enhtuya. I was hanging around by Lake Hövsgöl with a friend, waiting for our guide, who had disappeared the night before, to recover from his alcohol intoxication. By coincidence we chose the tree trunks close to Enhtuya's *ger* to sit down on and wait. Enhtuya approached us and invited us in for a cup of tea. In her home, I had a look at the photographs displayed in a frame in the back part of the *ger*, where I saw a picture of her with a feathered headdress covering her face, holding a drum in her hands, and wearing a dress adorned with drapery stripes. Obviously, the photo showed Enhtuya wearing a shaman's armor; therefore I asked some initial questions about her being a shaman. A few days later, I visited Enhtuya again when I was passing with some friends and Chinbat. Enhtuya invited us to her seance appointed for the following night in her *ger*. The seance was held to treat a foreign couple and was attended by local people, Mongolian visitors, the couple and our group as foreigners. The ceremony lasted around an hour and left no marked impression in my memory; nevertheless, I became interested in meeting other shamans.

During our journey through the Shishget depression, Chinbat conducted us to the shamans he knew. First, he led us to Badrah. When we entered Badrah's house, a couple traveling on motorbike was sitting on the bed next to the entrance of the small wooden house, talking to the shaman. After the couple left, it was our turn to have a seat. Our two guides conversed with the old fragile man, who had a high weirdly furrowed forehead and mumbled in a low voice. I had been curious to meet the shaman, though upon arrival I realized that there was nothing I could observe; I was neither prepared for nor did I perceive it as appropriate to do a formal interview; I just felt helpless as to how to satisfy my curiosity. Finally, I asked the shaman for a divination; I asked the shaman the very question which preoccupied me at that time: whether I should continue with my studies by

becoming a doctoral student and doing fieldwork in Mongolia. The old shaman unwrapped his diviner mirror from a drapery, spun the mirror, looked at the relief on the surface and predicted my work in Mongolia would be successful.

Leaving Badrah, we crossed the Shishget River nearby on the small float operated by a rafter; after we ferried all our horses across the river, we had only a few kilometers to go to the small gathering of herders' houses where the shaman Baljir (of whom I have talked in the opening of this chapter) lived. Near his house there waited a jeep of one of the major Mongolian tour operators with which two Australian photographers had arrived. The shaman's one-room-house was crowded with people. Baljir sat on the floor talking to his audience while smoking one cigarette after the other; in front of him, a jar's lid with incense and a jaw harp were deposited on a piece of drapery lying on the floor. Baljir relit the incense, picked up the jaw harp, slowly moved it in a circle through the smoke of the incense, then he pressed it against his teeth and started plucking the tongue of the harp, producing a twanging monotonous melody; he stopped suddenly, threw the harp up and let it drop onto the drapery. Both arms half outstretched, the hands' palms pointing to the roof, the shaman looked at the harp for a while and repeated the procedure once or twice. He looked up to give his advice and I remember well the piercing look of his eyes, which seemed to change their color into a lucent light blue. Later that afternoon, I also asked Baljir for his advice, again submitting my problem to decide about starting a thesis and I told Baljir about my idea to study the situation of the herding economy in the western province Uvs after the out-migration of a considerable part of the herding population. Baljir also prophesied my studies would be successful and he added that I should not go to western Mongolia to engage in an economic subject; "you should study here with shamans and the people of the taiga".



*Photograph 10: The shaman Baljir with his family at his home in Dood Tsagaan Nuur (07.08. 2003).*

Baljir invited us to his seance that night, which ended at dawn with all of the participants sitting in a circle on the floor and emptying several bottles of vodka. I remember his seance as a fascinating performance, with moments making me shudder and tense, and others provoking laughter from the audience. The following days I started to think about doing research on shamanism. After having gained an insight into the contemporary studies of shamanism relating the subject to modernity and power during my studies, it was nevertheless this exotic experience of a shaman's seance in the midst of a night which incited me to immerse myself into the subject for my thesis and to abandon my other plans.

My intention for telling this arrival anecdote is not to insinuate that I had gained a privileged access and rapport to shamans and to distance myself from other visitors tapping into the exotic nature of the subject. Rather, my aim is to disclose that I did not have a privileged relationship with my interlocutors. My interpretation of this story is that the shamans approached and invited me because they were interested in contacting foreigners. Our conspiracy lay in the mutual interest of our interaction: I was contacting them to collect the material for my thesis and the shamans were interested in contacting foreign anthropologists to support their legitimization as shamans. A flavor of conspiracy surrounded my interactions with shamans, when we were sitting together on the floor in their homes, crouched over my notebook for hours, the shamans dictating genealogies of spirits, causes of illness, or the text of their invocations to provide me with explanations that would enable me to write my dissertation. Subtle games of authority were part of our conspiracy. Although I was at forty, an "old" student, the shamans usually were at least some years older than me – which alone put me in an inferior position in our interaction: the shamans addressed me with the informal pronoun used for younger people, while I addressed them with the polite pronoun. This hierarchical relationship was further accentuated through my status as a student and the shamans' position as a teacher introducing me to those secrets they decided to disclose. On the other hand, I was the foreign guest, connected to urban centers and the authority of university, which put me in a position of respect.

To elaborate this mutual staging of authority I return to my first encounters with Enhtuya in summer 2002. After my holiday horse treks through the Darhad area, I extended my stay in the area and installed my tent by Lake Hövsgöl next to Enhtuya for two weeks. Enhtuya had in the meantime moved into a tepee erected on the lake's shore, surrounded by the family's reindeer. In contrast to the other reindeer herding families staying in the inaccessible taiga mountains in the border area, Enhtuya performed as "Tsaatan" family on the picturesque lake close to tourist camps.<sup>7</sup> During the day, Enhtuya was on show in her tepee, receiving Mongolian and foreign tourists as her guests, while almost every other

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<sup>7</sup> I will discuss Enhtuya's interaction with tourists in Chapter 7 and I will portray the reindeer herders in the taiga (called "Tsaatan" in Mongolian and "Dukha" in a new international discourse) in Chapter 9.

night she was performing as a shaman for Mongolian clients who mainly stayed as tourists by the lake. During this two-week-stay I made the first explorations into the realms of spirits. In the quiet early morning, at noon, and in the evening I sounded out Enhtuya; when guests arrived I remained in her tepee, chatting with the visitors and translating the conversation between Enhtuya and her guests, and at night I attended Enutya's seances. After some days, Enhtuya started to check the advances of my studies. At the end of a seance, after her husband had taken off her armor and had provided her with a cup of milk tea and a cigarette, Enhtuya asked me – in a voice loud enough for the audience to follow our conversation – which of her spirits had visited her during the seance. I tried to guess the identity of the spirits by associating her theatrical movements and animal sounds during the seance with wild animals, as Enhtuya had before introduced her spirits as animals. While I felt like a pupil being tested by her teacher, I was well aware that this examination in the middle of a crowded tepee was a mutual exchange of authority staged for an audience which seemed not to be familiar with shamans' seances. The shaman gave the younger woman and student the appearance of knowing about the secrets of shamanism and the foreign student who apparently could recognize the spirits confirmed the existence of the spirits and thereby proved the shaman to be a "genuine" shaman. Of course, Enhtuya knew that I could not really recognize her spirits' identity, which is not determined by possible accompanying animal sounds but by the particular spirits' name, which I only learnt later in my fieldwork. I moreover allege that Enhtuya knew that I had heard the rumors questioning her as a "real shaman" and a "real Tsaatan" woman in the local arenas. Both of us were located in fragile conditions of status; me as a tourist becoming an anthropologist and Enhtuya as a contested shaman. Our conspiracy was concerned with the mutual production of authority: to stage as a "genuine shaman" and to have the authority to represent it.

My view on the conspiracy integrated into the interactions with my interlocutors is related to the insight that the personal experience of "being there" no longer suffices for the privileged authority of anthropologists. I was not at all the first foreigner contacting the shamans in the Darhad area. There were not only other anthropologists visiting Darhad shamans before me. Moreover, "we" anthropologists share our field experiences with tourists, journalists, documentarians, and Western "neoshamans" who all produce their own representations. I aim to oppose Geertz's staging of the anthropologist as rejected intruder who by the clever use of conspiracy finally becomes able to "penetrate" the culture and gains rapport to his informants, on which he then bases his authority of representation. My field was not a closed bounded community into which I had to penetrate. In my field, there was just nothing to penetrate and I never was "just in" either. I encountered individuals, living scattered over a huge area, and with each of them I had to build a new relationship, which developed in its particular way. I described the shamans Baljir and

Enhtuya as very open and curious to contact foreign tourists and anthropologists; some people received me curtly at first, gradually becoming more communicative; sometimes people tested my knowledge before they revealed anything; others only provided me with information on a second visit; and finally some interlocutors were sociable and open-minded when I met them for the first time but showed no more interest in an exchange during later visits. A personal relationship of “rapport” or even friendship did evolve through joint experiences and repeated visits with some of my interlocutors while it did not with others.

I aim to represent the people in my thesis as the individuals I encountered them as and not as anonymous representatives of a bounded culture called “the Darhad”. To show them with their individuality and agency I represent the shamans and the guides with their proper names. Although this has been quite a common practice in reports on shamanism, I indeed do worry about a possible rollback of earlier persecutions. I remind that early twentieth-century accounts had contributed to identify shamans who later became persecuted (see Johansen 2004). However, in the present time, shamans are not persecuted but are venerated as part of national tradition and cultural heritage and I assess it as more important to acknowledge my involvement in the constitution of the reputation of shamans. To show shamans with their proper names demands not to write everything but to silence delicate information or to subsume it into general accounts. Furthermore, I doubt that it would be possible to show shamans as outstanding individuals without mentioning their names: insiders would easily recognize the persons being described. One might argue that the foreseeable danger today lies not in the potential persecution of shamans but in the international interest and the “persecution” by an esoteric audience and tourists. I do not share this concern. I have experienced that shamans do not differentiate between anthropologists and other foreigners – we are all just visitors. I do not feel in the need to protect shamans from contacts with other visitors, and beyond this, other visitors are not dependent on my account to find their way to the shamans in the Darhad area.

### **Critique on the notion of conspiracy**

George Marcus (1997) suggests that to dislocate rapport with conspiracy means to integrate the broader context – thought as one of colonialism or “a cultural formation of the world system” – squarely into the fieldwork relation: instead of an imagination of the anthropologist crossing a “boundary and exploring a cultural logic of enclosed difference” the affinity between anthropologist and interlocutor then arises from their anxiety about their relationship to the context as “a third”. The context, present for example in the living circumstances and the social transformations, was often part of the discussions. It was part of my research agenda not to give an account on shamanism as “timeless system of religion” but to show it as a historically situated practice integrated in the context of post-socialist

Mongolia. I perceived the condition of this context as profoundly shaped by international or transnational influences, be it by international development policies or by tourism. To include the wider context in the relationship of the anthropologist to her informants however is not to perceive the couple of ethnographer and informant in relation to the world system as an outside third (which in fact makes conspiracy easy). It requests to acknowledge that this context also shapes the very condition of the relationship between the anthropologist and informant. The most obvious characteristic of this condition I perceive as neocolonial is that I was in the position of being able to afford to travel to Mongolia and later even to do fieldwork on a grant, whereas only few of my interlocutors could have afforded the ticket to visit me in Switzerland. Another facet of the neocolonial context lies in the general conditions of anthropological fieldwork in Mongolia. During the socialist period it was hardly possible for Western anthropologists to conduct fieldwork in Mongolia, and if it was, only on a very restricted scale, permanently accompanied by officials (Humphrey 1994). Only due to the disintegration of socialism did it become possible to do unobserved fieldwork for the formerly excluded scholars. Since the early 1990s, increasing numbers of American, European, Japanese and Korean scholars have entered Mongolia for fieldwork, while the Mongolian scholars hardly can afford long-term fieldwork and become “assistants” of foreign researchers.

One of the subtexts of the explorations in this chapter is the attempt to distance myself from the colonial legacies of our disciplinary history. However, I could not fully convince myself with the arguments put forth; some doubts remain: is the replacement of the idea of “rapport” with one of “conspiracy” of travel encounters really a substantial reconceptualizing of fieldwork? Or is this new trope at the end hardly more than a rhetorical self-justification to continue a practice of fieldwork which has been beset by criticism for two decades now? The idea of conspiracy presupposes a relation of equality, which probably is still more the exception than the rule in anthropological fieldwork; at least not in the relations of a Swiss student doing generously granted fieldwork with more or less poor herders in rural Mongolia. By denying an equal relationship, I do not mean that the power in the encounters was on my side; on the contrary, I often was the dependent, the inferior, and the one who needed help.

The relative deficiency of me as fieldworker in the field stands in contrast to the authority I exercise with the representation. Above I cited Pratt (1986) and Clifford (1988) who criticize the staging of authority in the classical representations by relating them to their colonial context. With Paul Rabinow (1986) I argue that the authority lies in the very condition of producing a text which represents others – which cannot be avoided with new forms of representations like experimental, dialogical, or polyphonic experiments. It is still the anthropologist as author who decides from which conversation to quote and which stories to include or to exclude – something which also Clifford (1988) admits.



I suggest integrating the self-reflexive analysis of our experiences in the field and the anthropological representations as part of our field of study. The goal of this attempt is not to retreat into subjectivism, but to scrutinize how we inscribe scholarly biases into the object we claim only to represent and to detect the scientific unconsciousness in the social conditions and constraints of scholarly practice (Bourdieu 1993). I have extended my field in a way which Michael Taussig (1987: xiii) describes in his author's note to "*Shamanism, colonialism and the wild man*": "[...] my subject is not the truth of being but the social being of truth, not whether facts are real but what the politics of their interpretation and representation are". Thus, my field also includes the disciplinary fields of anthropology and in particular its discourses on shamanism. Throughout my dissertation I will switch between my experiences with people in the Darhad field and the discursive field of representations of "shamanism".

### **Why a white horse should be devoted to the spirits**

I started this chapter with an introduction of my guides and how the brothers Buyanölzii and Davaanyam on our journey came to be followed by spirits intruding into the lives of their wider family members. A year after I first realized these intrusions I heard a story that explained these mysterious events. I was staying with Davaanyam at his sister Oyundalai and his brother-in-law Terbish's in Alag Erden near the Eg river, south of Hatgal in July 2004. We arrived there to collect Davaanyam's horses to set out for fieldwork. Two of the family's daughters had become persecuted by spirits and had fallen ill. The second daughter Uranbayar had since married and she told that she was still dreaming about deceased people. In the meantime, also the third daughter Ulambayar complained about inexplicable troubles. The lama consulted diagnosed a *harin yum*, a disturbance by black shamanic spirits, and recommended what shamans had advised to my guides the year before: to devote a horse to the spirits. The lama further recommended moving the family *ger* to another place, which the family was about to do when we arrived. Due to the steady rain we stayed with the family for three days until the rain finally stopped and Davaanyam and I set off for Ulaan Uul and the family started to move their *ger*.

In these days Davaanyam's brother-in-law Terbish told us a story he had heard from an elder relative of his wife's – which sounded like the key to the current spirits' intrusions: A paternal ancestor of Oyundalai, Davaanyam, and Buyanölzii once went to the taiga for hunting, where he shot a big white deer. After that hunting trip, he lost a considerable part of his livestock and therefore the hunter went to a Tuva shaman in the taiga to submit his problem. The shaman told him that there was something wrong with the deer he had shot, and that was reason that his cattle had died. The shaman repaired the spiritual nuisance and asked as remuneration a white horse, which he intended to devote to the spirits (*seterleh*). To obtain the remuneration, the shaman accompanied the hunter back to his

home, but when the hunter wanted to give his white horse to the shaman, his daughters objected, lamenting that it was their beloved horse. Finally, the shaman made a cut in one of the horse's ears, drank the leaking blood and returned to the taiga. With this magical action, Terbish explained, the shaman caused harm unto the family of the hunter and his descendents: four of the hunter's daughters died, and the youngest one became a shaman.



*Photograph 11: Ulambayar, Uranbayar, Otgontsetseg and their brother Baaska in Alag Erden (26.07. 2004).*

## Exploring inspirational ontologies

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*This chapter articulates the exploration into the ontologies of Darhad shamans' spirits with an analysis of the scholarly discourses on Siberian shamanism. I argue that since the eighteenth century, scholarly representations have been preoccupied with a rationalist approach to the shamans' interactions with inexplicable spiritual realms. Scholarly representations outline rational imaginations of shamanistic belief systems and cosmologies, despite mentioning since the eighteenth century that shamanism is in decline, that it is influenced and threatened by the spread of Buddhism and Christianity. By situating myself in this tradition, I will make transparent how I asked shamans for explanations of spirits and cosmologies and thereby was actively engaged in the very delineation of spiritual entities. By interpreting my efforts, I will propose to view the inspirational realms of shamans less as cognitive maps of others worlds than as performative acts of translation.*

Today, the notion of “traditional shamanism” is related to the reports of the early twentieth century. Earlier sources are seldom mentioned, in particular the explorers' reports of the eighteenth century are neglected, probably due to their obvious denigrations of shamans. In contrast, I will include these reports into my overview about the outstanding features of scholarly representations. The aim of this discussion is to show the changes as well as continuities of the scholarly accounts. I will trace the development of the focus on “shamanistic belief systems” and by discussing my own fieldwork I will illustrate how this perception travels back to the shamans and influences their practices.

Since the early European missions to the Mongol court reports about the journeys to Siberia and Inner Asia have included remarks about inspirational practitioners (see Roux 1959; Haenisch 1941). The term “shaman” was brought to Europe by the Dutchman Ysbrandts Ides at the end of the seventeenth century; and, shortly after, the word became used as a generic term for magical practices in Siberia (Laufer 1917).<sup>1</sup> The tales about shamans fascinated a literate public; fact and fiction stimulated pervasive imaginations in eighteenth-century Europe (Flaherty 1992; Stuckrad 2003). The German scientists Daniel Messerschmidt, Georg Steller, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, Johann Georg Gmelin, Johann Gottlieb Georgi, and Peter Simon Pallas explored Siberia in the service of the Imperial Academy of Science in St. Petersburg founded in 1724 (Dahlmann 1999; Heissig 1989). The German explorers mapped the territory with its resources and satisfied the curiosity of their European audiences with eyewitness accounts of seances of shamans and other

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<sup>1</sup> Laufer (1917) argued that the term “shaman” derives from the Tungus and he rejected the at time popular view that the term “shaman” was not an indigenous term but derived from the Sanskrit and the shamans' practices from India. The indigenous terms are distinct in the different languages. However, the term for a female practitioner are quite similar called *udgan* (Roux 1958).

“superstitions” of the native populations (Znamenski 2004: xxi ff.). The explorers’ reports reveal an ambivalent perception of shamans, blending fascination with contempt. In this period, the focus of disapproval of Siberian “magicians” changed from a religious to a rationalist one: while before the shamans had to be depicted as devils to be acceptable subjects of representations, during the eighteenth century this paradigm of permissibility became superseded by the criticism of a sceptical Enlightenment (Flaherty 1992). The salient feature of the eighteenth-century explorers’ gaze was to denounce the shamans as tricksters, deceivers, or sorcerers, whose seances were depicted as delusions of the credulous natives. The transformation of the perspective on shamans is apparent in Gmelin’s description in the mid-eighteenth century:

Die Ceremonien waren alle mit den vorigen Hexereien, die wir gesehen hatten, so wie auch der Ausgang einerlei, nämlich schelmisch und betrügerisch. [...] Wir hatten bei allem dem, da wir sahen, dass die ganze Zauberei in einem blossen Blendwerke und Betrügerei bestund, doch ein besonderes Vergnügen, diese Kerls spielen zu sehen. Denn sie verdrehen das Gesicht, machen tausenderlei Sprünge und Bewegungen des Leibes, schreien als wie rasende, rasseln als wie der Teufel, und bei der grossen Last des eisernen Rockes, den sie auf dem blossen Leibe tragen, müssen sie nothwendig nicht wenige Schmerzen leiden: daher sie auch ungemein schwitzen und schäumen. Alles dieses thun sie für gute Bezahlung, die ihnen ihre Gemeine geben muss; uns mussten sie es umsonst thun, und wir liessen, um sie ihres verdammten Handwerkes wegen ein wenig zu martern, die Comödie etliche mahl von neuem spielen. [...] Mir scheint es noch nicht begreiflich, wie es vernünftige Leute gebe, die an dergleichen Possen einen Glauben haben; ja ich kann auch nicht begreifen, wie es andere einer Religion zugethane Leute gebe, welche glauben, dass diese Schamanen wirkliche Hexenmeister wären, und mit dem Teufel wirkliche Unterredungen hielten, oder in irgend einem Verständnisse mit ihm stünden. Ich halte dafür, dass sie so viel von dem Teufel als von GOTT wissen, nämlich ganz und gar nichts, und dass alle diese Gaukeleien eine Betrügerei sind, wovon diese Leute, als wie andere von ihrer Handarbeit leben (Gmelin 1999 [1751/1752]: 149, 150).

Johann Georg Gmelin was a chemist and botanist and participated in the second Bering expedition to Kamtchatka (Posselt 1990). Gmelin was eager to meet shamans, whose seances he enjoyed as entertainment on long winter evenings; he was primarily interested in the theatrical aspects of the performances and the shamans’ appearances and hardly in the content of their rituals. He focused on the shamans as practitioners and did not associate them with a system of belief, something which later became dominant. The citation above reveals his ambiguity between a rationalist and a religious perspective: first, he denied that “rationally minded persons” could “believe” in the “burlesque” of the shaman. Then, he called into question that even persons devoted to religion could believe in the capacities of shamans, proposing that the shamans knew neither about God nor the devil but conducted their “frauds” as an income-generating “handicraft”.

An ambivalent stance on shamans is also characteristic of the later reports of Peter Simon Pallas (1771-1776; 1801) and Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1775), who were more concerned with the content of the shamanic practices and made efforts to describe rituals

and the content of the belief in detail. Georgi was impressed by the poetic gifts of shamans and despite his own disbelief in shamans' practices, he admitted that some shamans sincerely believed in the existence of spirits and to be in contact with them. Therefore, he put the practices of the shamans in the context of religion, but at the same time he expressed his doubts about the seriousness of the shamans' performance:

Bei den Religionsübungen der Tungusen läuft alles auf die Aussöhnung beleidigter Gottheiten, auch derer die sie Böse nennen, hinaus. Dieses soll durch Gebet und Opfern geschehen. Sie wollen dadurch ein gegenwärtiges Uebel abwenden, sich die Götter im Voraus zu Freunden machen, oder auch für genossen Glück danken. Die Schamanen aber kleiden alles in so viele Gauckeleien ein, dass es einem Narrenspiel sehr ähnlich wird. Sie wollen durchaus dabey als Schwärmer entzückt oder besessen angesehen seyn, und springen, brüllen und rasen zwischen Gebethen (Georgi 1775: 281).

Georgi (1775: 313) perceived the religion of the Tungus and the Buryat as “natural” religion with the shamans as priests; however, he mentioned that the Buryat included the “Lamaist idolatry” into their own shamanic faith. Georgi’s interpretation of shamanic practices as religion can be viewed as an early attempt to associate shamanic practice with a “belief system”. Pallas (1801) dedicated one of his two volumes about the Mongols to their “superstitious beliefs”: he outlined an elaborate cosmology with numerous kinds of spirits, *tänggri*, residing in the upper and in the underworld. Different to Georgi, he associated the spiritual cosmology not with the shamans but he explicitly stated that he had taken these accounts from Buddhist books of the “*Lamaischen Fabellehre*”. Pallas devoted almost the entire volume to Buddhism, which he called “*Tybetanischer Aberglauben*”, “*Schigemunische*”, or “*Lamaische Fabellehre*”, and he spent only the short last chapter on shamans’ practices, which he described as remnants of an ancient religion that were plastered over with the new doctrine. In the chapter “*Gaukeleyen des schamanischen Aberglaubens, Zaubereyen und Weissagereyen unter den mongolischen Völkern*” he reported on a sacrificial ceremony and quoted at length the rules of scapulimancy and weather rituals.<sup>2</sup> His description of shamanic “superstitions” focused on the practice of shamans and not on cosmology. Like other explorers of his time, Pallas mentioned that the natives were becoming increasingly reluctant to disclose their shamanic practices (Flaherty 1992: 72).

The representations of the early eighteenth century bluntly disparaged the shamans, while towards the end of the century Pallas and Georgi associated the shamans as practitioners with beliefs. They emphasized that shamans’ practices and beliefs were on the retreat and that shamans were persecuted by Buddhist monks. Embedding the practices of shamans into a consistent “belief system” became a major concern only from the nineteenth century onward. With the focus on a “shamanistic belief system”, the scholarly accounts

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<sup>2</sup> Scapulimancy is a kind of divination with a sheep’s shoulder blade.

successively abandoned the obvious disparagement of shamans and increasingly scholars distanced themselves from their predecessors, whose accounts went out of date.

### **The emergence of “shaman-ism” as a belief system**

The German orientalist Radloff (1884) explored the linguistic and ethnographic terrain of southern Siberia and later became a central figure in the institutionalization of Russian anthropology. Radloff produced an influential account of south Siberian shamanic practices (Znamenski 2004: xxix). He introduced his overview of “*das Schamanenthum und sein Kultus*” with the remark that “in earlier times” all Tungus, Mongol and Turk tribes were devoted to the *Schamanenthum*, yet only among the Tungus, the Buryat, and a small part of the Turkic tribes in Siberia the old “*Schamanenglauben*” had remained (Radloff 1884: 1). Radloff presented a distinct shamanistic cosmology by describing in detail the “*Weltanschauung des Schamanenthums*”: the division of the world into three separated layers, each of these divided into several strata populated by good spirits and deities in the upper strata of the light and bad spirits in the lower strata of the darkness. Radloff condensed the characteristics of the *Schamanenthum* into the belief in a strong relationship between the living and the dead ancestors who were intermediaries to the powers of the light and the darkness.

Radloff was desperately seeking to attend shamans’ seances during his expedition, yet he only succeeded in witnessing a short prayer and one proper seance with his own eyes (Znamenski 2004: xxix). In fact, he hardly encountered shamans at all and on the rare occasions he did, as with the two baptized former shamans he talked about, they were reluctant to reveal their secrets to him (Radloff 1884: 2). Although his access to primary sources was obviously limited Radloff rendered lively descriptions of shamans’ practices, written in the present tense and in an active voice, giving the reader the impression of being part of the scene. Radloff’s account includes a thirty-page-long description of a two-day seance containing the text of the shaman’s chants. This description became canonized as a typical shamanic session and was used by Eliade to back up his general model of shamanism (Znamenski 2004: xxxi). Before describing this ceremony, Radloff (1884: 19, 20) revealed that his description was based on a missionary’s notes from the 1840s, published in a Siberian journal in 1870, and that he had not been permitted to look at the original record at the Altai mission. Radloff’s representation is outstanding in that he advanced the systematization of a “belief system” related to the shamans’ practices. The term “shamanism” probably did not emerge before the end of the nineteenth century –it appeared first in the English translation of the first part of Mikhailovskii’s (1895 [1892]) work on shamanism (Hamayon 2003: 14).<sup>3</sup> As far as I could trace the earlier sources in the original, the eighteenth-century explorers wrote about the shamans as persons and as

<sup>3</sup> The Russian title includes the term *shamanstvo*, which was translated into “shamanism”.

practitioners. The term “shaman-ism” associated with a distinct “system of beliefs” surrounding the shamans only evolved during the nineteenth century.

Radloff recommended Bogoras and Jochelson, the socialist revolutionaries exiled to Siberia, as members of the Jesup North Pacific Anthropological Expedition to Boas. The monographs published in English about the Chukchee (Bogoras 1904-1909), the Koryak (Jochelson 1975 [1908]) and the Yukaghir (Jochelson 1975 [1926]) contained detailed sections about shamanism, establishing the perception that the stronghold of shamanism was located in north-east Asia and was associated with mental deviation and neurosis (Znamenski: xxxiii). The eighteenth-century explorers had already discussed the mental state of shamans and had related their “hypersensitivity” to the natural environment and the harsh climate; in the early twentieth century this idea became well known by the term “arctic hysteria”. The field accounts of Bogoras and Jochelson were supported by secondary synopses of the shamans’ mental capacities by Czaplicka (1914), Nioradze (1925), and Ohlmarks (1939).<sup>4</sup> The monographs of the participants of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition are outstanding in another respect: pre-dating Malinowski and his “invention” of twentieth-century ethnographic fieldwork, they were based on extensive fieldwork and the knowledge of the native language. Furthermore, their accounts about shamanism are embedded in holistic representations of distinct ethnic groups. While Radloff’s “*Aus Sibirien*” was written in the form of eighteenth-century expedition accounts, enriching the chronology of the journey with haphazard sketches of personal experiences, information about the people, the flora, or the geology, Bogoras and Jochelson produced systematically ordered representations about delineated groups. Although the tables of contents of Bogoras’ and Jochelson’s works look similar, with the same titles put in a different order, they bear distinct approaches towards the shamans: while Bogoras classified shamanism in an evolutionist model related to theories of animism, Jochelson was primarily concerned with the “degeneration” of religious practice due to the Russian colonization and with the reconstruction of the traditional religious system.

Between 1912 and 1917, Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff did extensive fieldwork among the Tungus (Evenki) and Manchus in Transbaikalia and Manchuria and produced a comprehensive account of spiritual ontologies and shamans’ practices (Johansen 2001a). Shirokogoroff’s “*Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*” (1935) aspired to relate shamans’ practices in a functionalist approach to his overall theories of “Ethnos” and “psychomental complex”. Fortunately he failed in this endeavor. His account is full of contradictory views, inconsistencies of concepts, and shows the ambiguity of the shamans’ position in their society. Although his “ethnos” theory later came to dominate Soviet anthropology (which silenced the authorship of Shirokogoroff; see Johansen 2001a), it is mainly his meticulous

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<sup>4</sup> The concern with the mental state of shamans has regained prominence in the recent multidisciplinary research aspiring to assess the therapeutic healing of shamans (see Atkinson 1992).

descriptions of practices, inconsistent ideas of spirits, and his actor-centered account which are most valuable for present-day readers. Parallel to the Russian observers, Siberian regionalists, for example the writer and folklorist Grigorii Potanin, the Yakut/Sakha ethnographer T. Ksenofontov, or the Buryat ethnographer Garma Sanjeev sought to upgrade the cultural and social status of Siberia and devoted their attention to ethnography and shamanism (Znamenski 2004: xxxi, xxxii).

### **Shamanism as a subject of armchair anthropologists**

The Stalinist anti-religious policy repressed both shamans' practice and its ethnographic representation. Menges (1981) complained that the field material collected by Soviet ethnographers could no longer be published and that the field notes remained unedited in archives. One strategy to bypass Soviet political restrictions was to present (sometimes rather superficially) the encountered shamans and their practices as historical: Soviet ethnology approached shamans' practices, which "still existed underneath", as "moribund" and represented shamanism in an "ethnographic present perfect" as "traditional reconstruction" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2001: 12).<sup>5</sup> Another strategy was to focus on the study of shamanic paraphernalia, in particular the drum, which could be presented as traditional folklore (for example Vajnstejn 1996). Unsurprisingly, one of the main subjects of Soviet shamanism studies was the debate about the origin of shamanism. The question whether shamanism was an ancient tradition grown out of matriarchy or a rather new phenomenon related to class society was heatedly discussed (see Humphrey 1980 for an overview).

Non-Soviet scholars largely became excluded from doing fieldwork on shamanism in Siberia and Mongolia, with some prominent exceptions – for example the Hungarian scholar of religion Vilmos Diószegi (1962; 1968 [1960]; 1968), who did fieldwork during shorter periods in Mongolia and Tuva in the late 1950s and early 1960s, or the East-German ethnographer Erika Taube (1983), and, to a restricted extent, the French anthropologist Roberte Hamayon (1990). Besides a few first-hand field accounts, the European study of shamanism became largely the work of armchair anthropologists and scholars of religion, who were left to re-analyze the pre-Soviet field accounts over and over again. The masterpiece of this approach is undoubtedly Eliade's "*Shamanism*" (1974 [1951]). From a vast body of literature on Siberian and other shamans' practices, Eliade extracted an archetype of an archaic and universal shamanism. Intriguingly he succeeded in arranging the heterogeneous accounts into a consistent narrative. Eliade persuaded a wide public that shamanism was defined by the ecstatic ascent to the sky and the shamanistic cosmology of a tripartite world connected by a world tree or pillar. Eliade purified the figure of the shaman from the suspicion of mental pathology and instead represented him as a

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Anisimov (1963a; 1963b), Chernetsov (1963), Vainshtein (Vajnstejn 1978; Vajnstejn1984), Vasilevic (1963; 1996), Zelenin (1952 [1936]).



fascinating personality with extraordinary capabilities. Although largely criticized in recent decades for taking shamans out of their social and historical context, Eliade's account remains the dominant representation in student's introduction courses; it has further become one of the primary scholarly resources for the universalized "New Age" neoshamanism (Stuckrad 2003).

Roberte Hamayon (1990) provided the last "grand theory" of shamanism: she mainly re-analyzed the presocialist literature on Buryat shamanism and molded it into a Durkheimian view of religion as symbolic representation of the social. Hamayon distinguished two models of shamanism by relating shamans to the distinct socio-economic organizations of their communities. In her model of hunting shamanism, the shaman maintains a symbolic alliance relationship with the game-giving-spirit in favor of his community; in this Lévi-Strauss-inspired model she reifies the earlier view that shamanism originates in hunter culture (see Siikala 1978). Her second model is concerned with the social role of shamans of patrilineal clans; in this "transformed shamanism", the logic of alliance is superseded by a logic of descent. Hamayon (1996: 76-77) restricts the notion of shamanism to "archaic, tribal, or noncentralized societies" in which shamans are a "constitutive part of social organization, and [...] the shamanic institution is in charge of the regular life-giving rituals, destined to ensure the reproduction of society and of its natural resources". She demarcates this restricted conception of "shamanism" from "shamanic practices" in centralized states and under the influence of Buddhism and Christianity, where shamanic practices became "acculturated" and "marginalized" (1990: 705). Although Hamayon is a cardinal critic of Eliade, she follows him by extracting a speculative theory of "archaic shamanism" for which we have barely written sources. Her "*chasse à l'âme*" appeared in print in 1990, thus at the very moment when the socialist system collapsed and not only shamans reappeared on public scenes but also when scholars from "the West" enthusiastically invaded Siberia to study the practices of the "new" shamans.

### **The rational production of an irrational survival**

I argue that despite fundamental changes in the approaches to shamanism three subliminal themes have been strikingly persistent since the eighteenth century: the rationalization of the irrational, the questioning of the integrity of shamans, and the view of the threatening decline of shamanism. Since Pallas and Georgi, scholars have perpetuated the claim that shamanism is in decline, threatened by Buddhism and Russian colonialism, and hence is only a "degenerated" survival of an archaic tradition. The paradigm of decline is blended with the questioning of the integrity and authenticity of actually encountered shamans (see Chapter 10). Since the eighteenth century, the practices of shamans have been viewed from a rationalizing perspective: the early explorers, although fascinated by the magical practitioners they encountered, asserted their own rationality by denigrating the shamans

as tricksters who may have betrayed foolish natives but who were unmasked by the scientific gaze. At least since the nineteenth century, the rationalization furthermore manifested itself in the systematic depiction of “shamanistic cosmologies” and categories of spirits. These attempts at consistency have often been accompanied by the complaint of the inconsistency and deficiency of the locals’ information. Radloff for example stated that local people had only a dim idea of their own belief; after his detailed outline of the *Weltanschauung*, he bemoaned not being able to give a more precise picture because the various pieces of information were so contradictory “that they confuse the unity of the image or even destroy it” (Radloff 1884: 14; my translation). Bogoras lamented that “common people” only knew little of spiritual matters (1904-1909: 290). Contradictions in the statements of informants were also mentioned by Vainshtein (Vajnstejn 1978), Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1927; 1928), or Shirokogoroff (1935). Although complaining about the inconsistencies of native information, scholars have produced consistent systems of “imagined beings”, which are “non-existent from a scientific point of view” (Johansen 1999: 41).

The rationalist scholarly views on shamanism reflect Tambiah’s (1990) analysis of the scholarly approaches to religion. Tambiah identifies a paradigmatic shift with the Enlightenment, when “European thought progressively showed interest in the intellectual constructs, systematic and abstract, that were elaborated in the religious realm” (1990: 5). Religion was increasingly identified with a system of ideas and this intellectualist attitude to religion was universalized with the term “natural religion”. Bryan Turner (1997: 2) argues that the nineteenth-century interest in primitive religion that accompanied the spread of European colonialism was shaped by “the growing ambiguity and uncertainty of the role of Christian belief and practice” in an increasingly secular environment that became dominated by natural science. Styers (2004) unmasks scholars as magicians who show magic as an archetypical nonmodern phenomenon to define what is modern. The construction of shamanism as a consistent system of ideas then looks like a negative matrix of scientific rationality and is criticized as the “metaphysic of order” (Taussig 1992: 168; on Lévi-Strauss’ interpretation of a Cuna shaman’s song), or as a “romanticized inversion of Western rationalism” (Thomas and Humphrey 1996: 2; on Eliade’s extraction of shamanism as exotic essence). Hutton (2001: VIII) characterized the term “shamanism” as a scholarly construct “against which modern Western civilization has defined itself”.

### **The representations of shamanism in Mongol Studies**

The paradigm of decline in particular shapes the perception of shamanism in Mongol Studies that perceive shamanism as being displaced and persecuted by Buddhism since the seventeenth century. This view characterizes the reports of Pallas and Georgi, of Banzarov as well as the reports of twentieth-century Mongol Studies. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

(2003b) analyzes the representations of Buddhism and shamanic practices of the Mongols in German and British Mongol Studies and argues that they are saturated with a Saidian “orientalism”. She contends that, contrary to the view of Tibetan Buddhism, the perception of the closely related Mongol Buddhism is predominantly negative, which is reflected in the use of the derogative term “lamaism”. Buddhism is approached as a foreign religion, whose implementation lead to a weakening and degeneration of the Mongols, and which is responsible for the filth, poor health, illiteracy, venereal diseases and poverty of the Mongols at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The overall negative view of Buddhism “degenerating” the Mongols is accompanied by the silent approval of the persecution and murdering of the Buddhist clergy in the 1930s (Kollmar-Paulenz 2003b: 278). This biased perspective on Buddhism is, according to Kollmar-Paulenz’s analysis, accompanied by the romanticizing of indigenous religious practice that is usually called “shamanism”. The author recognizes a deep contradiction in the perception of Mongol Buddhism: the Mongols are perceived as deeply shaped by Buddhism, while the contrary is equally presupposed; that the Buddhist proselytization of the Mongols was only superficial and the Mongols stayed faithful to their old belief.

A similar argument was put forward by Christopher Atwood (1996) who criticized the widespread presumption of popular Mongol religious rituals and texts as essentially shamanistic in nature, camouflaged with a veneer of “Lamaism”.<sup>7</sup> The author argued that many accounts are based on a simple association of nomadism with an unchanging shamanism, which is perceived as incompatible with an otherworldly Buddhism. Atwood traced the source of this association of the Mongols with nomadism equals shamanism back to the article “The Black Faith, or Shamanism among the Mongols” by the Russian-trained Buryat scholar Banzarov (1981 [1848]). Banzarov indeed made a dual distinction between the “black faith” and Buddhism. He explained that the old folk-religion of the Mongols had no particular name but that only after “accepting Buddhism” did the Mongols name the old folk religion “black faith” (1981 [1848]: 56).<sup>8</sup>

However, Banzarov explicitly refused the view that this “black faith” – which the Europeans call “shamanism” – was reduced to and centered on the practices of shamans: “that the so-called shamanism [...] does not consist of a few superstitions and rites based

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<sup>6</sup> Kollmar-Paulenz cited examples from outstanding scholars, for example Heissig (1989 [1964]) or Bawden (1968); a further obvious example is Moses (1977). Before her, Siklos (1991) had criticized the accounts of Mongol Buddhism.

<sup>7</sup> An outstanding example of this view is Heissig (1953: 4). However, the same view is already inherent in Pallas (1801: 17): he wrote that among the Kalmyk and the Mongol old “superstitions” could remain as they were tolerated by the “*Schygemunischer Götzenpriester*” who plastered the old beliefs with a veneer of the new doctrine.

<sup>8</sup> The color black refers to the commoners, in distinction to the “white” nobles (Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 283). Here it also connotes “lay”, or not Buddhist. I will return to the association of the color black to shamans later.

only on the charlatanisms of shamans”.<sup>9</sup> That he did not share the celebration of the figure of the shamans is obvious in that he called the shamans “charlatans”. Consistent with this, Banzarov’s article focused on cosmological ideas of the Mongols’ folk-religion: the worship of *tenger*, both as the reverence of a supreme being of eternal heaven and of numerous spirits or secondary gods *tengri*, the worship of the earth as a force of nature and as a deity called *Itugen*, the reverence for fire, and the worship of ancestor-souls (*ongon*). Only at the end of his article did he write about the shaman who is “a priest, a doctor and sorcerer or diviner” (Banzarov 1981 [1848]: 82). Rather than constructing a belief system of shamanism around the shaman, Banzarov focused on the ideas related to the “old folk religion” of the Mongols which encompassed shamans as practitioners.

Today, Kollmar-Paulenz (forthcoming) recommends distinguishing between indigenous religious concepts in general and those concepts closely connected to the shamans as religious specialists. She criticizes that the perception of the formation of a Buddhist identity of the Mongols during the seventeenth century are shaped by the view of Buddhism and “Shamanism” as two diametrically opposed exclusive belief systems. The neglect of the perspective on the religious actor and the shared religious field, she argues, led to the interpretation of this constitutional period of Mongol Buddhism as one of a clash between two mutually exclusive systems. The main historical source that provides a view on the adoption of Buddhism by the Mongols is an eighteenth-century text, *Čindamani-yin erike*, rendering the biography of the monk Neyiči Toyin living in the seventeenth century. Kollmar-Paulenz (forthcoming) argues that the perception of two mutually exclusive belief systems and of Buddhism persecuting shamanism are mainly based on Heissig’s (1953b) translation and interpretation of this source. Re-analyzing the text from a Bourdieuan perspective, she showed that the Buddhist monk showed himself familiar with the indigenous religious beliefs: “He and the people he meets with and aims to convert to Buddhism show a remarkably similar socio-religious *habitus*, incorporating and at the same time acting this *habitus* out on the individual and collective level in a shared religious *field*” (Kollmar-Paulenz, forthcoming: 5; emphasis in the original). Kollmar-Paulenz argues that Buddhist monks shared many practices of indigenous religious beliefs that were not viewed as opposed to Buddhism, for example the worship of mountain deities or the hearth-goddess, and the *ovoo* cult.<sup>10</sup> In a shared religious field, Buddhist monks and shamans competed with each other, and therefore the Buddhist monks aimed to provide new and additional interpretations of existing religious practices and to introduce new rituals together with established ones. The Buddhist missionaries however saw the

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<sup>9</sup> Banzarov’s main argument here was to refuse the then popular view that the “so-called” shamanist religion came to the Mongols with Buddhism. In contrast, Banzarov argued that the “black faith” arose from “the external world, nature, and the internal world, the soul of man” (1981 [1848]: 56).

<sup>10</sup> An *ovoo* is a ritual stone cairn erected on mountain passes and along major roads.

indigenous religious specialists as their enemies and destroyed the *ongod* as the symbolic representation of shamans' power.<sup>11</sup>

Although Kollmar-Paulenz (forthcoming: 8) calls “Shamanism” a European “invention of tradition”, she nevertheless points to precursors of the production of a belief system surrounding the shamans as religious specialists: the eighteenth-century biography associated the indigenous religious specialists derogatorily with the term “*buruγu üjel*”, (“false thinking”, “false opinion”). This “false belief” was put in opposition to Buddhism. The Buddhist polemics produced, similarly to the later Mongol Studies, an indigenous belief system surrounding the shaman that is opposed to Buddhism.

In the prevailing perception of the Mongols and the twentieth-century Mongolians as being essentially shamanistic and having plastered this over with a veneer of Buddhism, the Darhad have recently gained a prominent position. Based on Badamhatan's (1965) monograph, the Darhad have become the model for an uninfluenced shamanism in Mongolia. The Darhad became the contrasting foil of shamanists that contrast the majority of Mongolians who are Buddhists (Kaplonski 2004: 177). Interestingly, the Darhad gained this reputation of being “shamanists” only after the destruction of the huge monastery Zöölön in the Darhad area in 1938. I will discuss in detail in Chapter 8 how the perception of the Darhad religious practices changed in twentieth-century ethnography. To sum this up here only briefly: until 1930, the scholarly accounts mentioned the huge monastery Zöölön in Renchinlümbe as well as mentioning shamans (Tseveen 1997 [1934]; Sanjeev 1930). Around twenty percent of the population were considered monks in the early twentieth century. The people living to the west of Lake Hövsgöl had until the foundation of the nation-state been the lay subjects of the Javzandamba Hutagt, the highest Buddhist authority of the Mongols. Thus, the population to the west of Lake Hövsgöl was until the early twentieth century strongly connected to the Buddhist authorities, both in view of political subjugation as well as religious practice. Only after the assassination of Buddhist monks and the destruction of the monasteries could the Darhad be associated with their shamans. Before Badamhatan's monograph appeared, general accounts about Mongol shamanism did not mention the Darhad as examples of shamanists.<sup>12</sup> It was mainly due to Badamhatan's account and the scholarly fascination with “shamanism” that the Darhad became associated with their shamans and identified as “shamanists” by an international scholarly audience (for example by Even 1991; 1992). And besides the Buryat, it is mainly the Darhad shamans that today fuel the association of the Mongolians with shamanism.

<sup>11</sup> That Buddhist monks and shamans interfered in similar magical practices was already expressed by Pallas (1801: 246-247). Interestingly, he wrote that the *ongod*, which today are seen as spirits exclusively summoned by the shaman, were distributed, as materialized amulets, not only by shamans but also by monks to the people.

<sup>12</sup> The Darhad were for example neither mentioned by Banzarov (1981 [1846]) nor by Heissig (1953a) as shamanists. Banzarov wrote that mainly Buryat maintained shamanism among the Mongol tribes, and Heissig stated as examples the Ongnighut, the Khortsin Banners, the Dörbet, Dzalait, and Ghorlos.

### **A new focus on practice, marginality, and the state**

Recent anthropological accounts on shamanism abstain from general theorizing and from essentializing shamans' practices with belief systems and cosmologies in a timeless and universal frame. Instead, they focus on shamans as practitioners in local, national, and transnational contexts (for a review see Atkinson 1992). Humphrey (1996b) deconstructed the term "shamanism" as representing a unitary and coherent system, pointing to the incoherence of cosmological fragments and to the heterogeneity of specialists and she suggested shifting the attention to the variety of inspirational practices. In "*Shamanism, History, and the State*", Humphrey and Thomas (1996) powerfully plead for historicizing practices of shamans and for putting them in the context of the state. Humphrey (1996a) opposes Hamayon's (1996) claim that shamanism is incompatible with hierarchical ideology and argues that shamans were sometimes integrated into the center of state power, for example in the thirteenth-century Mongol empire or the eighteenth-century Manchu state. According to Humphrey, shamanic practices in history have been integrated into state power as well as marginalized by state rule. Inspiring new accounts on shamanism are located outside the traditional focus on shamanism of Siberia: Michael Taussig (1987) connected shamanic healing in the Colombian Amazon with the disorder of state terror in the context of colonialism and exploitation. Jane Atkinson (1989) studied the poetics and politics of shamans' ritual performances among the Wana in Sulawesi. Anna Tsing (1993) explored marginality, gender, state violence, and the shamans' imagination of power in southeast Kalimantan (Indonesia). These self-reflexive new ethnographies situate shamans in power relations between the margins and the state.

Undoubtedly, my account is influenced by these new ethnographies. Nevertheless, I realized during fieldwork and writing that my approach is also shaped by the earlier perspectives. I have presented an overview of the history of representations of shamanism which shows not only changes but also persisting themes. I do not exclude my own account from this approach; also in my work the legacies of earlier discourses on shamanism are found. In a way, my own view on Darhad shamans derives from my failed attempts to find such a thing as "shaman-ism", with its different connotations of belief system, coherent cosmology, or the supposition of a community of shamanists. Instead of a "shaman-ism", I found shamans who invoke notions loaded with inspirational power in their reach, independently of whether they originate in old folk beliefs or indigenous religious practice, or whether they were imported Tibetan terms pointing to Buddhism or even New Age ideas.

Among the Darhad, the gender-neutral term for shamans is *böö* (which among the Buryat refers to male shamans only). The term for male shamans is *zairan* (or *zaarin*; among the Buryat, this term serves a title for an outstanding male shaman), the word for female shamans is *udgan*. Based on a linguistic analysis of four terms in classical

Mongolian, the Mongolian author Y. Rintchen (1977) distinguished four inspirational specialists: the males *böge* (today: *böö*) and *jiyarin* (*zairan*), and the female specialists *iduyan* (*udgan*) and *abjiy-a* (this term is no longer in use). Rintchen interpreted the *böge* as a specialist with intuitive perception, who beseeches the ancestor spirits to support the clan. In contrast, the *jiyarin*, while acting in a state of unconsciousness, lent his mouth to the ancestor spirits and “gods”, who, through the body of the *jiyarin*, imparted their will to the clan members and the head of the nation. The female *iduyan* was, according to Rintchen, the guardian of the fire, making offerings to the fire in order to secure the well-being and prosperity of the clan. The grand female *abjiy-a* was in olden times capable of obtaining magical forces from spirits. In sum, Rintchen associated the male practitioners with ancestor spirits and “gods”, and the female specialists with guardian spirits and the fire; furthermore he distinguished the *jiyarin* and *abjiy-a* as great shamans.<sup>13</sup> Such categorical distinctions between different practitioners are not found among the contemporary Darhad shamans. Nevertheless, Darhad shamans carry out different practices, like divining, magical treatments, worshipping rituals of spiritual entities (*tahil*), and the seances by jaw harp or drum.<sup>14</sup> Although all shamans are not engaged in all of these activities, there are no categorical distinctions between the practitioners (see Chapter 6). Darhad shamans usually refer to their practice with the verb *böölöh*, “to shamanize”, and locals commonly call shamans *bööldög hün*, “shamanizing people”. Thus, shamans themselves and local people focus on what shamans do. Similarly, I focus on the practices of shamans.

By focusing on shamans as practitioners, I partly return to the eighteenth-century approach to shamans. To make this connection to the representations from that time almost amounts to breaking a taboo. Throughout the twentieth century, these reports have largely been banished from scholarly considerations because the obvious denouncement of shamans inherent in these early accounts is rightly disapproved. Despite the widespread neglect of the eighteenth-century accounts, I acknowledge that these explorers approached the shamans as individual actors – a perspective that is in vogue again today. A further parallel that I find in my approach to the explorers’ reports is that I traveled and sought after shamans and asked them to perform for me. I suppose that this has always been a practice of scholars – as far as scholars during socialist restrictions were at all allowed to meet with shamans. However, the practice of asking the shamans to perform is largely silenced in the scholarly accounts, maybe to distance oneself from the arrogant eighteenth-century reports.

<sup>13</sup> This interpretation of the indigenous terms was cited by Humphrey (1996b: 322). In contrast, Hamayon (1990: 142-3) claimed a semantic relationship of the term *böö* to the term *böh* (wrestler) and she related the term *zaarin* to *zaar*, “musk”.

<sup>14</sup> Seances by jaw harp are usually shorter than seances by drum and are carried out during the day, while seances by drum are only performed at night.

My view on Darhad shamanism focuses first on the shamans as individual practitioners who explain what they do in different terms, who compete with each other, and who have been educated in (socialist) modernity and participate actively in postsocialist Mongolia. I did not find a community of shamanists surrounding the shamans but only people who ask for shamans' services in an overall atmosphere of doubts over shamans' capabilities. Despite this focus and despite my original idea to abstain from using the term "shamanism", I by and by realized that I have to reintroduce the term into my analysis. I propose to reintroduce the term shamanism as -ism, less to associate the practices of shamans with a consistent belief system, but to recognize the pervasive legacy of a scholarly discourse that produces the very object it pretends only to describe (Foucault (2004 [1969])). The scholarly "shamanisms" do not only shape the perceptions of students and influence esoteric movements or artists; together with students and tourists, these concepts of shamanism travel back to the shamans, affecting their very identity and practice.

### **The production of explanations during my fieldwork**

In the second half of this chapter I intend to make transparent how I brought ideas of "shamanism" to the shamans. Meeting with shamans, I was curious to hear whether the shamans reflect the concepts found in the literature. I show now how I failed to find consistent belief systems and cosmologies in the interviews with shamans and how fragmentary and evocative the notions and explanations were. My failings only reflect what Sanjeev (1930) had already figured out: that one searched to no avail for a system of the worldview among Darhad shamans.

Looking back on his fieldwork with shamans in the Colombian Amazon in the 1970s, Michael Taussig put the world of shamans in opposition to the world of university that demanded explications and coherence:

I remember well the repeated shock of returning from the Putumayo to the university in the late 1970s, after the fragmented joke-riddled incompleteness of ways of talk, of active interpretation, so practical, so fabulous, in the all-night curing sessions there, coming back to face the demands for academic talk and writing – the demands for an explanation, the demands for coherence, the denial of rhetoric, the denial of performance, when what was crying out for a coherent explanation was the demand for such and the denial of such (Taussig 1992: 7).

Although I recognize the two different qualities that Taussig describes from my own fieldwork, I do not distinguish between two strictly separated spheres. Following generations of students of shamanism, I was not only curious to see shamanic seances but brought also the quest for rationalization with me into the field. During the first months of fieldwork in 2003 I not only asked the shamans to perform but I also interviewed them about the ontologies of their spirits and their cosmologies. I tried to find out what spirits are, how they are and who they are, and how they are related to humans and to each other. I



tried to trace the variety in the explanations of the shamans and to recognize the similarities and differences to the representations in the literature.

I encountered one shaman who resolutely refused to answer my questions about spirits and his shamanizing: Goostoi, the notorious shaman living in the Western Taiga.<sup>15</sup> Before I visited him for the first time in mid-August 2003, numerous people warned me against calling on the crabby old shaman, cautioned that he would not talk to me, at least if I did not bring him some bottles of vodka. Finally, his younger brother Ganzorig led me and my guide Buyanölzii on a two-day-ride to the remote autumn camp in Huulagt Nuur where Goostoi stayed with his niece and her son far away from the other reindeer herders of the Western Taiga. Arriving (without a single bottle of vodka) at his camp, Goostoi seemed to welcome our visit. While for the following two days the surrounding mountains disappeared in mist and snow, Goostoi sketched with his stories a landscape of socialist reindeer economy and presocialist taiga life in which he placed powerful earlier shamans like his father Ak Sal. Although he obviously enjoyed telling anecdotes about shamans and informing about social norms of shamanizing he was rather reluctant to talk about his own practice. He introduced himself by emphasizing that he was not a shaman but only a singer and later he dismissed his shamanizing as uninteresting – something one could interpret as modesty or as a strategy to enhance his reputation by maintaining his secrets.



Photograph 12: The shaman Goostoi and his niece Handai in front of his tepee in Ming Bulag, Western Taiga (16.07. 2004).

Goostoi preferred telling stories to answering questions, and in particular he disliked my questions about the nature of his spirits: he barked at me that only foreigners asked him what *ongod* were or what he saw while shamanizing and that such matters were not my concern. When he had calmed down, he said that he could not explain what *ongod* were

<sup>15</sup> Goostoi lives in the taiga mountains to the West of the village of Tsagaan Nuur. He belongs to the thirty-five households of reindeer herders living in two taiga areas.

and that he became *uhaangiïi*, unconscious, during the seance. He compared *ongod* to the Christian God and asked in return whether I could explain what God was. He said that *ongod* were *hii üzegdel mayagaar*, abstract or airy beings, and that he experienced *ongod* as in a dream. I partially attribute Goostoi's embarrassment about being asked questions to his refusal of a potentially subordinated position in the constellation inquirer – respondent and to his preference for producing himself as the authority entertaining his audience. Nevertheless, his refusal and his inability to explain spirits fundamentally challenges the scholarly attempt to depict and classify inspirational beings. However, Goostoi was an exception and usually the shamans answered my tedious questions about inspirational beings.

The shaman Umban was one of those shamans who made an extraordinary effort to introduce me into the realms of spiritual entities. Umban was one of the first shamans I got to know in the Shishget area and during each of my fieldwork stays in the area I visited him once or twice. Umban was in his mid-forties and lived with his wife and four children on the northernmost pastures in Tengis. His daughter Höhrüi was in the process of becoming a shaman too in that period. I attended several of Umban's seances, and the following day Umban listened with me to the recording and commented on the chants. Especially during a week's stay with Umban in June 2003, our conversations revolved around the inspirational beings. Umban showed me some of the *asar*, the residences of the *ongod*, on the neighboring mountain slopes; and during this week, he gathered his brothers and sisters at his deceased mother's *asar* to worship her. Umban exerted himself to provide answers on my numerous attempts to intrude into the being of spirits. In these conversations we together produced rationalizations of the inexplicable. The following translation of a small passage from an interview with Umban should give an impression of the intricacies of our endeavor to define and delineate the often-used notions *ongod*, *lus savdag* and *tenger*. Bawden (1997) translated the term *ongod* as "shamanist spirits", *lus* as "water spirits" or "local deities", *savdag* as "spirits of the locality", and *tenger* as "sky", "heaven", "weather", and "god". In our conversations however, these notions became increasingly ambiguous. The cited interview section departed from shamans' specific interpretations of illness.

U: [...] for example, if someone eats something from a place with *tenger* (*tengertei gazar*), this can cause sickness.

J: Where are these places with *tenger*?

U: Our homeland (*nutag*) is full of *ongod tenger*. As one venerates the *ongod*, one should venerate this place (*gazar*), that water (*us*) or this landscape (*baigal*). These places are all related to *ongod*. Places with *tenger* (*tengertei gazar*). The places have *masters*; the water has *masters*, the woods have *masters* (*ezen*).

J: Are *ongod* also *masters* (*ezen*)?

U: *Ongod* have *masters*.

J: So, *ongod* are themselves not *masters*?

U: No, *ongod* have *masters*. You go to the *asar* and venerate the earth's *ongod* there. *Ongod* are only *masters* (*ezen*) in their *asar*, the *masters* of their *asar*. But the main *masters* of the *ongod* are the *masters* of the earth, the *lus savdag*.

J: So *ongod* are not *tenger*?

U: No, they are different.

J: So, what are *ongod*?

U: *Ongod* are my *tenger*. I am the interpreter (*helmerch*) of the *ongod*. The *tenger* of the *ongod* are those *lus savdag*, where the *ongod* in his former life as a human was living. The *masters* of the homeland (*nutag*), the *lus* of this earth are the *tenger* of the *ongod*. The *lus savdag* are *tenger*, and the *ongod* are always related to the *lus savdag*.

J: Then, *ezen* are like *tenger*?

U: Yes. *tenger* are alike. *Ongod* and *tenger* are alike. When *ongod* venerate particular *tenger*, the *tenger* come down to humans.

J: Did I understand correctly? *Ongod* are like *tenger*?

U: Yes, they are alike. When I embarrass *ongod*, *tenger* come to me. Why? Because *ongod* and *tenger* are interconnected.<sup>16</sup>

In conversations like these we puzzled together over delimitations of inspirational entities and their relationship among each other; “for my book”, as Umban used to say. We produced cognitive models of spiritual worlds, similar to those contained in the scholarly representations since the late eighteenth century. The search for explanations was undoubtedly my concern, and through my questions I pushed Umban to distinguish what is connected and to categorize what is fluid, and together we inescapably created contradictions from one sentence to the next. Thereby, I did not only collect information about beliefs but I actively participated in the creation of the explanations. Although our conversation seems to confirm a well-known cultural dichotomy, I do not perceive our discussions as patterned by an opposition of a rational Western student versus a shaman deeply anchored in his magical realms. Umban, like the other Darhad shamans of his generation, was as much brought up in a modernist anti-religious socialist regime as I grew up in a rural environment that was animated by the magical marvels of Catholic saints. In the following, I will introduce the ontologies of spirits. I will discuss the characterizations expressed in interviews and the blurring of the notions as separate entities in the communication with clients and in the practice of the seances. Thereafter, I will propose approaching the notions as an evocative means to relate humans to their environment and ancestors rather than focusing on the distinction of cognitive categories.

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<sup>16</sup> Small passage taken from an Interview held on 19.06. 2003.

### The *ongod* dwelling in shamans' homes and in the mountains

My explorations start with the term *ongod*, the notion Darhad shamans often use to talk about their main spiritual authorities. The term is well known from the literature as describing the central spiritual entities surrounding the shamans of the Mongols. The term was mentioned by Banzarov (1981 [1848]), and even by Georgi (1775) and Pallas (1801); Heissig (1953a: 25; 494; 2004 [1970]) mentioned that the term was included in a seventeenth-century Mongol source and it is even ascribed to the descriptions about “idols” in the thirteenth-century missionary reports. The Soviet scholar Zelenin (1952 [1936]) dedicated a book with an evolutionary theory to the *ongod*, using the Mongolian notion as technical term for similar phenomena all over Siberia. Usually, the literature states the term in the singular as *ongon*. In contrast, Darhad shamans use the grammatical plural *ongod* to address also single *ongon*; sometimes they even create a new plural form, *ongoduud*. I follow the Darhad shamans' practice and use the term *ongod* both to address singular as well as a plurality of spirits.

The term *ongod* refers to a spiritual entity as well as to the materialization of the spiritual being. Umban, in accordance with other shamans, explained that *ongod* are the souls of deceased shamans.<sup>17</sup> *Ongod* reside on mountain slopes, where they are called *heeriin ongod*, and at the same time they stay in the homes of shamans, where they are called *geriin ongod*, home *ongod*. These home *ongod* are regularly summoned in the shaman's seance: on the days of the seances the materialized *ongod* are displayed on the northern wall, the place of honor in a Mongolian home. While the shaman receives the *ongod* one after the other into her/his body, and while the *ongod* talk, a family member venerates the *ongod* hanging on the wall by sprinkling milk towards them and by addressing them respectfully. Today, the materializations usually have the form of several straps of colorful fabric sewn together; some earlier *ongod* I saw were decorated with small figurines in human and animal shape. In the older literature, the *ongod* are often described as including human and animal figures. The materialized *ongod* are denoted as “representation” by Even (1991: 187), “receptacles” by Vajnshtejn (1978: 457), or “placings” by Shirokogoroff (1935: 54).

*Ongod* are gendered and are named after their place of residence in the landscape; they are called the mother or father of a particular location. Usually these residences are situated on the slopes of the first taiga mountain ridges, often with southern exposure and a beautiful view on the valleys. The residences of the *ongod* in the landscape are called *asar*: simple forms of *asar* consist of trees decorated with the materialized *ongod*, or alignments of *ongod* between two trees; in more elaborated *asar* the *ongod* are located in a fence or in

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<sup>17</sup> When I asked about the notion of three souls, which is frequently mentioned in the literature (for example by Pürev 2002; Sandschejew 1927) shamans refused this idea and insisted that humans have one soul.

a small hut.<sup>18</sup> The Mongolian historian and scholar of shamanism Pürev (2002: 343) identified 130 named *ongod* of Darhad shamans, residing in *asar* in the border zone between the taiga mountains and the steppes of the Shishget depression and showed their location on a map. The majority of these *ongod* is concentrated in the vicinities of the rivers Harmai, Ived, Hög, Tengis, and Hogrogo, bordering the western as well as the northern taiga mountain ranges. The author claims that there had been 600 *ongod* (with and without *asar*) in the 1930s.



Photograph 13: The shaman Umban venerating the *ongod* Javartin Eej in her *asar* in the mountains in Tengis (20.06. 2003).

While Banzarov (1981 [1846]: 57) wrote in the nineteenth century that *ongod* are the deified souls of deceased human beings, the present-day Darhad shamans state that only earlier shamans can become *ongod*, and that the souls of ordinary people remain as troubling spirits in the world and cause harm. Three years after the death of a shaman, an *asar* will be erected at the place chosen by the shaman before her/his death and the former shaman will be reawakened as *ongod* through a ceremony. Besides the detailed accounts about the *asar* of Darhad shamans by Pürev (2002), and a short reference by Badamhatan (1965: 226) I could not find the term in the “shamanism” literature; however some authors relate the spirits of ancestors to the burial places of shamans (for example Heissig 1953a: 504; Humphrey 1995). Umban explicitly denied a relationship between burial place and *asar*; he emphasized the enlivening of the soul and neglected the burial of the dead corpse. Other shamans I asked confirmed this view, with the exception of Goostoi who rejected the idea that Tuva shamans have *asar*. Instead, Goostoi claimed that at the place where a shaman died an *ongod* would arise three years later.

<sup>18</sup> The word *asar* also denotes a marquee or a rectangular cloth tent (Bawden 1997).

When a shaman decides to incorporate a particular *ongod* in her or his collection of home *ongod*, s/he enlivens a prepared materialization of this *ongod* during a seance. The shamans elect as their home *ongod* deceased shamans from their own or from their in-laws' bilateral ancestors; furthermore, they elect neighboring or well-known *ongod* like Hosin Aav in Ived or Agarin Hairhan (far away) in Bayanzürh. The *ongod* are both connected to shaman ancestors and to particular places in the landscape. The relationship to the landscape seems stronger as the *ongod* carry the name of these places and not the names of the former shamans; the *ongod* also introduce themselves in the seances by their place-names. Moreover, only close relatives and offspring remember the earlier human names of the *ongod*. The *ongod* are individuals with particular specialties and powers. Shamans select among their *ongod* particular *ongod* as *galin ezen* (master of the family hearth) or as *sahius* (protector) of their family.

### **Animal and human qualities of *ongod***

Some *ongod* make their entry into the shaman's seance with animal sounds or movements, resembling a bird, a deer, or a bear. Vajnshtejn (1978) distinguished between zoomorphic and anthropomorphic *ongod/eren* of Tuva shamans. Hamayon (1990), in enhancing the approach of Zelenin (1952 [1936]), relates the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic *ongod* to different socio-economic environments of shamanic practice: she associates the zoomorphic *ongod* to a "genuine" shamanism of hunting societies; where the shaman is involved in a symbolic alliance relationship with supernature to obtain game for his community. In contrast, she views the anthropomorphic *ongod* as a later invention of a pastoral society in which the logic of exchange has become transformed and dominated by a logic of descent. Following Hamayon's lead, Dulam and Even (1994) state that the representation of the game-giving spirit is absent among Darhad shamans; that the Darhad *ongod* are of human origin, but that they are still associated with a lively animalism.

The present-day Darhad shamans do not distinguish between separate categories of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic spirits; yet they have a particular term to talk about the animals' sounds accompanying the arrival of the *ongod* during the seance: they speak about *huvilgaan*, a term translated as "reincarnation" and thus related to Buddhism by Bawden (1997). The shamans' explanations about the meaning of the term *huvilgaan* differ. Some shamans, like Umban, say that the *huvilgaan* is the vessel or body of the *ongod*, others claim that the animal sounds indicate the *ongod's* attendant, servant, or translator who announces or accompanies the *ongod*; a further explanation perceives the animal as the *ongod's* mount.<sup>19</sup> Umban explains that some of his *ongod* arrive at the seance with different *huvilgaan*, depending on their mood: his grandmother-*ongod* for example appears as a

<sup>19</sup> These different explanations for the *ongod's* *huvilgaan* are also outlined by Bumochir Dulam (2002), who based his interpretations on interviews with shamans from different areas in Mongolia.

magpie if she is calm but as an eagle owl if she arrives enraged. The *ongod* display both human and animal characteristics during the seance: performed by the bodily movements of the shaman, an *ongod* may enter with the flutter of a bird, may suddenly fall into the limping movement of a mumbling old woman puffing on a pipe or slurping a cup of vodka, and finally may change into a horse or reindeer carrying the *ongod* and trotting away.

The inspirational riding animals have a counterpart in the *seter*: a horse, reindeer, or goat that is consecrated to the *ongod* as their mount.<sup>20</sup> In the ritual consecration, the *seter* is marked with a *hadag*, a ceremonial scarf, and should no longer be mounted. Ceremonies for the consecration of these inspirational mounts are frequently mentioned in the literature, for example by VajNSTEJN (1978), SHIROKOGOROFF (1935), SANJEEV (SANDSCHEJEW 1927) and, back in the eighteenth century, by GMELIN (1999 [1751/1752]), GEORGI (1775), and PALLAS (1801).



Photograph 14: The shaman Umban with his brothers and sisters worshipping his mother-ongod (23.06. 2003).

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<sup>20</sup>I have once seen a ceremony of Buddhist monks who made a horse into a *seter*; the ceremony in Tsetserleg was held in a dry summer to request rain and was accompanied by a big *naadam*, festivities including horse races and wrestling. Atwood (2004) relates the term to Buddhism.



## Images of ongod

As the *ongod* show both human and animal characteristics during the seance, I wondered whether the shamans themselves could see the *ongod* during the seance. Umban answered that he did not see the *ongod* as an image, but that he saw *tuyaa*, colorful rays, when meeting them. Other shamans also said that they saw *ongod* as rays during their seances, and Badamhatan (1965: 224) confirmed this statement for the Darhad shamans in the early 1960s. Not satisfied with this answer and, similarly to Bogoras (1975 [1904-1909]), I asked some shamans for a drawing of their spirits. However, Umban depicted what I could see too: the materialized *ongod* on the wall of the *ger* and in the *asar*, and then he added the picture of a bird, the *ongod's huvilgaan*, against the backdrop of a starry sky. As if to scoff at my tenacious intrusions he then wrote on the drawing: “what are *ongod*”, making it clear that he had ultimately answered the question.

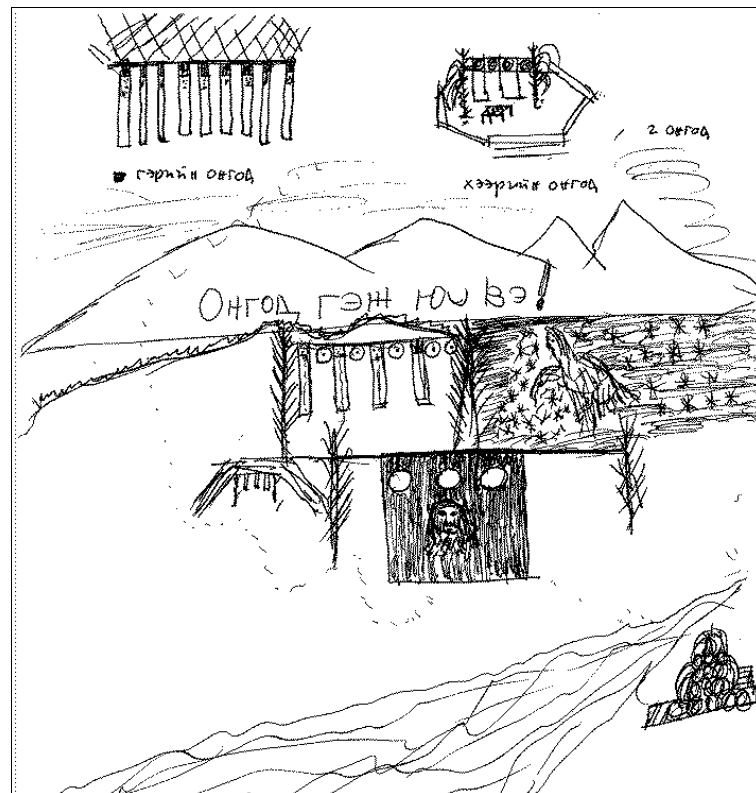


Figure 1: *Ongod gej yuu ve? What are ongod?* wrote Umban on one of his drawing depicting *ongod* in their materialized form, hanging on the wall in the home and being located in the *asar* in the mountain; and showing furthermore a bird-like *huvilgaan* in a starry sky (20.06. 2003).

Rather different from Umban’s depiction of *ongod* is the representation of Enhtuya, the female shaman living with her family and reindeers on Lake Hövsgöl I introduced in the preceding chapter. Enhtuya drew her *ongod* as fantastic beings, partly human, partly



animal or as combinations of animal parts, and whilst she was filling three pages with depictions of spirits, she commented her drawings with fanciful stories about the appearance and preferences of the spirits. While Goostoi rejected a visual perception of the *ongod* altogether, Umban presented *ongod* in the materialized form and as *ongod*'s *huvilgaan*, and Enhtuya provided the mental imagery I had asked for.



Photograph 15: The shaman Enhtuya in front of her home ongod (13.07. 2003).

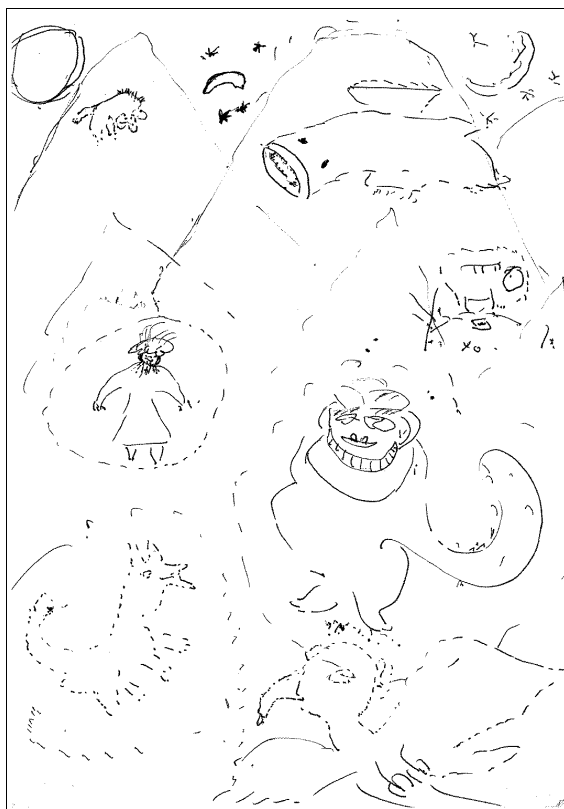


Figure 2: One of Enhtuya's drawings showing her ongod (07.07. 2003).

### **Lus savdag and tenger**

Further inspirational notions that often emerge in conversations with clients and in inspirational diagnoses are *lus* and *savdag*. The terms *lus* and *savdag* are considered Tibetan terms, translated as “genius of the locality” (*savdag*) and as “water spirits” and “local deities” (*lus*) by Bawden’s dictionary (1997). The Darhad shamans use these notions to address inspirational authorities of the landscape, sometimes distinguishing *lus* as particularly related to the “living water” of springs or rivers. *Lus savdag* occur in divinational diagnosis as causing harm; for example, *savdag* may react angrily to lumbering and *lus* may become enraged about the pollution of rivers. *Lus savdag* can be calmed by offerings of decorated small trees (*örgöl*) near rivers. In contrast to *ongod*, *lus savdag* have neither names nor gender and they are not located in particular places. The shamans agree that *lus savdag* and *ongod* are related, however they cannot specify the kind of relationship; Umban said in the interview cited above that *lus savdag* were the masters of the *ongod*, other shamans denied that the relationship was hierarchical. Sanjeev (1930) had already mentioned that the Darhad shamans address *lus* that were located in the water. However, he denied that the term was related to a shamanistic view. As the Shishget depression is veined with a system of connected lakes and rivers, the author mentioned that he had hoped to find a cult of water spirits; however his search was without success.

*Tenger*, a term denoting both sky and weather in colloquial language, is a notion fraught with cosmological meaning and is a primary subject of worship in Mongolia. The conception of *tenger* as *höh mönh tenger*, as eternal blue sky, is well documented for the medieval Mongols, imagined as “father” and associated with ruling male groups, in opposition to the earth which was represented as female (for example Banzarov 1981 [1846]; Even 1991). A second concept of *tenger/tengri* includes numerous spirits animating the atmosphere (Banzarov 1981 [1846]; Pallas 1801). Today, the most prominent example of *tengri* is the idea of 99 *tengri*, which are divided into the 55 (good) white *tengri* to the west and the 44 (bad) black *tengri* to the east (Pürev 2002). Besides Enhtuya, none of the Darhad shamans had mentioned this concept. Today’s Darhad shamans often invoke the notion of *tenger*, sometimes in a particular number, yet there is no elaborate conception of *tenger* divided into categories of black and white, nor are there individual names for *tenger*. When Darhad shamans talk about *har tenger*, black *tenger*, they do not address bad but powerful entities. Usually, they then talk about their most powerful *ongod*.

### **The blurring of categorical distinctions**

So far I have tried to delimit the different inspirational notions as distinct entities; now I will shift the focus to how this attempt at categorization is blurred by the shamans’ use of these notions. Although the dominant explanation constitutes *ongod* as deceased shamans,

not all *ongod* stem from humans: some *ongod* appearing in seances are *helgüi ongod*, without (human) language; sometimes shamans talk about *baigaliin ongod*, landscape *ongod* without a human past, or an *ongod* can be called *ongod* of the drum, neither related to a location nor to a former shaman. The delimitation between *ongod* and *lus savdag* is furthermore not as clear as it seems at first glance: basically, *lus savdag* do not enter the seances yet sometimes shamans said that a *lus savdag* had been present in a seance. Badamhatan (1965) used the term *savdag* in a word pair with *ongod*, and his description of *ongod* as masters of the landscape is similar to present-day Darhad shamans' explanation of *lus savdag*.

On the margins of the concept *ongod* there roam other terms indicating non-humans, like *chötgör* or *tiiren*: on one of our excursions in Tengis, Umban pointed to the rocks above the track and said that in a cave in the rocks a *tiiren ongod* (demon *ongod*) was hidden. He said that the *ongod* had been the first husband of his mother, the shaman RENCHINDORJ. He explained that this *ongod* was a coarse *ongod* and good for doing bad things. The *ongod* had told Umban that he should not awake him as *ongod* in an *asar* but rather take him as *seter ongod*. The explanations about this *ongod* transgress the categories defined above: the term *tiiren* is translated as demon by Bawden (1997) and shamans usually reject a relationship between *tiiren* and *ongod*; however Umban used the two notions as a word pair, transforming *tiiren* into a kind of *ongod* or the characterization of an *ongod*. A further transgression lies in the equation of the term *tiiren ongod* with the term *seter ongod*, moving the meaning of *seter* from the *ongod*'s animal mount to the *ongod* proper.

It is widespread among Darhad shamans to blur the distinctions by combining the different notions into word pairs invoked together. Shamans talk of *tengeriin lus* (the *lus* of *tenger*), of *lus höltei ongod/böö* (an *ongod* or a shaman with a *lus* leg), of *gazariin lus* (the *lus* of a place) or of *lusi ezen* (the *master* of *lus* or the “*lus* master”) and frequently they talk of *ongod tenger*. Such combined expressions indicate a relationship between the two notions, yet they obscure rather than reveal the particular kind of relationship between them. A prime example of the blurring of categories by using notions in pairs is the above-cited interview passage with Umban, who, forced by my questions, pushed inspirational terms around in a circle, shifting the relationship between them from one statement to the next, and who thereby arrived at distinguishing *ongod* from *tenger* and equating the two notions soon after. It seems that he used *tenger* not to address a particular entity related to the sky but as a generic term for master or authority; yet at the end of the passage he rather appears to address a distinct entity with the term. Umban, like other shamans, used the term *tenger* both as a synonym for *ongod* and to address distinct spiritual entities. Already Sanjeev (1930) had mentioned that the Darhad use the term *tenger* to relate to their *ongod*;

he had assumed that the Darhad had borrowed the term from the Mongols.<sup>21</sup> Banzarov (1981 [1848]: 73) had stated that the term *tengri* was used to address any “deity”.

Paying close attention to the way Umban and other shamans used the inspirational notions in conversations with clients revealed the evocative and poetic character of these notions. By combining *ongod* and *tenger* into a word pair, shamans use a speech pattern that is widespread in Mongolia. It belongs to a way of talking whose aim is metaphorical expressiveness more than precise distinction. With the word pair *ongod tenger* the shamans connect themselves to the supreme inspirational authority of the Mongols; *tenger* is a notion fraught with inspirational power also for Mongolians who are not familiar with shamans’ practices. Rather than representing a “system of belief”, the power of the spiritual entities comes into being through the invocations of the shamans. The shamans connect themselves to power-laden notions they can reach and they are not shy to engage with inspirational entities deriving from “belief systems” associated with political rulers (*tenger*) or with Buddhism (*lus savdag*).

### The absence of the three-world concept

Since Eliade’s “*Shamanism*” (1974 [1951]), general accounts on Siberian shamanism mention the concept of a tripartite world connected by the *axis mundi* or “world tree” as a typical characteristic. Darhad shamans do not mention this cosmological view of a three-layered world. Although they use the notion of *tenger* they do not perceive the sky as a separate world and completely absent from their accounts is a concept of the underworld. When explicitly asked, the shamans even reject the idea of a tripartite world. Like other Darhad shamans Umban emphasized that there was only one world. When I asked him to draw the landscape through which he wanders during the seance, he first gave me an irritated look, and then he refused my request by arguing that he was not good at drawing. Finally, he started to draw mountains, a river, clouds, the sun, the wood on the mountain ridges, then a *ger*; he stopped and asked his wife Tömör to draw two horses as *seter*; and then Umban finished the drawing by patching an *asar* onto the first mountain ridge and a shaman’s tree (*udgan mod*) near the river. He also added a figure holding a milking jug in the left hand while with the right splashing milk in veneration to the mountains or the sky. At the end he drew the running paths of the *ongod* (*güits*) with dotted lines, explaining that the *ongod* ran along these tracks from the *asar* in the mountains to the shaman’s tree and to the home of the shaman. The tracks, he said, enabled the *ongod* to visit relatives, friends, the *lus savdag*, or the shaman during a seance. These running tracks, which are frequently reported by Darhad shamans, are only rarely mentioned in the literature (but see Pürev 2002; Shirokogoroff 1935).

<sup>21</sup> I suppose that it is no coincidence that Sanjeev distinguished the Darhad from the Mongols, probably because he assumed them rather to be Urianhai than Mongols.

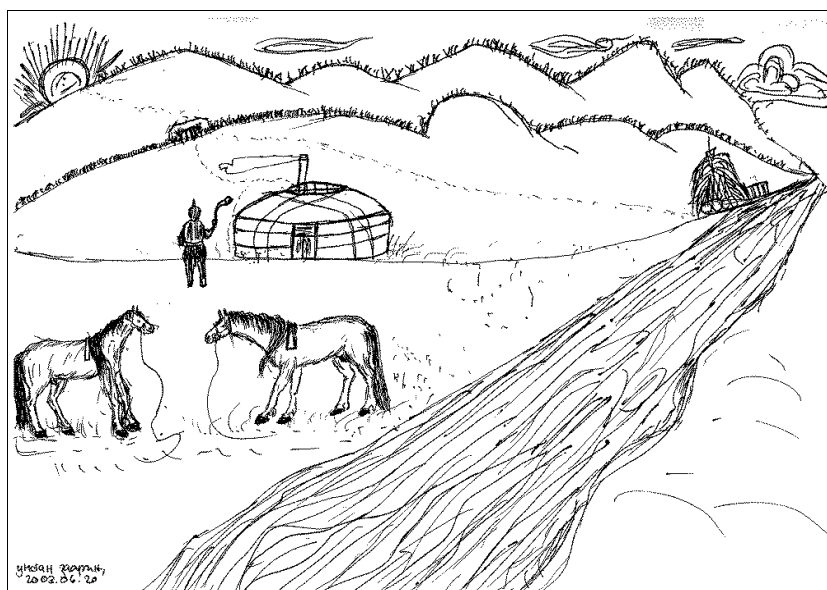


Figure 3: Umban's drawing of a shamanic landscape (20.6. 2003).

If one is searching for the tripartite world, one can read a verticalization into Umban's drawing; with the *tenger* and *ongod* in the heights and the river at the bottom interpreted as representing the underworld. However, I do not interpret his drawing as symbolizing a tripartite world – I just see it as an abstract drawing, a naturalistic representation one learns at school. The drawing shows a generalized Darhad landscape in which the people set their homes in the vicinity of water sources yet in places which are not endangered by floods, and with the *asar* as residences of the spirits on the first mountain ridges. In Umban's drawing, as in his stories and explanations, the *ongod* live in this world and not in any other.

The image of three worlds is connected with the idea of shamans who can move between the worlds along the world tree or the *axis mundi*. One can interpret the pole of the *ger* and the hearth with smoke as symbolizing the *axis mundi* (Humphrey 1995: 143). Another relation to the *axis mundi* is the polar star, called *altan gadas* in Mongolian (lit. "golden tent peg"). Both references to the *axis mundi* are obviously widespread ideas and are not specific to shamans' practices. The well-known ascent of trees is not found among the Darhad shamans – neither in today's practice nor in the account of Badamhatan (1965).<sup>22</sup> Darhad shamans relate to trees in two ways: they offer small decorated pines or other tender wood as gifts (*örgöl*) to the *lus*; furthermore, the shamans venerate (female) shamans' trees (*udgan mod*). These shamans' trees however can hardly be associated with the ascent to the sky; often they are crippled bushes with a snarl of close branches.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the Buryat shamans in northeastern Mongolia include the ascent of trees in their initiation ceremonies.

Moreover, the idea of ecstatic ascent to the sky is absent among Darhad shamans. Umban said that during the seance he was wandering through the *haranhüi*, the dark. He neither mentioned that he was traveling to the sky nor to the underworld. How am I to visualize this realm of the dark? Is it even a distinct realm? Once, Umban said that he did not know this as he was unconscious (*uhaangüi*) during his journey. Another time he described the *haranhüi* as landscape with mountains, rivers, with the residences *asar* of the *ongod*, and with livestock fences, yet without being enlivened by humans or livestock. On yet another occasion he said that during his journeys he did not see the *ger* and the people sitting around him and that it was like wandering in a void without sounds or any odors save the smell of incense.

### **The tripartite world as being imported from Buddhism**

The model of the tripartite world is not the undisputed cosmological order framing Siberian shamanism as Eliade's "*Shamanism*" would have us believe. Humphrey (1996b: 121) argues in her analysis of early twentieth-century Daur shamanism that the "other world" of shamans was not referring to a tripartite cosmology but rather represented the unseen aspect of this world and, thus, was omnipresent. Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1927; 1928) did not mention the concept of three worlds for the early twentieth-century Buryat. Banzarov (1981 [1846]) outlined the idea of *tenger* as abstract supreme being however he did not mention an underworld as part of the Mongols' cosmology. In contrast, Radloff (1884) had described the "*Weltanschauung des Schamanenthums*" as a world consisting of three layers. Pallas (1801) had clearly attributed his description of spiritual beings populating the upper and underworld to the books of the Buddhist clergy and not to the shamans. Shirokogoroff (1935: 304 ff.) described the shamanizing to the sky and the underworld for only some Transbaikal Tungus groups. Interestingly, Shirokogoroff (1935: 62) traced the idea of the tripartite worldview mainly to Buddhist and, further, to Christian influences. Vajnstejn (1978: 345) wrote of rather vague ideas of spirits of the lower world. Badamhatan (1965: 228) mentioned in a single sentence that Darhad shamans venerated three *tenger* related to three worlds or continents. This sentence was interpreted by O. Pürev (2002) as belonging to a concept preceding the model of three vertical layers, consisting of one world divided into three continents: the upper continent, situated in the Himalayas, the middle continent consisting of the Inner Asian steppes, and the lower continent lying to the north where the rivers flow. Heissig (2004 [1970]: 236) attributed the image of three worlds to the influence of Buddhism, claiming that in "pure shamanism" (by which he meant religious practice before Buddhist influence) a concept of the world beyond, to which the shaman might have access, was absent. Hamayon (1990) similarly ascribes the division of supernature into three worlds and the distinction of good and bad *tenger* to Buddhist influence.

The Darhad shamans are called the “black shamans” in Mongolian terminology – purporting that they are not influenced by Buddhism like the “yellow” Buryat shamans (Pürev 2002; Even 1992). I do not support this dominant perception: as I have argued above, the Darhad were for more than two centuries the subjects of the highest Buddhist authority and in Renchinlhumbe the large monastery Zöölön was located. Therefore, I do not explain the absence of a tripartite cosmology as a prove of an original shamanistic worldview. Rather, I see the absence of a three-world concept as being related to twentieth-century modernization and the shamans’ school education. In 1930, Sanjeev mentioned the Darhad shamans as being influenced by Buddhist doctrine. He said that ideas of sin and guilt had intruded into the shamans’ conceptions. Only after the monasteries were destroyed and the monks assassinated or integrated into lay life did the Darhad become associated with their shamans (see Chapter 8). Today, Darhad shamans deny an influence of Buddhism on their practices. Indeed, Buddhist insignias and Buddhist home altars, which are widespread in postsocialist Mongolia, are largely absent in the Darhad area. The fact that the shamans use Tibetan terms obviously related to Buddhism – like *lus savdag* or *Burhan* (Buddha) is not seen by the shamans as a devotion to Buddhism. However, when a person passes away the relatives seek the support of Buddhist monks, as indeed shamans and their descendents do as well. When the mother of the shaman Enhtuya died, she went to the monastery in Mörön. Shortly later, the former shaman Luvsdai passed away in her neighborhood; his son also traveled to the monastery in Mörön to ask a Buddhist astrologer (*zurhaich*) when, where, and how to bury his father. From the monastery, the son returned with a small music machine which played the melody “*om mani padme hum*” without interruption for several days.

### **The ongod as hybrids between “nature” and “culture”**

Through their interactions with *ongod*, *lus savdag*, and *tenger*, the shamans relate humans to their ancestors, to domestic and wild animals, and to their environment; they act on the interface of what is commonly separated into nature and culture. It has become commonplace in anthropology to acknowledge the perception of nature as culturally constructed. However, approaches studying the cultural conceptions of nature usually perceive culture as producing distinct classifications for the empirically existing nature out there (Descola and Pálsson 1996: 3). This naturalism perceives relationships with the environment that are classified as animistic or totemistic as “intellectually interesting but false representations” of an autonomous empirical nature (Descola 1996: 88); the author interprets naturalism itself as a kind of cultural classification.

According to Humphrey (1995), the Mongolian notion for nature, *baigal*, (“what is”) implies a concept of nature in which entities in nature appear as having their own “majesty” or effectiveness. Humphrey distinguishes two different modes of the engagement with the

environment: the chiefly mode associated with political leaders and lamas, and the shamanic mode. The two modes are realized by different forms of agency and distinct rituals. The author relates the chiefly agency to patrilineal males, claiming a mode of power that focuses on centrality and verticality, relating the chief to *tenger* as supreme power, and producing the imagination of eternity enacted in the image of the self-perpetuating reproduction of the patrilineage. Spirits in the chiefly landscape are termed “rulers” or masters (*ezen*, pl. *ezed*) and the main site of worship is the mountain top-altar, the *ovoo*, which stands for this verticality. According to Humphrey the shamanist mode acts relationally; it celebrates difference, laterality, metamorphoses and movement. Humphrey views the two modes as different kinds of speaking and ways of relating to the environment, they are interrelated and people compete in these modes; chiefs (and lamas associated with chieftainship) may engage in the shamanic mode as shamans are active in the chiefly landscapes. According to this model, one can interpret the shamans’ invocations of *tenger*, *lus savdag*, and *ezen* as the engagement of shamans in the chiefly mode.

Humphrey (1995: 136) claims that the Mongolian concept of nature (in the sense of environment) “is not separate from but includes human beings”. I agree that Mongolian pastoralists view themselves as located in and dependent on the environment. Therefore, one could doubt whether there is in the Mongolian language a pair of opposite notions that corresponds to the enlightenment nature-culture dichotomy. Nevertheless, I argue that Mongolians do make distinctions along the interface between “nature” and “culture”. Pastoralists differentiate between domestic livestock and wild animals; taiga reindeer herders clearly distinguish wild from tamed reindeer and they deny that wild reindeer can be domesticated. The term *heer*, denoting steppes, open country and the wilds, is often used to mark an opposition to the domestic sphere, for example by using the notion *heer honoh*, to stay overnight in the wild, instead of at (someone’s) home. Shamans, and people in Mongolia in general, undoubtedly distinguish between humans and non-humans (Pedersen 2001); moreover, different terms like *setgel sanaa* (feelings, mind), *süns*, (soul) or *oyun* (mind, reason) all denote inner qualities of humans and therefore indicate distinctions between “body” and “mind”. Without studying this question in-depth, I assume that Mongolians make distinctions between “nature” (thought as the environment) and “culture” (thought as the domestic sphere); however it might be that an all-encompassing dichotomous concept similar to the “Western” one is absent. At least there is no single term that includes all the dimensions that are inherent in the term “nature”; the term *baigal* refers only to the natural environment.

Latour (1995) argues that modernism can only maintain the great divide between nature and culture through practices of purification. While these purifying practices separate the two ontological zones, they also enable the detached practices of translation by which



modernist science creates hybrids between nature and culture. Drawing on Latour, Descola (1996: 89) notices parallels between naturalism and animism:

[N]aturalism is never very far from animism: the former constantly produces actual hybrids of nature and culture which it cannot conceptualize as such, while the latter conceptualizes a continuity between humans and nonhumans which it can produce only metaphorically, in the symbolic metamorphoses generated by rituals.

Descola distinguishes the “actual hybrids of nature and culture” produced by naturalism and the “only metaphorical” hybrids of animism. Through the characterization of one sort of hybrids as “real” and the other as “only metaphorical”, Descola in a way reproduces a naturalistic or rationalizing view on animism. Concerning the Darhad shamans’ interactions with spirits I propose another view on this distinction: in contrast to naturalism, the shamanic mode acknowledges not only the distinction between nature and culture but also the transgressions and hybrids on the interface – between humans and non-humans, and between the domestic and the wild. The *ongod* are these hybrid intermediaries: their identity is related to humans, to wild and domestic animals, and to particular locations in the landscape; the *ongod* transgress distinctions of humans and non-humans. The shamans are specialists at working on the interfaces, at enabling transgressions and at connecting the distinct zones; shamanic seances are the stages to perform these hybrids into being. Latour (1995) talked of the creation of hybrids in modernist science in terms of translation. Shamans use exactly the same term when they describe what they do: they translate between *ongod* and humans. By their communication with hybrids, shamans can relate to the non-human forces in the environment and the ancestors in the past. From this angle, a re-reading of the cited interview passage with Umban reveals new meaning: Umban presented *ongod* as intermediates between the powerful masters of the environment (*tenger, lus savdag, ezen*) and humans.

I started this chapter with the claim that representations of shamanism since the eighteenth century have produced the shaman and shamanism as a screen to reflect the observer’s rationalist self-perception. The representation of cosmologies of spiritual worlds have created the shaman as “the irrational other” who cannot distinguish between nature and culture, thereby reassuring the modernist dichotomy. Shamans distinguish between humans and non-humans, between the domestic spheres and the wild. However, they also acknowledge the transgressions or intermediate zones and they communicate with *ongod* as hybrids. In the next chapter I will show how shamans use the communication with *ongod* and the relations to the non-human forces and the ancestors in the past to act in the modern world; how they use archaic notions to support people in their struggle in the postsocialist economy. Thereafter, in Chapter 5, I will analyze in detail the relationship between shaman and *ongod* and how the *ongod* come into being during the shamans’ seance.



## Topographies of affliction in postsocialism

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*This chapter locates the shaman Yura's inspirational treatments of individual cases of suffering within the wider context of the postsocialist economy. After an initial enthusiasm about the transition from socialism to market economy, the majority of assessments now express their disappointment about the social outcomes. They focus on increase in poverty and inequality, and on the spread of economic insecurity and vulnerability. The assessments criticize mainly the transfer of responsibility and risk to the individual households. To support their clients in their present-day struggle, shamans relate the household's affliction to the imagery of an ordered past and to the responsibility of spirits.*

The kitchen of the shaman Yura in the village of Ulaan Uul *sum* was a much-frequented place when I stayed with her in September 2003. Yura was usually sitting with a cup of salted milk tea in one hand and a cigarette in the other on a footstool when people entered to chat with her or to ask for her medical advice. Some people asked for drugs from her kitchen-cupboard, others requested her divination and shamanic treatment. Yura is a former nurse of the local hospital and has a small private drugstore. She is living with her husband Gürbaazar in a three-room wooden house in a spacious compound which they share with one of their daughters' family; their home is located at the main road in the midst of administration buildings and shops at the center of the sprawling village. After years of administrative endeavors, Yura succeeded in obtaining a license for a private pharmacy and in 2003 the family built a small drugstore at the roadside.

Yura was born in Ulaan Uul in 1947, as the fifteenth of sixteen children into, as she said, a reasonably well-off herder's household. She started primary school at the age of eight in Ulaan Uul, and soon after the expropriation of the herders and the constitution of the collective farms in 1959, the family moved to Ulaanbaatar. Later, they returned to Hatgal at the southern edge of Lake Hövsgöl for a couple of years, only to move back again to the capital, where Yura was educated as a nurse. Pregnant, she married at the age of eighteen in Ulaan Uul, and subsequently gave birth to six children. Her husband Gürbaazar was an army officer in the capital and later worked as a state storekeeper in Ulaan Uul. Yura worked as a nurse, first in Ulaan Uul, then in Ulaanbaatar, and later again in Ulaan Uul. Over the years, Yura got tired of her exhausting job at the hospital. After attending a pharmacist's training in Ulaanbaatar, she operated the pharmacy belonging to the rural hospital of Ulaan Uul for ten years. In 1993, Yura profited from a special retirement offer of the new postsocialist government and retired at the early age of forty-five. The family, who had already kept some cattle while living in the village, moved to the nearby pastures and engaged in fulltime herding. Later, Yura and her husband left the livestock with their

married children and returned to their village home where Yura opened an informal pharmacy in her kitchen.

During the 1990s, Yura became a shaman. “I was sick for long years”, Yura explained, and for two years her ailment even kept her from doing her job. She described her illness as her being *unadag*, which literally means “repeatedly falling”; the notion is often used by Darhad shamans to describe a period of mental and physical sickness before becoming a shaman. Yura’s thirty-year-old daughter Erdenchimeg remembered her mother’s early illness attacks during her childhood, when Yura had sometimes cooked inedible food and gave her daughter half-raw dumplings to eat in school. Yura described how the living circumstances of her family deteriorated during the 1990s: Erdenchimeg lost her husband while she was pregnant with her first son, two of Yura’s grandchildren died, and both her sons started drinking. Feeling desperate, Yura said, she accepted to become a shaman. She chose the Darhad shaman Batbayar *udgan* as teacher who enlivened a jaw harp to enable her to contact her ancestor spirits. After practicing for several years in private only, Yura started to shamanize with the drum and the special ritual dress called armor.

After some days at her home, I joined Yura and her husband on a daylong jeep drive to the *aimag* (province) capital Mörön. Yura traveled south to equip her new pharmacy and to visit clients who had called her for a seance. The town of Mörön spreads out across a dry open valley along the river Mörön and was inhabited by over 30’000 people in 2003.<sup>1</sup> The administrative center of the town bears witness to the socialist modernity project: it is formed by a spacious arrangement of buildings – including the provincial and the town administration, the post office, a museum, a theatre and some hotels, surrounded by apartment blocks and connected by the few paved roads in town. Today however, the big market with market halls surrounded by maze-like rows of containers at the northeastern margins forms the lively center of town. On this market, everything available in the province is offered up for sale, from livestock products to candies, and from car spare parts to felt used to cover the Mongolian *ger*. The two centers of the town are connected by rows of compounds lined up along unpaved roads, where the majority of the inhabitants live.

Yura’s daughter Erdenchimeg inhabits such a compound with her family. When we arrived, one of Yura’s sons was moving out of the second house in the compound; the family relocated to Renchinlümbe in the Shishget depression, where his wife, a post office employee, was sent to run the telephone and post office; at the same time, Yura’s other son was moving in from the countryside, so as to provide their children with better education facilities. During the two weeks that Yura stayed at her daughter’s, people dropped in to meet the shaman and to ask for her advice. Yura made a divination and, depending on the diagnosis, offered to treat them through a seance to be held on one of the following nights. As Darhad shamans usually do, Yura appoints the time for her seances according to the

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the provincial statistical office, Mörön (10.09. 2003).

lunar calendar, considering a few days as particularly auspicious, generally the odd days as suitable, and the even days as unfortunate to perform a seance. After some days in Mörön, Yura started to complain that life in town was too busy and the temperatures too warm, and she longed to return to the calm and chilly countryside and to the South Korean soap opera she watched every night at home – which she could not in town, because she was working every other night and in the other nights electricity was switched off in the quarter where her daughter lived. While she was eager to return home, the line of people asking for her support did not come to an end. Thus, she prolonged her stay day by day and she increased the number of treatments by scheduling two seances on one night and once even challenged her spirits by performing on an even day of the astrologer's calendar.

### Yura's healing seances in Mörön

When the clients called Yura on the appointed day, she provided them with detailed instructions on what to buy for the seance and ordered them to pick her up, together with her husband and me, at seven o'clock in the evening. At their home, the hosts served salty milk tea, pastries, and salads; Yura instructed them to serve the main course after the seance, as she did not eat meat before shamanizing. Her husband and assistant Gürbaazar unpacked her paraphernalia, draped the shamanic armor on the sofa, suspended her spirits (*ongod*) materialized as colorful straps of fabric, from the northern wall of the living-room. When shamanizing in an apartment, where an ordinary wood stove was lacking, Gürbaazar dried the drum by rotating it again and again over the heating coil of the electric kitchen stove. The hosts arranged the offerings – milk, vodka, a plate with pastries and candy, and a box of cigarettes – on a table below the *ongod*. The evening passed with preparations and chatting, and in between Yura took out her divination utensils, four ankle-bones of a musk deer and a small bag with twenty-one stones, to make further divinations.

Typically, Yura begins her seance shortly before midnight. She first dresses herself in a particular *deel* she only wears before her seances.<sup>2</sup> She picks her jaw harp, presses it against her teeth, pulls the tongue and plays a short wailing melody. After this introduction, her assistant Gürbaazar changes Yura into her ritual clothing. He purifies each piece of clothing circling it over smoking incense, shaking it out and repeating the procedure twice. He starts with the boots made of buck leather and hands them to Yura, who takes the boots in a measured gesture to her face and blows into them three times before she puts them on. Then Gürbaazar in one motion dresses her in the armor and removes her *deel*. Yura's armor is a gown made from a young female deer leather trimmed with sable fur and laden with

<sup>2</sup> The Mongolian *deel*, a knee-length gown or coat, buttoned on the right side of the body, worn with the belt around the waist by women and on the hip by men, is usually called the "traditional" Mongolian dress. Considering Elverskog's (2004) illustration of the diversity of garments worn by the Mongolian nobility during the Qing period and his analysis of the relation of dress code and rule, I assume that the present-day uniform *deel* as a Mongolian national dress has rather a recent origin, related to the 20th century Mongolian nation-state and socialist egalitarianism.

ceremonial scarves, weighted with iron bells and symbolic weapons such as knives and tridents mainly located between the shoulders on the back. Finally, Gürbaazar wraps the headgear around her head and ties it at the back. The shamanic headgear consists of a broad headband with an embroidered face covering the forehead, adorned with eagle feathers above and a curtain of fringes below hiding the shaman's face. Whilst being dressed, Yura stands with her head hanging, silent, repeatedly yawning and giving the impression of being withdrawn.



*Photograph 16: The shaman Yura just before starting her seance, at her home in the village of Ulaan Uul (03.09. 2003).*

Fully equipped, with the drum in her left hand and the stick in her right, Yura bows first to the fire, then before her *ongod*; thereafter she leaps straight up three times and starts reciting her *tamlaga* to summon her *ongod* in her deep voice. In the metaphoric language and the rhythm of a poem she addresses her spirits as powerful authorities, as watchful protectors and as gracious merciful aerial beings, and the shaman requests her *ongod* to enter her body and to bring good fortune and virtue. As usual in the Darhad shamans' invocation chants, Yura's *tamlaga* avoids the term *ongod*; her chant addresses the spirits in the plural as well as in the singular. The following is a shortened version of her *tamlaga*, which Yura jotted down for me (05.09. 2003):

<i>Myangan melmiitengüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My thousand-eyed merciful ones
<i>Tümen sonortonguud min' gej hairhduud</i>	My ten-thousand-eared merciful ones
<i>Serveej büren haragtai</i>	Of completely outstanding appearance
<i>Sertii büren chanartai</i>	Of completely protruding capability
<i>Shil möngön shireetengüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My silver-enthroned merciful ones
<i>Shijir altan tuyaatanguud min' gej hairhduud</i>	My pure golden-rayed merciful ones
<i>Avaa ih hüchtengüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My exceedingly powerful merciful ones
<i>Asar tavan tengertengüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My pavillon with five heavenly merciful ones <sup>3</sup>
<i>Höh lusan höltöngüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My blue water spirits-related merciful ones <sup>4</sup>
<i>Har lusan hamjalgatanguud min' gej hairhduud</i>	My black water spirits-following merciful ones
<i>Hii hiisver biyetengüüd min' gej hairhduud</i>	My aerial-bodied benevolent ones
<i>Hiisver üilen damjalgatanguud min' gej hairhduud</i>	My aerial-transmitting benevolent ones
<i>Höh möngön tengeriin ezen bolson hairhhad min'</i>	My blue silver heavenly-become-master benevolent ones
<i>Hörst altan delhiin tulguur bolson hairhhad min'</i>	My terrestrial golden-become-earth-protecting benevolent ones
<i>Tavan tiviin ezed min'</i>	My masters of the five continents
<i>Tansag orni sahius nar min'</i>	My protectors of the delightful world
<i>Baigaa bayan orni min'</i>	Of my wealthy land being
<i>Ezen bolson hairhhad min'</i>	My become-master benevolent ones
<i>Suuga altan hangain min'</i>	My reigning golden Hangai
<i>Hamba hilen goyoltonguud min'</i>	My plushly decorated beings
<i>Haliu bulgan olbogtonguud min'</i>	My on otter-and-sable cushions- seated beings
<i>Ger nevt gereltenguud min'</i>	My felt tent-transcending light-beings
<i>Tuurga nevt tuyaatanguud min'</i>	My felt wall-transcending ray-beings
<i>Toonotoi gert min' tongoj hairlagtai</i>	Bending over the felt tent's roof-ring benevolent ones
<i>Tol'toi tuyaagaa tuslaj hairlagtai</i>	With reflecting rays-helping benevolent ones
<i>Tovtoi ügee helj hairlagtai</i>	Clear words-saying benevolent ones

<sup>3</sup> The *asar* are the residences of the *ongod* in the mountains.

<sup>4</sup> “*Höh lusan höltöngüüd*” literally means “those who are footed in the blue *lus*; *lus* is a Tibetan term related to the masters of the water.

<i>Örhteᠢ gert min' öngij hairlagtai</i>	My heart and family-protecting benevolent ones
<i>Ölzii buyanaa shingeej hairlagtai</i>	With your fortune and merit sinking [into my body] benevolent ones

Interrupting her *tamlaga* in the middle, she venerates her *ongod* by sprinkling some drops of milk and vodka towards them and by incensing the line of *ongod*. Gürbaazar offers Yura burning incense three times which she eats.<sup>5</sup> Yura now starts drumming, and continues her *tamlaga* by singing it in her deep hoarse voice. She starts drumming with a slow drumbeat in the rhythm of a walking horse, and while she is riding her drum and invoking her *ongod*, her voice gradually becomes louder and the rhythm of her drumbeat falls into a gentle gallop, increasing gradually in speed. Suddenly, fervid drumming, a screaming voice, and a whistling sound announce the arrival of the first *ongod*. It is the metamorphosis of Yura's deceased mother which speaks through the body of her daughter. The *ongod* grumbles, laughs, greets her daughter, and angrily tells that she burned her shamanic drum and her armor during communism and therefore nine of the sixteen children she had borne died. After the mother *ongod*, the spirit of the grandmother takes the voice of the shaman: she describes the long journey she took to meet her granddaughter, she recalls that she followed her granddaughter for forty years and begged her for thirty years to become a shaman. The grandmother admonishes her granddaughter to use her shamanic power carefully for "white" (good) deeds and to avoid "hard" (bad) deeds. If she does not follow her advice, the grandmother warns, she will only live for another couple of years.

The spirit falls silent, and Gürbaazar offers her a cup of tea and a cigarette, and some sips of vodka. The grandmother continues chanting, and Gürbaazar asks the *ongod* to turn her attention to the concerns of the first client. The spirit thereafter talks about the client, makes the diagnosis, effects the cure and provides instructions for further treatment. Sometimes, the *ongod* calls another spirit to do the healing. After all clients are attended to, Gürbaazar induces the end of the seance by circling around Yura, requesting the *ongod* and the shaman to separate; heralded by a cuckoo's cry, the grandmother again arrives, ordering the shaman to turn towards the hearth fire and to return; the shaman ends the chant mutedly, singing that "like ducklings in a row the *ongod* return". Yura drops the drum, her chant fading away. Gürbaazar puts away the drum, peels the armor off her slackened body and dresses her in the *deel*; he then places the still motionless shaman on the ground and presses the jaw harp into her hands. After playing a while, Yura opens her eyes and stretches yet remains seated with a dazed expression on her face. Gürbaazar serves her a cup of tea, lights her cigarette and asks: "Have you had a good travel and return?"

<sup>5</sup> Darhad shamans use dried twigs of a taiga juniper, resembling Tuya, as incense. Ground into a powder, the same plant is used as incense all over Mongolia.



The diagnoses of Yura's *ongod* will be analyzed at the end of this chapter; here I first summarize the requests and distress of clients I heard while attending Yura's seances in Mörön. The first client was a single mother living in a well-furnished apartment close to the administrative center. The woman did not say why she consulted the shaman. She obviously was not accustomed to shamanic ceremonies and did not understand the chants. Thereafter, Yura treated the family of a bank executive. The client explained that the family had been rich some years ago when her husband was doing good business with imported cars from Russia, but that after this business had collapsed he was left with only petty trading. This family's concern focused on the absence of economic success of the husband's business; besides, the husband suffered from health problems, specifically with the kidneys and the heart. Immediately after the seance, his younger brother entered and requested a seance for his own family; he told Yura about his personal circumstances, that he had neither work nor economic success and that, moreover, his wife's younger brother had drowned in a river a few days ago. Yura went to his home for the next seance.

Several appointments were necessary until Yura was finally shamanizing for a state-employed lawyer and her husband, a successful businessman in Mörön, whose wealth was based on marmot skin trade with Russia in the initial years of the market economy. The lawyer demanded inspirational support to get a visa, preferably for the United States, otherwise for Switzerland, or, at least, to Korea, where she had already been working for several years. When Yura asked why she absolutely wanted to go abroad, the answer was quick and clear: to get rich fast. I accompanied Yura to another seance she conducted for a family she had already treated a year ago. That time she was asked to heal a daughter of the family who suffered from asthma, a weak heart, and her low weight; in the meantime, the girl recovered from her asthma and took on weight. This time the family asked for good luck for their business. The father worked as a trader on the market and the family was undecided as to whether they should make a risky investment in the planned new market. The man complained that his trade was not doing well and he admitted that his main problem was alcohol.

For some clients frequenting her, Yura did not appoint a seance for one of the following nights, but carried out a treatment instantly. Once in the early morning, a middle-aged gaunt silent man in a worn-out black suit brought his daughter with a broken leg; he told of another daughter lying sick at home. After Yura made her divination, she immediately carried out the treatment ritual by jaw harp. One afternoon, a young couple entered the house with a crying baby suffering from diarrhea. Besides giving them drugs against diarrhea, Yura called her spirits by playing the jaw harp, sprinkled incense on ember, poured the embers into a big cup of water and purified the baby by moving the steaming coals in a circle around the infant. This haphazard enumeration of afflictions submitted to the shaman Yura shall now be put in the context of postsocialist Mongolian economy as

assessed by economists, governmental departments, non-governmental organizations and international institutions. These assessments consider afflictions similar to those of Yura's clients as typical in postsocialist days.

### **Mongolia's postsocialist economy of risk**

The only recent account with a largely favorable review of the postsocialist economy I could find is an IMF report titled "*Growth and Recovery in Mongolia During Transition*" (Cheng 2003). The author praises the relative success of Mongolia's macroeconomic development compared with other postsocialist countries, stating that Mongolia's growth performance in the 1990s was better than those of the Baltics, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the poorer performers of Central and Eastern Europe. Cheng's assessment focuses on the period of growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) during the second half of the 1990s, "after the painful transformational recession" peaking in 1993/1994 (Cheng 2003: 4). However, it was only in 2002 that Mongolia's GDP reached the pre-transitional level of 1989. In 2002, GDP per capita mounted to 480 US\$ and therefore was, due to the growing population, still 15 per cent below 1989 levels (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a: 94; comparison at 1995 prices). From 2002 to 2005, GDP per capita increased further at roughly twenty per cent (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2006: 114; comparison at 2000 prices).

Having been the first state to follow the Soviet Union in building a socialist society, in the 1990s Mongolia again plunged into a radical shift. In the crisis caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Mongolia's political elites eagerly led the country into upheaval, enacting political democratization along with an economic "shock therapy" focusing on price liberalization, state budget reduction and privatization, supported by Asian Development Bank, IMF and World Bank advisors. Domestic and foreign critics who warned against poor growth, unfair division of state property, or corruption and who proposed incremental changes under state control were left unheard (Rossabi 2005). Although Mongolia was "the star pupil of liberal development economics" until the end of the 1990s, Griffin (2001a: 1) summarized the results after a decade of economic reforms as "highly disappointing": "The transition to a market orientated economy has been accompanied by a decline in the average standard of living, a dramatic increase in poverty, greater economic insecurity, and a rise in inequality in the distribution of income and productive assets". In the introduction to "*The Mongolian Economy*", Nixon et al. (2000: xvi, xvii) express their pessimism whether Mongolia will end its "transition" successfully as Mongolia, in consequence of the exogenous shocks and policy decisions, "has, in effect, joined the 'Third World'": "Its per capita income is one of the lowest in the world, poverty is endemic, infrastructure facilities are poorly developed or non-existent, the domestic savings rate is low, the financial sector is underdeveloped and the commodity composition

of exports is highly concentrated and subject to unpredictable price fluctuations in global markets”.

Although some of the recent assessments still praise the macroeconomic and structural reforms, the reports by governmental and international organizations all include a critical judgement of their consequences. The following review of the literature leaves aside the structural and macroeconomic policies and focuses on their outcomes and how they are experienced by people in everyday life. The majority of reviewed accounts focus on the manifold vulnerabilities people have been experiencing since the collapse of the socialist system, and show these as related to the particular risk of the living circumstances in postsocialism. I will organize the discussion of the postsocialist “economy of risk” around different aspects of insecurity: poverty, unemployment and informal work, health, and livestock herding. After the discussion of the assessments, I will reflect on the concepts I have used, like “transition”, “postsocialism”, and “risk”. I will argue that mainly the disappointment about the failing of a quick prosperity led to the thoroughly negative assessments of the development during the 1990s and, moreover, to an idealized view on the socialist past.

### **A postsocialist economy of risk: 1. Poverty and “nouveaux riches”**

Not to be able to provide one’s family with enough to eat is a serious risk in postsocialist Mongolia. While it is often claimed that poverty was nonexistent in socialism (for example Nyamsuren 1999; World Bank 1996), poverty now affects more than a third of the population. The dimensions of poverty have been measured by four major studies: the 1995 and 1998 “*Living Standards Measurement Surveys*” (LSMS) conducted by the National Statistical Office, supported by the World Bank in 1995 and UNDP in 1998 (World Bank 1996; National Statistical Office of Mongolia 1999); the “*Household Income and Expenditure Survey/Living Standards Measurement Survey 2002-2003*” (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank, and UNDP Mongolia 2004); these three nationwide surveys have been complemented in the year 2000 by the “*Participatory Living Standards Assessment*” (PLSA), a broad-ranged qualitative study of people’s views and experiences (National Statistical Office of Mongolia and World Bank 2001).

Although the surveys are based on different data collection methods and comparison is therefore limited, they agree on one main result: they all classify roughly a third of the population as living below the poverty line. The 1995 and 1998 surveys consider 20 per cent of the population as very poor and an additional 16 per cent as poor. The poverty line is based mainly on basic food needs: it is defined essentially as the minimum expenditures necessary to obtain a 2100 kcal diet, measured in 1998 according to the consumption patterns of the 40 per cent poorest households, who consume mainly flour, dairy products,

and meat (Schelzig 2000). As “very poor” are identified those people whose consumption is below 75 per cent of this poverty line. Although the 2002/2003 survey again calculates the mean poverty incidence at around 36 per cent, it asserts a distinctive change in the distribution of poverty between rural and urban areas. The 1998 LSMS survey assessed poverty to be more widespread in towns, particularly in provincial *aimag* centers (45 per cent), than in rural areas (32 per cent; Government of Mongolia 2001b). The newer survey shows the poverty rate as higher in rural than in urban areas (43 per cent in rural areas, with higher poverty incidence in *sum* villages than among rural herders, as opposed to 30 per cent in towns); it further reveals considerable regional differences, assessing poverty incidence in the western regions at over 50 per cent compared to roughly 35 per cent in the central and eastern regions (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank, and UNDP Mongolia 2004). The survey indicates the lowest level of poverty for the capital Ulaanbaatar, which at the same time features the highest level of inequality. The authors of the new study consider the variances in results as partly reflecting different procedures of data collection; furthermore, they interpret the new figures as consequences of the winter catastrophes (*zud*) which caused dramatic livestock losses between 1999 and 2001.

The poor in Mongolia are “heavily concentrated” in vulnerable groups: in households without employment, in single parent or large families, among old people, among children from dysfunctional homes, the sick and disabled (Nixon, Suvd, and Walters 2000: 202). According to the “*Country Gender Assessment*” (Asian Development Bank and World Bank 2005: 2) a disproportionate number of the poor are women, and female-headed households are considered to be at “much greater risk of being poor, particularly in urban areas”. The Participatory Living Standards Assessment (PLSA) conducted in 2000 emphasizes that “multiple sources of insecurity and vulnerability” threaten the livelihood security of the poor besides low income alone (National Statistical Office of Mongolia and World Bank 2001: 32). Negative consequences of poverty collected by the PLSA report include children dropping out of school, deterioration of health, disability, mental stress, domestic violence, homelessness, divorce, increasing numbers of single parent families, and widespread alcoholism, indebtedness, and malnutrition. The PLSA identified two common triggers of poverty: unemployment in urban sectors and the loss of livestock due to the *zud*. Nixon and Walters (2004: 13) also point to the connection between unemployment and poverty as demonstrated in the data of the 1995 LSMS survey, “with nearly 60 per cent of the unemployed falling below the poverty line [...] and with over half of the very poor unemployed”. The relationship between poverty and unemployment is also shown in the 2002/03 survey (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank, and UNDP Mongolia 2004).

Nixon and Walters (2004) claim that in comparison with countries of the former Soviet Union, the poor in Mongolia were mostly “equally poor and not very much worse off than

those just above the poverty line". A survey studying the livelihoods of that half of the population which belongs to the middle income groups estimates that 40 per cent of these are at risk of falling into poverty (Dalai and Oyuntsetseg 2004). These results match the criticism on the poverty surveys put forward by Brenner (2001: 28): the author argues (drawing on the analysis of the former two LSMS surveys) that the reported poverty incidence in fact measures extreme poverty, "because the poverty line contains the important assumption that people are undernourished to the extent that part of their expenditure is devoted to non-food items". Brenner concludes that a more accurate interpretation of the 1995 and 1998 surveys would classify about 52 per cent of the population as poor.

The majority of the recent assessment reports on rising inequalities in the living standards (Government of Mongolia and UNDP Mongolia 2003; National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank and UNDP Mongolia 2004). The incidence of poverty is the reports' primary concern, and the other side of the rising inequality, the emerging class of rich people, is only highlighted by a few authors: Nixon and Walters (2004) detect some causes of the rising inequality in the privatization of state assets. The authors denounce the inequitable and precipitous distribution of livestock in the early 1990s as well as the transfer of apartments to their inhabitants at no charge, which privileged apartment dwellers over people living in their own *ger*.<sup>6</sup> Their analysis identifies the small and medium profiteers of the privatization. Rossabi (2005: 51) locates the main profiteers of the privatization foremost in a small number of "politically and economically well-connected" people, who collected the shares of the former state-owned enterprises at give-away prices. Rossabi argues that many citizens in need of instant cash and unaware of the significance of the vouchers they received in 1991 sold their shares below value and thus did not profit from the redistribution of state enterprises. Rossabi further lists corruption, the misuse of foreign aid grants for private consumption, privileged access to bank loans never paid back, and the illegal privatization of profits from the exploitation of gold and other mineral resources as main sources of wealth of the "nouveaux riches".

## **A postsocialist economy of risk: 2. Unemployment and informal work**

The officially shown unemployment rate in postsocialism reached its peak in 1994 with – in view of the dramatic upheavals of the economy – a modest nine per cent (9.9 per cent for women), dropping in the following years to 3.4 per cent (3.8 per cent for women) in 2002 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a). At the same time, however, the employment rate decreased, from around 70 per cent in 1992 down to around 60 per cent in 2002. Anderson (1998: 10) interprets these bewildering figures: "The story being told by

<sup>6</sup> In the capital Ulaanbaatar, the apartments were transferred to their inhabitants in 1996/97. By the year 2002 the price of a two-room apartment in the city center had risen to 20'000 or even 30'000 US dollars (own fieldwork findings).

Mongolia's employment, unemployment, and not-employment statistics, is that a large portion of the able-bodied, working age population (particularly in Ulaanbaatar) has fallen out of the calculations of official labor statistics, counted as neither employed nor unemployed".

Estimations about the real unemployment rate are considerably higher than those represented in official statistics. Bolormaa and Clark (2000: 214) assess real unemployment as increasing, reaching around 18 per cent in 1997. An analysis of the 2000 "*Population and Housing Census*" (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2001a) presented similar conclusions arguing that if those who "do not work because there is no work available" had been counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate would have amounted to 25 per cent (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2001b). Incentives to register as unemployed are minimal, write Bolormaa and Clark (2000: 215), as financial benefits are limited to two and half months and are restricted to those who have paid the premium of one per cent of their salary for at least two years (Kusago 2001: 61).

Anderson (1998: 8) extracted a different conclusion from the gap between statistical unemployment and employment data: he claims that employment statistics "unwittingly demonstrate rapid growth of the informal sector", and he assessed that "roughly one third of the official labor force in Ulaanbaatar are engaged in informal activities" engaging between 100'000 and 130'000 people in the capital city. The author found out that in general informals do not consider themselves as employed, and estimates that therefore nearly 80 per cent of Ulaanbaatar's informals are not counted as employed in official statistics. Furthermore, he claims that a household on average gains a third of its income from informal sources. The author projects that for Mongolia as a whole, "underground activity" accounts for around 35 per cent of the official GDP.

The importance of the informal sector is revealed by the household income statistics: in urban areas, wages and salaries – which made up 85 per cent of the monetary income in 1990 – decreased steadily during the 1990s, sinking down to 40 per cent of the monetary income in 2002. In the same period, the share of private business activities and the category "other" together rose from 6 per cent to over 50 per cent of the monetary income (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a: 251). In rural areas, the share of wages and salaries decreased from 76 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent of the monetary income (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a: 251). The share of "private business and others" in rural areas rose from 17 per cent to 71 per cent in the same period. The shift in the monetary income of rural households comes as no surprise, since the liquidation of collective and state farms left the herders without salaries but with private livestock to market.

Informal work is not restricted to otherwise jobless people, but it is common also for people employed by the formal sector, often “well educated and highly skilled people”, to run an informal business on the side (Griffin 2001a: 8; Bolormaa and Clark 2000: 217). “Everyone got involved in some kind of trade”, remembered Nyamsuren (1999: 227), and Anderson drew the image of an informal sector that “has become a part of every city-dweller’s daily existence” (Anderson 1998: 1). Declining real wages, Anderson argued, had led formal sector employees to moonlighting in the informal sector, which was easy to enter and where people often earned more money than in their formal occupations (Anderson 1998).

Informal business mainly thrives in trade and transport: Kusago (2001) points to the large numbers of traders connecting the cities with the countryside, and Mongolia with neighboring countries, although she assumes that the small-scale transnational trade faded towards the end of the 1990s. In the capital city, Anderson found small kiosks on every street corner, as well as indoor markets owned by formal economic entities renting sections of the counter to informals; both were widespread forms of informal trade during the 1990s, supplementing the so-called black market, the nucleus of informal trade. As a further important informal sector he detected transportation: with the rise of private cars in the capital, the number of informal taxicabs increased as well, as most private cars also served as cabs. Similarly, private bussing within the capital and from the capital to other provincial centers rose noticeably within a few years. Anderson (1998: 23) compares monthly incomes of informals with formal salaries: in 1997, an informal taxi driver achieved 200’000 Tögrög monthly (around 220 US dollars at that time), which constituted three times the salary of a high-ranking hospital doctor or a cabinet minister and still one and a half times the official salary of the president of Mongolia.

However, in the following years the salaries in the formal sector rose, and the informal sector has undergone substantial changes since Anderson’s research. A large number of kiosks in the city center were closed in 1998 and the indoor markets in the city center were rebuilt into formal supermarkets between 1999 and 2003. Furthermore, the informal transportation business also underwent rapid restructuring: in the late 1990s, the number of private cars and informal transportation services rose steeply; in 2002 a surge of yellow cabs called “city taxi” blocked the capital’s streets; again, these taxis represented the mixed form of a formal company leasing the cabs to informals; yet the taxi drivers complained about high leasing fees, stiff competition and diminishing profits – by the summer of 2004, the predominance of the yellow “city taxi” on the streets had ended as suddenly as it had emerged.<sup>7</sup>

An important pattern of informal work is international migration, which Griffin calls a “survival strategy that is seldom discussed and about which little is known” (Griffin 2001a:

<sup>7</sup> Own observations in Ulaanbaatar during annual visits between 1996 and 2004.

9). The estimations of Mongolian citizens working temporarily abroad reach 100'000 persons, the majority of them working in South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Germany, with new emerging destinations like Ireland, Canada, or Eastern Europe; the majority of these migrants are assumed to be working illegally (Urantsooj et al. 2000). According to a study analyzing migration patterns in 2000, half of those people living longer than five years in the capital wish to move abroad for work (Rendendev 2001). An internet article cites the Minister of Social Welfare and Labor claiming that 20 per cent of the national income comes from Mongolians working abroad (Otgonjargal 2004).

Kusago (2001: 59 ff.) emphasizes the heterogeneity of informal workers, ranging from the very poor to people earning a multiple of an average salary paid in the public sector, and stresses the vulnerability of the unemployed to risks such as illness, death of the breadwinner, injury, or theft. Anderson underlines the inequity of the flat rate tax for informals, as the fixed tax charge independent of business earnings has the effect that “poorer informals are taxed into poverty while the richer pay taxes that are trivial relative to their profitability” (Anderson 1998: 1).

### **A postsocialist economy of risk: 3. Health**

Health services in present-day Mongolia receive bad grades from both foreign agencies and governmental reports: the equipment, the education of medical staff, the clinical quality, and the diagnostic capacity of public hospitals, as well as the supply of essential medicines are criticized as inadequate, and patients are said to be dissatisfied with the treatments received in hospitals.<sup>8</sup> The infrastructure, which provides every remote rural district with a hospital, is criticized as being too large to be affordable and as focusing on input rather than output. The government is exposed to considerable foreign pressure to reduce health expenditures, to privatize health facilities, and to shift from a hospital-based infrastructure to a policy centered on providing essential primary health care through family medical practices and preventive public health measures.<sup>9</sup> Poor and rural people are found to be at a disadvantage in accessing health care: more than half of the decentralized rural *sum* hospitals are assessed as being unable to provide a reliable primary health service (Government of Mongolia 2001a; IMF 2003).<sup>10</sup> By contrast, there is a high concentration of public as well as private health care facilities in the capital city (Government of Mongolia and UNDP Mongolia 2003). In sum, mainly the poor are restricted in the access to health care as they can neither afford health insurance, medication nor the costs of a journey to

<sup>8</sup> See for example the following reports: Asian Development Bank and World Bank 2005, Government of Mongolia 2001a, National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia 2003, Patel and Amarsanaa 2000.

<sup>9</sup> See Government of Mongolia 2001a, IMF 2003, Janes and Chuluundorj 2004, National Statistical Office of Mongolia and UNDP 1999, O'Rourke and Hindle 2001, Rossabi 2005.

<sup>10</sup> I doubt that this criticism points to new developments during postsocialism; I assume that rather the health care policy has changed under the influence of the new donor recommendations.



the nearest town and the accommodation there. Furthermore, poor people, in particular migrants, are often excluded from medical care because they are rarely in possession of the necessary registration papers (Patel and Amarsanaa 2000). The Mongolian government announced three major health concerns in 2001: the high maternal and infant mortality, the growing incidence of infectious diseases, and increasing death caused by cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and accidents and injuries (Government of Mongolia 2001a: 20 f.).

Under the title “*Free markets and dead mothers*”, Janes and Chuluundorj (2004) draw an alarming picture of maternal mortality in postsocialism: it doubled from a ratio of 119 to 240 maternal deaths per 100’000 live births between 1990 and 1994, and thereafter declined to 175 in 1999, which is still ten times higher than the mortality rate that the WHO considers as acceptable (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a; UNDP 2001). Janes and Chuluundorj locate high maternal mortality mainly among the rural and the poor, and relate it to the closure of local maternity rest homes, deteriorating health facilities in general, and the overall poor health status of rural women. The authors connect maternal death to the direct and indirect changes wrought by neoliberal reforms, “affecting women by raising the level of economic risk borne by individual households, increasing rural poverty, escalating the labor demands placed on women, and impairing the quality and accessibility of health care” (Janes and Chuluundorj 2004: 234). However, due to increased governmental concern and the re-establishment of maternity rest homes, maternal mortality ratio decreased to 109 in 2002, thereby dropping below the levels of the last five years under socialism, when maternal mortality rate fluctuated between 120 and 175 (IMF 2003). Similar to maternal mortality, infant and child mortality are related to poverty and the urban-rural gap: the infant and child (below the age of five years) mortality rate is higher in rural than in urban areas and also higher in less-educated and poorer households. Infant mortality has halved from 64 deaths per 1000 live births in 1989 to just below 30 in 2002 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a); but the 1998 “*Reproductive Health Survey*” considers infant mortality to be higher than reported by the annual vital statistics (National Statistical Office of Mongolia and UNDP 1999).

Besides the high maternal mortality, a further gender-related health problem is widespread alcohol abuse among men, which results in domestic violence against women and children. Furthermore, women are more affected by deficient calory intake and anemia (Asian Development Bank and World Bank 2005; Patel and Amarsanaa 2000). Further poverty-related health problems are identified in the rising incidence of infectious diseases, (for example tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases, STDs). Most of the people with tuberculosis are classified as unemployed and belonging to the poor or very poor, and half the people affected with STDs are considered as unemployed and homeless (IMF 2003). The analyses perceive as further significant contributors to present-day morbidity and mortality figures of adults the increasing stress, the rise in human insecurity, and the

growth of alcoholism and smoking (UNDP 2001). A further major public health concern is air and water pollution in urban areas (Government of Mongolia and UNDP 2000).

Mongolia's population doubled between 1918 and 1968 and once more by 1989 (Randall 1993). In postsocialism, population growth reduced its speed and the country's population comprised 2,6 million people in 2005 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2006). Griffin (2001a: 3) claims that Mongolians reacted to the sharp decline in the average living standard with increased fertility control which caused a dramatic decrease of the population growth rate from 2.9 per cent in 1989 down to 1.4 in 1999. Randall (1993) however showed that the fertility rate started to decline sharply as early as the mid 1970s, when well-educated women increasingly controlled their fertility despite the policies of the socialist administration aiming at encouraging procreation and population growth at that time. Randall estimated in the early 1990s that with the promotion of contraceptives and after the legalization of abortion, the fertility rate would continue to rapidly fall.<sup>11</sup>

#### **A postsocialist economy of risk: 4. Livestock herding**

In opposition to standard economic formulas and historical experiences, Russell et al. (2000) propose livestock herding as the most promising source of rapid economic growth in the short to medium term for Mongolia, pointing to its importance in the shrinking economy during the 1990s, when livestock herding was the "principal engine of Mongolia's quick recovery" (Cheng 2003: 4). Indeed, the agricultural sector, which is dominated by livestock herding, tripled rapidly from initially 15 per cent to roughly 45 per cent of GDP between 1990 and 1996 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a: 95; at current prices). However, Griffin (2001b) assesses herding as a survival tactic rather than a development strategy and he considers the development of postsocialist livestock herding as a process of underdevelopment: having lost their jobs in the agricultural collectives, in the industry and administration in the beginning of the 1990s, people from rural villages and provincial capitals moved to the countryside and into subsistence herding life. According to Griffin's analysis, the number of herding households almost tripled, reaching 190'000 in 2000, and productivity of the pastoral sector decreased in the second half of the 1990s. Besides the movement of former village- and city-dwellers towards pastoral life, a second major shift in the pastoral sector was the relocation of numerous herding households from peripheral to central areas, moving "close to the market" in the vicinity of major towns (Russell et al. 2000).

At the end of the 1990s, the vulnerability of the livestock sector became apparent, when successive winter catastrophes, *zud*, preceded by dry summers, decimated the livestock

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<sup>11</sup> Randall (1993) argued that fertility in Mongolia rose mainly due to the availability of antibiotics which could effectly treat widespread venereal diseases. Randall maintains that population growth rate increased before the introduction of the pronatal policy and not, as is commonly assumed, due to it.

herds. The *zud* caused a loss of 11 million head of animals, and livestock assets, which were at their peak with 33,6 million head in 1999 and subsequently dropped to 24 million head in 2002 and 2003 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2004a; 2004b). Although massive livestock losses are a recurrent phenomenon in history and also in socialist days, Mongolia has not experienced a similar loss of livestock in recent decades (Müller 1997; Templer et al. 1993). The *zud* forced many herders to abandon their pastoral existence and to move to towns, in particular to Ulaanbaatar, contributing to a 25 per cent increase of the capital's population between 1997 and 2002 and becoming part of the unemployed and poor in the rampantly growing northern outskirts of town (Rossabi 2005: 122).

As early as 1993, Templer et al. (1993: 105) pointed to the central importance of the issue of environmental and climatic risk for herding households and warned against burdening the individual households with the responsibility for risk management without supporting them. The recent *zud* catastrophes have spotlighted the vulnerability of herders operating as individual households: "Perhaps for the first time since the origins of the Mongolian state in the thirteenth century, Mongolian herders became domestic-level subsistence producers, lacking access to cooperative institutions that served to spread economic risks among numbers of households" criticize Janes and Chuluundorj (2004: 238). The 2003 "*Human Development Report*" summarizes the situation of the postsocialist herding economy as follows: "The closure of government farms and *negdels* (agricultural collectives) left a thin, weak rural economy dominated by subsistence agriculture, short of both cash and credit" (Government of Mongolia and UNDP Mongolia 2003: 25). The privatization of herds and the ensuing self-responsibility of herding households in the midst of national economic crises was the start of an increasing economic inequality and poverty in the countryside: a few herders became rich, but 70 per cent of herders owned less than 100 animals at the beginning of the new century, an asset which is not perceived as large enough to yield a reliable living for a household (Rossabi 2005: 128). International concern for environmental sustainability focused on the increasing pressure on pastures due to increasing livestock numbers and their concentration in central areas, the disproportionate growth in the number of goats, and the lacking or insufficient institutional land arrangements (Griffin 2001b).

### **Postsocialist risk and the re-imagination of socialism**

The term "postsocialism" first gained prominence in anthropology and was initially directed against the ideology of "transition" by which economists and policy makers approached the disintegrating socialist economies.<sup>12</sup> The notion of "transition" transported the idea of a passage from "what was seen as an inefficient and wasteful" socialist economy into an

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<sup>12</sup> The first use of the term "postsocialism" I found was in the title of Humphrey (1992): "*The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia*"; yet the author did not discuss the term at that time.

alleged “natural” economy of the free market (Sneath 2002: 192). Objecting to the evolutionism and universalism inherent in this paradigm and to the related policy of mechanistic transfer of “Western” institutions to the former communist states, anthropological (and other) studies aimed to “provide the necessary corrective to the deficits of “transitology”” (Hann et al. 2002: 1). In their introductions to “*Postsocialism*”, Hann and Humphrey uphold their use of the label more than a decade after the collapse of socialism, arguing that the socialist past continues to serve as “the prime reference point for people” (Humphrey, p. 12), but that it probably will sooner or later be rejected by young people not educated under socialist regimes. Katherine Verdery offers an extended view in her part of this introduction, “*Whither postsocialism*”. She does not restrict the term “postsocialism” to the ex-socialist states but includes “the West”, sketching an approach which could be termed “postsocialist” or “post-Cold War” studies. The Cold War, she argues, organized the world around the dichotomy of “the East” against “the West”; “the existence of socialism itself affected the constitution and becoming of ‘the West’” (Hann et al. 2002: 18). Verdery proposes to follow the example of postcolonial studies and to trace the practices of domination, the technologies of modernity, and the representations of the self and the other for the emerging representations following the integration of the former socialist bloc into a global capitalist economy. It is Verdery’s extended understanding of the term “postsocialism” that I follow in this thesis.

I discussed how recent assessments of the livelihoods in present-day Mongolia emphasize the inequality, insecurity, and vulnerability people face. Noteworthy is the representation of the socialist past in these reports: in general, they summarize the socialist past very briefly in a few sentences, stating that everyone was guaranteed a job and a steady income (Griffin 2001a: 9), that there was neither poverty nor inequality (see for example Nyamsuren 1999), that the “pursuit of socialism until 1990 resulted in many impressive gains, including improvements in health and education, gender equality, social protection and human security” (Government of Mongolia and UNDP Mongolia 2003: 6). Only a decade after the collapse of socialism was celebrated, the reviews on socialism now highlight and appraise alleged socialist merits. The seven decades of socialism are now reviewed with a condensate of a few sentences focusing on security and equality and representing socialism as a homogenous period. The remarks about socialism neglect that only from the 1960s onward the collective farms, the health sector, and the educational system were expanded on a large scale (Müller 1997; Randall 1993; Neupert 1995). The brief reviews ignore that the outcomes of the Soviet-aided industrialization and enlargement of the agricultural production remained largely behind the expectations and could hardly improve livestock herding productivity (Müller 1997; McMillan 1969; Cassidy 1970; Heaton 1973). The brief positive reviews on socialism moreover disregard that also after the persecution of ten thousands of Buddhist lamas, nobles, rich livestock herders,

and intellectual leaders in the 1930s, repression and political violence continued until the 1980s (Baabar 1999; Kaplonski 2002). I suppose that the disappointment about the outcomes of the “transition” has contributed to the shift in the perception of the socialist past as an antipode to the present-day focus on insecurity, vulnerability, and inequality. Thus the “transition”, which was welcomed as one from a command economy and totalitarian system to a free market economy and democracy in the early 1990s, has become re-assessed as a transition from security to insecurity, risk, and loss.

Mary Douglas (1992) traced the changing connotations of the term “risk”. She outlined how the notion of risk emerged in the seventeenth century to describe the calculation of probabilities of losses and gains in gambling and then evolved into the idea of risk-taking in nineteenth-century economics and became restricted to adverse outcomes in the twentieth century: “the word risk now means danger; high risk means a lot of danger” (Douglas 1992: 24). Douglas related the political rhetoric of risk to cultural individualism, which upholds the individual, vulnerable to the encroachment of the community. This connotation of the term shapes the assessments of the living circumstances in postsocialist Mongolia. The present-day “economy of risk” indeed brought along a teleological “transition” – a paradigmatic transfer of the responsibility for economic dangers from the state to the individual. Socialist rule pursued a policy of economic equality, resulting in the equal sharing of economic hardships (Sabloff 2002: 20, 34); postsocialist rule however delegates economic risk to the individual, with the consequence that a few have become very rich and more than a third of the population has become poor in a few years only. This “transition” is hidden behind the rhetoric of “transition” from a command economy to a liberal market economy, which is connotated by Cold War dichotomies ignoring similar features of the former opposite “systems”, for example the striving for economic growth, as well as neglecting heterogeneities within the two blocs. Generations of anthropologists have been claiming with Polanyi (1977) that “the market” is nothing natural and universal out there, but embedded in social relations and cultural features. Griffin (2001a: 10) emphasizes the differences between the Mongolian market and “advanced market economies”: while historically the expansion of “the market” was accompanied by the development of a welfare state, the Mongolian “transition” has been accompanied by the shrinking of the welfare state. With the notion of “postsocialist economy of risk” I address what Griffin calls the “privatization of risk management”.

“[T]he reality of dangers is not at issue [...] but how they are politicized”, wrote Mary Douglas in her discussion of the term “risk” (1992: 29). I do not claim that the dangers in socialism were generally smaller; nor do I claim that for the first time in history the Mongolians are individually responsible for their economic survival without the support of larger collectives distributing risks as Janes and Chuluundorj (2004) do. Looking back on twentieth-century Mongolia only, there is good reason to assume that pastoralists were left

on their own after the destruction of the monasteries and the failed collectivization in the 1930s until the collective farms were established towards the end of the 1950s (Müller 1997). What I propose is a break in policies between the latter half of socialism and postsocialism: a transfer of the responsibility for economic survival from the state to the individual household.

### **Postsocialist distress and the resurgence of traditional healing**

The summarized assessments of postsocialism usually link the economic transformation with the aggravation of health-related issues and social problems. In an epidemiological study, Kohrt et al. (2004) explore the subjective experiences of distress expressed by the Mongolian illness label *yadargaa*.<sup>13</sup> The term literally means “tiredness”, “weariness”, “weakness” or “exhaustion” and is used to denote a state of illness related to mental fatigue. Mentioned symptoms often included fatigue, furthermore a heterogeneous list of symptoms such as physical weakness, headache, dizziness, difficulty to concentrate, high blood pressure, or sluggish thought processes. Half of those interviewed in the epidemiological survey considered themselves to be suffering *yadargaa*. The authors found no dominating group among the sufferers, yet they suggested a trend toward women, the elderly, and city dwellers. Some of the interviewed physicians referred to stress and worry as the main causes of *yadargaa*; some physicians however denied *yadargaa* to be an illness altogether. A bonesetter identified quarrelling, jealousy, and the failure to “communicate properly with the mountains, trees, and rivers” as causes of the syndrome (ibid.: 479). The *yadargaa* sufferers related their illness to a variety of causes, outstanding amongst which were problems related to work. The study suggests an association between suffering *yadargaa* and a deterioration of life quality under postsocialism. As a figure in the report shows, people suffering *yadargaa* perceived life change as less positive than the non-*yadargaa* respondents. However, also the *yadargaa* sufferers evaluated five of seven sub-domains (including “material wealth” and “health”) as having improved; only in the sub-domain employment was change assessed as negative by *yadargaa* sufferers but as positive by non-sufferers (Kohrt et al. 2004: 481). The authors assess the perception of the changes in employment opportunities as the best indicator of the characterization of the *yadargaa* sufferers. However, they do not comment that – in contradiction to their overall interpretation and the official assessments – the respondents of their study on average assess their living quality as having improved overall during postsocialism.

Although the authors relate the complaints about *yadargaa* to particular distress in postsocialism for those who did not benefit from the changes, they do not address the

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<sup>13</sup> The authors speak of a particular Mongolian sickness label, related to “shamanic” and Tibetan concepts of life-balance and stability. However, a similar sickness concept is discerned for example in France, where the sickness is called *la fatigue* and is similarly related to burdensome life circumstances (Gaines 1991).

question whether suffering from *yadargaa* is tied particularly to postsocialism or whether people also before, under socialist rule, complained about *yadargaa*. What certainly has changed is the scholarly approach to the folk illness label. To make *yadargaa* a subject of a study and to interview bonesetters and traditional doctors as experts is certainly related to postsocialism; this could hardly have been done under the socialist Mongolian government, which marginalized traditional practitioners (Neupert 1995). How the socialist official discourse used biomedicine as a central metaphor for socialist modernization is impressively demonstrated in a still-popular Mongolian black-and-white movie with the title “*Serelt*” (“*Awakening*”) from 1957, which I saw on Mongolian TV during fieldwork. The film stages Soviet-aided modernization which is symbolized by the figure of a blond young female Russian doctor opening a modern hospital. Her antagonist is an old Buddhist healer (*maaramba*), who is represented as backward quack and the antipode to modernization, and who accuses the Russian doctor of having caused the death of a sick girl. However, when the girl’s father enters the hospital to avenge his daughter’s death he finds her convalescent. With him, the whole community turns their faith to the bright Russian doctor while the old charlatan is arrested.

Traditional healers, once rejected as reactionary by socialist modernization ideology, now enjoy great popularity among the population: Bernstein et al. (2002) studied the importance of Mongolian traditional medicine, which they categorize as a combination of Tibetan and Chinese medical practices. The authors show that traditional medicine is very much present in educational institutions: twenty per cent of the students entering the national Medical University in Ulaanbaatar in 1998 exclusively enrolled for traditional medicine. In a survey conducted for the study in Mongolia’s second largest town Darhan, half of the 90 people interviewed stated that they consulted traditional practitioners, often in addition to biomedical treatment. The study further revealed that almost all respondents favored a primary care doctor trained in both traditional and biomedical methods. Bernstein et al. (2002: 44) criticize that the WHO and the Mongolian Ministry of Health “for reasons that are unclear [...] downplayed the importance of traditional medicine” and that in official reports traditional practitioners are too scarcely mentioned in view of their results which suggest “that traditional medicine may be frequently used and widely accepted by the population at large”.

People in postsocialist Mongolia not only seek the help of traditional Mongolian medicine, which is authorized by university training, but they consult a wide variety of healers, for example Buddhist and other astrologers, herbalists, fortune-tellers, seers, bonesetters, or shamans. The widespread eclectic consultation of health services shall here be illustrated by the example of Solongo, a college teacher in her mid-forties, with whom I shared an apartment in Ulaanbaatar in winter 2003; it shall show her endeavors to cure her wrist, which she broke after slipping on an icy stair while we were shopping together. After

Solongo fell, we immediately went to the hospital, where her wrist was x-rayed and put in a cast. Solongo received a prescription for three different drugs, which included an analgesic and a herbal remedy; the doctor moreover gave her the same advice that she had already received from the taxi-driver on the way to the hospital: to eat boiled marmot liver. Immediately after arriving back home, Solongo phoned her younger brother and asked him to bring the medicine on the prescription and an additional Chinese medicine. The next day, her mother, who was a medical professional, instructed her to boil the soot scraped from nine cooking pots in water and to drink it for several days. My friend followed this advice and she obtained some frozen marmot liver as well; further, a friend of hers took her to a lama reputed to be a successful healer. As her pain did not disappear, Solongo repeatedly expressed her doubt about the treatment in the public hospital. After the cast was removed and revealed a strange looking wrist, she managed to visit a doctor she knew in a private hospital. Solongo returned from this consultation with a new cast; the doctor had diagnosed the fractured bone to be badly knitted and had broken it again.

Solongo's endeavors could be interpreted as an example of the irrational behavior of a population who, as Neupert (1995) claimed, shows only a limited concern and knowledge of modern medicine and scientific disease theory. Shifting the perspective however, one could perceive Solongo's endeavors as rational strategies; in the context of the widespread mistrust in the capacities of public health care, she strove for the best cure for her broken wrist she could achieve, thereby utilizing biomedical treatment alongside strategies considered as traditional folk beliefs. It is a similar pursuit of all available strategies which leads people in cases of affliction to seek also the support of shamans.

### **The etiology of shamans' diagnoses**

When asked what kind of requests clients address to them, Darhad shamans usually first answer with "sickness". They explain that shamans can heal sickness which cannot be cured in hospitals and as those sicknesses are caused by spirits, only shamans could cure them. Yet in response to direct questions shamans explicitly state what participation in the shamans' interactions with clients and their healing diagnosis also reveals: clients address all kinds of misfortune and problems to shamans. As I have shown with the example of some of the treatments of the shaman Yura, clients often seek support in a pervasive situation of distress, in which different problems like sickness, unemployment, financial worries, risky family business operations, alcoholism, and social conflicts merge. The shamans address this overall situation of distress with their divinations and inspirational treatments. They relate the distress to the intrusions and disorders caused by spiritual entities. Analyzing the healing seances of Korean shamans, Laurel Kendall (2001) similarly concluded that the Korean shamans do not attack particular illness symptoms but rather a pervasive climate of family affliction; the Korean shamans perceive all kinds of problems as



symptomatic of a household's troubled relations with ancestors and gods, which the author calls an "ideology of affliction".

When clients consult a Darhad shaman, they usually request the shaman's divination by asking about their *noyon nuruu*. "Noyon" means "lord" or "extreme", and "nuruu" means "back" or "ridge"; the phrase denotes "ridge-pole" in a concrete sense, and in an abstract sense, "steadiness", "solidity", "stability" or "reliability" (Bawden 1997). The formula contrasts the hustle and bustle which so often dominates the lives of people in postsocialism. For divination, Darhad shamans use twenty-one or forty-one stones they arrange in nine positions of a square. The different positions reflect the symbolic cosmological order also represented by the Mongolian *ger*. The arrangement symbolizes the division between female and male, the hierarchy according to age, the hearth in the centre for the continuation of the family, the household economy as well as stability and mobility. Although the exact formulations of the diagnosis and the corresponding comments vary among Darhad shamans, they nevertheless revolve around a few common notions. The following terms reflect the notions used by the shaman Yura in her diagnoses and they indicate the etiology inherent in the divinations of Darhad shamans in general.

<i>haraal</i>	curse; sent by enraged <i>ongod</i> , ancestor spirits, or by other shamans
<i>lusan horlol</i>	harm caused by <i>lus</i> , the masters of the water and springs
<i>har hel dev buzar</i>	defilement or pollution deriving from quarrels
<i>tsagaan hel am</i>	harm due to overt acclamation in favor of the cursed client
<i>arihni buzar</i>	defilement caused by vodka or alcohol abuse
<i>ulaan mahni buzar</i>	harm deriving from polluted "red", i.e. raw meat
<i>hulgan dev' buzar</i>	defilement deriving from thievery; contracted for example by meeting a thief
<i>nas barsni hüni buzar</i>	harm caused by the intrusion of the unsettled soul of a deceased person
<i>süns zailah</i>	the soul leaving the body, thereby threatening the life of the person if the soul cannot be returned soon
<i>har talni yum</i>	"something from the black side"; denotes claims of <i>ongod</i> who are not worshipped by their descendents
<i>hölsdög</i>	anxious babies crying a lot, suffering from flatulence and diarrhea, caused by misbehavior of the parents or the intrusion of ancestor souls

Yura's diagnoses – and those of other Darhad shamans – operate in the etiological realms of spirits' intrusions: clients provoke spiritual entities and attract inspirational defilement in the course of everyday practices, for example by eating (polluted) meat, taking wood (from the wrong places), entering a river, visiting a family, or by disputing. Yura's diagnoses

indicate the centrality of orality, of eating and the mouth (*am*). The notions related to dispute and overt acclamation, *har hel am* and *tsagaan hel am*, include the word *am*, which literally means “tongue” or “mouth”; the term forms the stem of the term *am’dral*, life.<sup>14</sup> The notions relate the constitution of the personhood to the mouth, to talking and conversation and delineate social norms of this. The shamans’ explanations of the diagnosis “pollution from red meat” were diverse, including raw polluted meat entering the client’s home, or eating half boiled meat in another household. In any case, the diagnosis is ambiguous, as meat is held in high estimation and considered to be source of power; by contrast, meat is also perceived as a source of pollution, shown in that shamans usually emphasize that they do not eat meat before a seance. The shamans’ diagnoses furthermore invoke the realms of the dead and the interface of life and death. They spar with the “souls” of deceased former humans intruding the living, and they pursue the wandering “souls” after they have left the body of a person, which will cause the death of the person if the soul is not returned.<sup>15</sup>

Yura’s inspirational diagnoses are not related to the particular sickness or kind of distress clients mention; she may attribute the same diagnosis for distinct symptoms and she may relate varying diagnostic labels to the same symptoms. During the seance, the shaman’s *ongod* cure the disordered inspirational situation of the client: in the poetic chant, the spirit speaks through the mouth of the shaman, identifies the particular pollution and sends it away. At the same time, the shaman visibly performs the purification. Yura strikes with the fur-drawn drum stick over the head and the upper part of the body of the patient, who is kneeling with his or her head bent before her; she wipes off the drum stick on the rim of the open side of the drum, and she repeats this procedure twice more. At the end, Yura wipes her drum with a tough beat in the direction of the door, sweeping the defilement off and out of the room.

### **Pollution as a commentary on social disorder**

In the list of Yura’s diagnostic labels, the prominence of the words *dev* and *buzar*, denoting dirt, defilement, or pollution, is striking. “Dirt is essentially disorder”, wrote Mary Douglas in “*Purity and Danger*” (1966: 2). The metaphor of dirt can be addressed to the bodily disorder of the patient or the disorder of the family, which is re-ordered through the shaman’s treatment. Douglas however analyzed notions of purity and dirt as expressions of social order. In present-day Mongolia, public and scholarly discourses perceive social disorder as a consequence of the “transition”, causing economic inequalities and poverty,

<sup>14</sup> I will return to the notions of *har hel am* and *tsagaan hel am* at the end of Chapter 7. I thank Giovanni da Col (MIASU) and Hans-Rudolf Wicker (University of Bern) for suggesting this interpretation.

<sup>15</sup> Mongolians use the term “*süns*”, which is translated as “soul”; I do not claim that the Mongolian term has the same implications as the term “soul”. Johansen (2003b) has criticized the applicability of the term “soul” to shamans’ practices in Tyva.

widespread alcoholism, or increasing crime, implicitly re-imagining the socialist past as one of order. I propose reading the shaman's imageries of dirt as commentaries on the perceived post-socialist disorder and the shamans' practices of purification as a provision of metaphorical social order for clients whose lives are impaired by disorder.

Shamans invoke a social order that is related to the past and the environment. To interpret curses by masters of the water in revenge for polluting water and logging as an expression of behavioral norms towards the environment is illuminating for a society whose economy has been dominated by pastoralism and where public discourses now debate overgrazing, deforestation, and pollution of water sources. The inspirational diagnoses request clients to protect the resources as well as acknowledge the dangers and threats of the environment and the humans dependence on it. It seems reasonable to interpret the diagnoses related to theft, alcohol, and dispute as disapproving commentaries on perceived social disorder. Interestingly, I usually could not find out whether a shaman disclosing the diagnosis addressed the client as wrong-doer or as a victim. It might be that the shamans leave this interpretation to the client. It might however be that even if a shaman diagnoses a client who committed a social failing, the person is approached as a victim of spirit's intrusion. For example, a man who receives the diagnosis of pollution from vodka is usually not approached as wrong-doer and responsible for the suffering of his family, but is approached as sick and the victim of spiritual intrusions. This means that shamans by their diagnoses free the clients from the responsibility for failed behavior and lack of success. The responsibility and risk, which was transferred to the individual households in postsocialism, is transferred by the shamans to spirits and their intrusions.

The power to purify these pollutions and to re-order the disorder lies in the capacity of *ongod*, which are usually the shamans' ancestors and themselves earlier shamans. However, how can Darhad ancestor spirits be acted out as authorities for an often non-Darhad audience? Why should the relation to long-deceased elders be authoritative for urban clients who often understand neither the symbolism nor the language of the shamans' performances? The moral authority of the shaman's performance has to be perceived in the context of the recent appreciation of pre-socialist history, fostering a new national identity on the imagery of "the moral authority of past" (Humphrey 1994; Kaplonski 1998; Kaplonski 2004; see Chapter 7). This new re-evaluation of a presocialist past as a dehistoricized reservoir for an authentic Mongolian identity is the new frame of reference for the Darhad shamans' seances; the shamans produce the lively enactment of this diffuse but venerated past – also for those of their clients who are not familiar with shamans' seances. This enactment of the past however does not reintegrate the clients into the morals and the genealogies of an imagined integrated past. On the contrary, the shamans perform their seances on behalf of individualized households; the spirits empower the clients in the competitive environment of postsocialism, they cope with the distress of

families and support individuals in their strive for economic success. The privatization of risk emerges as a field in which shamans, among other inspirational specialists, provide their services. Thereby, performers of an ostensibly archaic tradition turn into actors in the present. Michael Taussig (1987: 237) sees shamans as “made to act as the shock absorbers of history”. Occupied with essential dangers, shamans adapt to distinct historical periods of social relations.

Up until now I have focused on the supporting practices of Darhad shamans, interpreting their diagnosis as commentaries on social dis/order and their treatments as encouragement in the individualized struggle of clients in postsocialism. However, where people are supported in a competitive environment there are probably losers, and where shamans cure inspirational defilement, there has to be cursing. Indeed, shamans in Mongolia are accused – in oral rumors and sometimes even in newspapers – of causing harm by using “black magic”, *jatga*, and cursing, *haraal*. When asked, Darhad shamans usually deny causing harm, although they claim to be able to do so; they explain then that using their power to cause harm could be dangerous for their children, as they could be harmed by the revenge of another shaman. It was only towards the end of my fieldwork that shamans started to reveal more about the practice of cursing.

During my last visit to the shaman Umban in Tengis, I asked him once again about cursing. He answered that people often asked for curses these days.<sup>16</sup> Umban attributed the requests of cursing to a spread of jealousy which makes people quarrel. Later that day, he asked me to follow him behind his house and, sitting on the ground and smoking, he introduced me with an aura of conspiracy into those shadow realms he had entered when traveling to Ulaanbaatar. He talked about rich people he met in town, and showed himself deeply impressed by the admiration he had received by rich and important people. Umban hesitantly revealed that some of his clients in the capital “have eaten corruption”: being under pressure, these people asked for *haraal*, cursing, against people prosecuting their illegal accumulation of wealth. Also the judge who protected corrupt people asked for shamans’ support, said Umban. He was the only shaman who talked about rich people defending their wealth with the aid of shamans.

Shortly after this last encounter with Umban, I left the Darhad area; arriving in Ulaanbaatar I met with Moko, a young ambitious shaman from Tsagaan Nuur. Moko frankly disclosed that he uses *har dom*, black magic, to struggle against bad things or people; it is just easier than to use only white healing, he said to a young couple while driving to their parents’ for a seance. For doing black things he uses a separate, “black” armor, a heavy robe made from bearskin, decorated with bear claws in addition to the usual metal bells and weapons. The headgear of this armor is adorned with the feathers of the largest bird in Mongolia, a vulture called *tass*, and the drum has the form of a triangle.

<sup>16</sup> 15.08.2004.

When asked whether rich people were requesting curses to protect their wealth, Moko just burst out laughing, and replied that most of the people consulting him were *hohirogch*, losers.



*Photograph 17: The shaman Moko presenting the big vulture, tass, from which he took the feathers to make the headgear of his “black” armor (05.10. 03).*

### **Shamans’ support of households in changing circumstances**

In this chapter I related the contemporary practices of Darhad shamans to the individualized risk of distressed clients in the postsocialist economy. It is necessary to put this hypothesis into a broader historical context: I do not claim that it is the first time in history that shamans are preoccupied with the fate of individual households. Heissig (1953a: 507; 2004 [1970]: 232) argued that for the last three centuries Mongolian shamanic practices have been preoccupied with the safeguarding of material benefits, the livestock, domestic happiness, children, and with protecting individuals against grief, illness, misfortune, and evil spirits. This is essentially similar to today. What has changed are the forms of danger of an urban population which focuses on jobs and monetary income, while the main dangers of a rural population are still related to maintaining their livestock. What I propose is a break with the later years of socialism when collective enterprises and the state assumed the responsibility for economic risks – and when Darhad shamans have probably become a marginal phenomenon only.

The scholarly and Mongolian discourses celebrating the resurgence of shamans’ practices in postsocialism rest upon the foil of socialist persecution of shamans: the present-day religious freedom let shamans’ practices proliferate, after they had been repressed by communist anti-religious policy. I do not question that there were socialist repressions against shamans, although I believe that it was not the antireligious

persecutions alone (whose baneful excess peaked in the late 1930s, see Kaplonski 2002), but that the whole socialist modernization project, including the development of secular education and health infrastructure as well as the state's control of the economy, which exerted pressure on shamans to abandon or to hide their practices. Nonetheless, numerous stories of local people about shamans practicing in socialist days and the scholarly accounts of the 1960s (Dioszegi 1961; 1963; Badamhatan 1965) indicate that shamans were practicing during socialist days (see Chapter 8). At the beginning of the 1990s, only a few Darhad shamans attracted public interest; therefore, I assume that the number of shamans diminished towards the end of socialist rule. I argue that with the establishment of the collective economic organization during the 1950s, the socialist state took over risk distribution by providing salaries and jobs, access to secular education, and health services for all its citizens; and that this state responsibility contributed to the decline in the demand for shamans' services and the number of practicing shamans. The transfer of the responsibility and risk for the economic survival to the households might have contributed to an increasing demand of shamans' services and the subsequent increase in the number of shamans (see also Buyandelgeriyn 2007).

Leaving the narrower phenomenon of shamans' practices in the ex-socialist Inner Asian areas, one encounters a remarkable recent discussion of inspirational practices which are put in the context of neoliberal capitalism, mainly discussed for Africa and the cultural expression of witchcraft and sorcery. Moore and Sanders (2001: 3) state that "contemporary witchcraft, occult practices, magic and enchantments are neither a return to 'traditional' practices nor a sign of backwardness or lack of progress; they are instead thoroughly modern manifestations of uncertainties, moral disquiet and unequal rewards and aspirations in the contemporary moment". Comaroff and Comaroff (1999; 2000) claim the rise of "occult economies" – the deployment of magical means for material ends – to be a global phenomenon and a response to the "millennial capitalism" and the culture of neoliberalism.

Shamans, with their gown called armor (*huyag*) adorned with symbolic weapons, acknowledge "the role of battle and risk" (Vitebsky 1995: 185). During their seances, Darhad shamans transgress the ordinary; they wander through the realm of the dark and battle with unknown dangers, communicate with and appease enraged ancestor spirits. Today, people request the Darhad shamans' inspirational capabilities to struggle against the "invisible hand" of the market and the threatening magic of "transition". Moreover, urban people ask shamans' inspirational support for their risky transgression of national boundaries in informal work migration. The shaman Moko mentioned above let me participate in two seances held in Ulaanbaatar, one in autumn 2003 and one in autumn 2004; both ceremonies seemed – as far as I got to know the requests of the clients – to be preoccupied with international migration. During the first seance for example, an informal

gold trader frankly talked about her gold trade to and from Korea and Turkey evading customs control. A middle-aged woman asked for a visa to go to the USA. A surgeon in her mid-forties attended a seance of Moko's for the third consecutive time – she first wondered about the reasons of an earlier outbreak of hepatitis; then she asked for success for her private trade with anti-alcoholic drugs she imported from Eastern Europe, and finally she requested the shaman's help in settling her visa problems so that she could visit a medical congress in Japan.

The second seance was held in an older couple's apartment in one of the numerous Soviet-built blocks, where they were living with some of their children and with their grandchildren by two sons who were working in Korea and the United States. During the preparations for the seance, the wife called her son in the USA, who recently had a car accident. The mother told her son that the shaman would soon start his seance and asked him to venerate the shamanic spirits; after the phone call however she relayed to the shaman that the son could not leave work to venerate spirits at home. After the seance, Moko recommended that the sons prepare a cup of black tea for the spirits before his next seance on the coming third day of the lunar calendar. This recommendation opened a heated discussion on whether the third night of the lunar calendar happened in the United States at the same moment, or rather before or after the seance was held in Mongolia and when exactly the son in the United States should offer the cup of tea, so as not to miss the shaman's seance. Moko listened to this discussion with obvious irritation and ended it authoritatively by repeating his order that the sons should prepare the tea in the evening. Such petty distinctions of time cannot make any sense for a shaman, who amalgamates history with the present, connects the town to the rural periphery, and the social with the natural environment. The sublime inspirational transgressions of time and space make shamans flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.





## Performance of inspirational power

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*This chapter is concerned with the analysis of Darhad shamans' seances. I will relate the scholarly discussions about the terms "trance", "ecstatic journey", and "possession" to the practice and explanations of Darhad shamans. I will analyze the shamans' seances as communication between ongod, shaman and audience. The discussion of the transcript of a seance however will show that the exact meanings of the chants remains obscure. Focusing on the seemingly redundant parts of the chants and the dramaturgy of the seance, I will outline how the seance is an arena for performing authority and hierarchical relationships. I will argue that by the enactment of the shaman as powerless, the ongod are performed as powerful entities. The presence of powerful spirits in turn confirms the power of the shaman.*

The literature about shamanism dominantly frames the seances of shamans in the terms "ecstasy" and "trance": these notions are often used as synonyms to denote the mental state of the shaman. If the two terms are distinguished, then "ecstasy" tends to be used with a religious connotation and related to the celestial ascent while the term "trance" (from latin *transire*, "to pass", "to go beyond") is rather marked by a psychological connotation and put in the context of healing (Hamayon 1999).<sup>1</sup> Since the 1970s, the terms have been supplemented by the notion ASC ("altered states of consciousness") put forward by Erika Bourguignon (1973) for the comparative analysis and the classification of similar phenomena on a worldwide scale. Beyond the focus on the mental state of the shaman during the seance, the terms "ecstasy" and "trance" merge, at least since Tylor's "Primitive Culture" (1977 [1889]), two different perspectives on the relationship between the shaman and the non-human world: the travel of the shaman's soul as well as the voluntary reception of the spirits in the shaman's body, the embodiment of spirits.<sup>2</sup>

I will briefly discuss the two discrete ideas by opposing the two approaches of Shirokogoroff and Eliade. Shirokogoroff (1935: 363-365) wrote of "extasy" [sic] as a state of mind, which he perceived both as the doubling of consciousness and the (partial or even full) loss of consciousness; ecstasy could be intensified by drumming, dancing and through drugs like alcohol or tobacco. The Russian ethnographer related this state of mind to the shamans' reception of spirits: "Since the arrival of spirits means extasy" (1935: 326). Eliade (1974 [1951]: 499 ff.) explicitly distanced himself from Shirokogoroff's approach and instead identified ecstasy as the inspirational journey of the shaman. Eliade devalued the

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Zeljko Jokic for the reference to the latin term.

<sup>2</sup> To name the voluntary reception of an *ongod* in the shaman's body, thus a literal "em-bodiment", I use the term "embodiment". This choice does not presuppose that the shaman only symbolically represents the spirits.

embodiment of spirits as a recent invention transforming genuine shamanism. However, Shirokogoroff also had included inspirational travels in his notion of shamanizing, yet he defined the embodiment of spirits as ecstasy rather than the journeys themselves. Several authors emphasize this distinction between the shaman's journey and the "arrival of spirits" or the embodiment of spirits: Findeisen (1957) and Lewis (1989 [1971]) viewed the embodiment of spirits (which both call "possession") as the essence of the seance.<sup>3</sup> Johansen (2003a) distinguished two different types of shamanism, one related to the "ecstatic journey" of the shamans' soul and the other to the "possession" of shamans. She assigned the "ecstatic journey shamanism" to egalitarian small groups of hunters and fishers in northern Siberia and "possession shamanism" to "patriarchal feudalism" of south Siberian Turkic and Mongolian groups. Often, however, the seance is described with the terms trance, ecstasy, or ASC without any discussion of whether the terms used indicate a spiritual journey or the embodiment of spirits.

### **Trance and the production of the authenticity of the shaman's seance**

Roberte Hamayon (1995a; 1995b; 1999) attacks the widespread tendency to regard "trance" or "ecstasy" as the heart of the shamanic seance: the statement "a shaman is in trance" nothing reveals, argues Hamayon, because the notion "trance" involves a conceptual blurring of physical, psychic, and cultural aspects. She criticizes the vagueness and the lack of precision in the descriptions, for example that the psychic state of shamans during trance is declared both as reduced consciousness and as increased awareness. Usually, Hamayon resumes, the reports only remark that a shaman is in trance, the rest being left to the reader's imagination. In the absence of a particular method to assess the mental state of a shaman, it would be the scholar's subjectivity deciding whether a shaman is in trance or not. The author does not deny the existence of states of mind, but she does not consider them relevant to the study of shamanism as we lack any evidence that the "interior experience" of the shaman is important. Furthermore, Hamayon claims that the notion of trance is irrelevant to "shamanistic societies".

In contrast to Hamayon's rejection of the idea of "trance", the state of the shaman during the seance was the subject of numerous discussions during my fieldwork. Shamans say that they are *uhaangüi*, unconscious, during the seance. Similarly to the scholarly concepts of trance and ecstasy, shamans use a rather vague term to talk about the non-ordinary state of mind of the shaman during the seance. Referring to their seances, Darhad shamans most often use the verb *böölöh*, to shamanize; a word deriving from the Mongolian term for shaman, *böö*. When shamans explain their shamanizing, they merge the two distinct ideas that scholars differentiate: Darhad shamans tell both about their inspirational journeys and

<sup>3</sup> As the term "possession" is mainly shaped by the focus on involuntarily possession by spirits in the context of witchcraft and sorcery of British Social Anthropology, I do not use the term referring to the Darhad shamans.

about the entering of *ongod* into their bodies during shamanizing. Thus, the seance as explained by the shaman stages two opposite movements at the same time: the travel of the shaman (i.e. the soul of the shaman) away from the place of the seance and the travel of the *ongod* to the place of the seance and into the shaman's body. That which is dangerous for ordinary humans and has to be cured by the shaman, i.e. the leaving of the soul, is a condition of the shamans' journey and embodiment of *ongod*.

The shaman Umban, for example, described that during shamanizing he rides on his drum or – when shamanizing with the jaw harp – he wanders on foot through the *haranhüi*, the dark. Umban explained that he met *ongod* on these travels and that he transmitted the messages of the *ongod* to humans and the messages of humans to the *ongod*. While Umban wanders through the *haranhüi*, the *ongod* he calls run on their paths, *güits*, from the *asar* in the mountain to the location of the seance; they enter his body and speak through his mouth to the audience. Thus, similarly to the descriptions of Shirokogoroff, Umban's narratives encompass a state of mind (*uhaangüi*, unconscious), the ecstatic travel (the shaman wandering in the *haranhüi*, the dark) and the voluntary and involuntary entering of spirits into the body of the shaman. The explanations of the shaman Umban and other Darhad shamans contradict scholarly models that associate the “ecstatic journey” and “possession” of shamans to different societies in Siberia.

Although I agree with Hamayon that we as anthropologists cannot decide whether a shaman acts in trance or not, I claim that the scholarly discussion about trance is occupied with similar themes as the debate among locals: both the scholarly discourse and the narratives of shamans stress the transgression of the ordinary, expressed as an altered mental state. I contend that both scholarly and local discourses are predominantly concerned with the question whether the particular shaman is “really” in trance or is acting only theatrically. Shirokogoroff assumed that “a real exstasy of the shaman, which may influence the audience, can occur only when the shaman himself is convinced of his possessing spirits” (Shirokogoroff 1935: 332). The author distinguished between “real” ecstasy and the merely theatrical rendition of the communication with spirits (1935: 362). This distinction between “real” ecstasy (or trance) and imitation is also made by Eliade (1974 [1951]: 220; in discussion of the seance reported by Radloff 1884). The subject of transgression, as well as the question regarding a theatrical play-acting, are suggested by the shamans' putting on a costume and thus making a transgression materially obvious.

I started my fieldwork with the deliberate intention of following Hamayon's advice and abstaining from assessing whether a shaman is in trance during a seance. I was well aware that I am not able to do so: how should I judge the mental state of a shaman by only observing his or her body movements? The Darhad shamans' movements usually start with three upward jumps and then the body moves in accordance with the drumbeating, be that in the rhythm of a riding animal's trot, the trudging movement of a bear, or in the gait of an

old person. The shaman sways from one side to the other with each drumbeat, s/he may spin around her/his own axis, at times s/he bows, sits down on the floor, and stands up again. Instead of the “wild jumping”, or “frenetic dancing” sometimes reported in the literature, the Darhad shamans’ movements seem to be rather controlled. Most notably, the only part of the body that might indicate the mental state of the shaman, the face, is covered with the fringes of the head-dress.

However, during fieldwork the question of trance was simply lurking everywhere. It was not only the century-long fascination and preoccupation of explorers and scholars which had left its imprint on my perception, but the question and the doubts about the genuineness of the shamans’ seances was just a dominant topic of local people’s conversations about shamans (see Chapters 6 and 7). I was vacillating between taking a distanced perspective and abstaining from judging the state of the shaman - and starting to assess the mental state of the shaman. Sometimes while observing a shamans’ seance, I inadvertently searched for hints that indicated that the shaman was in trance or that the shaman was “only acting”. For example, once a shaman hit an attendant with the drumstick to make her stop chatting with her neighbor. Or, another example, an *ongod* once demanded a foreign visitor to take a picture of the shaman together with his disciple. On such occasions, I wondered whether the speaking *ongod* was acting or whether the self-interest of the shaman dominated the performance of the spirit. On the other hand, I was impressed by the strange gaze of these two shamans mentioned while they were enlivening their boots and the gown; their glance seemed to be piercing and misty at the same time. In opposition to the widespread view that “extasy is reached by means of a gradual increase of emotion through the rhythmic music, the ‘dancing’, and the contents of the shaman’s songs



Photograph 18: Also this picture was requested by an *ongod* (04.08.2003).

and the self-excitement” (Shirokogoroff 1935: 330), I saw this penetrating gaze before the shaman had started the seance by drumming.

It was most of all the particular context of the seance, the quality of the relationship with the shaman, and the impression of her or his personality that could induce me to think about the mental state. For example, once when I asked a shaman to perform a seance I interpreted his hesitation as reluctance to express an expected amount of compensation, but neither he nor I addressed the subject. When we arrived for the seance in the early afternoon, I deliberately offered him his payment beforehand, together with the gifts for the *ongod* – instead of compensating him after the seance as usual. It was however not until the evening that he demanded a higher compensation, arguing that, as a foreigner, I should pay several times the amount I had offered. In return, I asked him to cancel the seance – which he refused with the argument that he had already announced the seance to his *ongod* and therefore had to fulfill the promise. Although we finally managed to settle the conflict without one of us losing face by agreeing on a financial compromise, the incident influenced my perception. I watched his beautiful performance with great emotional distance and, adopting local reasoning, I accused him inwardly of play-acting and of not having studied well the texts passed down to him by his mother, who had been a well-known shaman. Thus, although I intended not to assess the mental state of the shaman, I nevertheless sometimes plunged into speculating about whether a shaman was in trance or not.

In the local discourses, the questions central to the concern of the shaman’s mental state is whether the shaman is capable and powerful or whether s/he is weak, or only cheating. These discussions however only seldom included the topic whether the *ongod* exist or not. The existence or absence of the *ongod* just did not seem to be a relevant question. The local as well as the scholarly discourses are impregnated with the fascination of the transgression of the ordinary. I claim that the discussions about the transgression of the ordinary are related to the production of the shaman’s authenticity: local discourses are primarily concerned with the magical power and effectiveness of shamanizing persons. In contrast, scholarly discourses are mainly concerned with the cultural authenticity, assuming the shaman to be acting out a cultural pattern and social role for her/his community, based on the shared belief in the existence of spirits. In both discourses, it is the potential threat of the inauthenticity of a shaman that allows judging the shaman as being in “real trance”.

Hamayon (1999: 184, 185) relates her rejection of the term “trance” and the importance of the inner experience of the shaman to her argument that the seance is a collective affair and that by “symbolically acting on the world” the shaman is acting out the role prescribed for his function. Hamayon puts the seance in the context of symbolic representation: she perceives “spirits” as “mere ideas” which “can only symbolically be made present” (ibid.: 185). Although Hamayon denies that spirits have an independent existence, she admits that they “may have the force of reality for those who adhere to them” (p. 185) and therefore

these representations may induce behaviors, practices and feelings. Hamayon views representations as “a privileged object of anthropological analysis as constituents of internally consistent symbolic systems that, as a rule, are widely shared in a traditional society and command its institutions and practices” (ibid.: 185). Note that Hamayon, by declaring spirits to be representations of “consistent symbolic systems”, virtualizes the intangible beings of spirits with – similarly imaginative – scholarly concepts. She displaces an “indigenous” metaphor of “spirits” by a scholarly metaphor of “social systems”, claiming the latter to represent some abstract “truth”.

In view of the century-long marginalization and persecution of shamans in the wider area, I have considerable doubts about perceiving the seances of Darhad shamans as representations of “consistent symbolic systems” of a “traditional society”. Local discourses questioning the genuineness and legitimization of shamans contradict a functionalist view of shamans as fulfilling a social function for their community. On the other hand, I reject Hamayon’s approach to disqualify those practices that do not conform to her models of hunting and pastoral shamanism as “degenerative” acculturated and marginalized fragmented practices. Therefore, I need to look for other ways to conceptualize the shamanic practitioners – who, at least in the case of the Darhad shamans, have the appearance of being “archaic” or “traditional” – while at the same time they are part of and integrated into modernity. In the following, I will not analyze the shamanic seance as the expression of a symbolic system but I will discuss what is happening during the seance – not in the inner experience of the shaman but in the social space. What Humphrey (1996b: 227) argues for the Daur shamans of the early twentieth century encompasses exactly the seances of Darhad shamans a century later: “Shamanic performances were not ‘symbolic’ reflections or representations of social relations. In a real sense, they constituted these relations and became in this way an arena of power”.

### **The seance as performance of relations between humans and non-humans**

The seances of Darhad shamans are staged as communication between *ongod*, shaman and audience.<sup>4</sup> The chants constitute the speeches of different *ongod* and the shaman interacting with each other. Each seance is performed as interaction, independently of whether it aims to heal a client, to venerate an *ongod* at her residence in the mountains, or whether it is performed at an anthropologist’s request or for a group of tourists. In the following, I will analyze this communication by shifting the emphasis from Hamayon’s perspective on the seance as expression of a symbolic system to a performative approach. I am interested in what is “made into being” during the seance: how the *ongod* are

<sup>4</sup> Anna-Lena Siikala (1978) had already conceptualized the shamans’ seance as communication between the shaman and her/his spirits. Her analysis of field-reports from different areas in Siberia aimed to distinguish different kinds of shamanism according to the character of “role play” and trance during the seance.

constituted by the performance and how the relationships between shaman, public and *ongod*, or between humans and non-humans are enacted. To do so, I analyze the language as well as the dramaturgy of the performance; I start with the invocation of the shaman Umban, and after discussing the kinds of chants that usually compose a seance, I will interpret a short seance of Umban's daughter, the shaman Höhrii. My analysis of what is performed during a seance departs from the cited seance and includes my insights from the overall sixty seances I attended during fieldwork.

The shaman Umban wrote the following text into my notebook in June 2003 and supplied the title *Darhad zairan Umbani böögiin tamlaga* (Darhad shaman Umban's shaman's *tamlaga*); he instructed me not to show his *tamlaga* to other shamans during my fieldwork but to include it in my dissertation. This text is a model of the *tamlaga* Umban recites at the beginning of his seances to invoke his *ongod*; however, during his actual seances, he varies his *tamlaga* here and there, usually including some additional verses and submitting his clients' requests .

<i>Tuurag nevt tuyaatanguud min'</i>	My ray-beings who transcend felt walls
<i>Ger nevt gereltengüüd min'</i>	My light-beings who transcend theger
<i>Tolin altan gerelten min'</i>	My golden light of a mirror <sup>5</sup>
<i>Torgon hadagt jolootonguud min'</i>	My reins-beings out of silk <i>hadag</i> <sup>6</sup>
<i>Deerees man' hardag tenger min'</i>	My <i>tenger</i> who is watching us from above
<i>Dergedees min' holdohgüj tenger min'</i>	My <i>tenger</i> who belongs to me and who does not depart
<i>Harsan deeree harj</i>	My upper, who has been and is watching
<i>Manasan deeree manaj suugaaraʔ</i>	My upper, who has been guarding, please keep on guarding
<i>Hui salhi shig hiisverten min'</i>	My tornado like aired beings
<i>Hurmastin ayanga shig gereltengüüd min'</i>	My thunderbolt like light-beings from Hurmast <sup>8</sup>
<i>Deer min' harj</i>	My upper, watch
<i>Aihin ayuulgüi aldahin garzgüi</i>	Without anxiety, danger or loss
<i>Har tolgoit min' haniadgüi</i>	My black-headed without a cold <sup>9</sup>
<i>Hatan tuurait min'</i>	My hard-hoofed livestock <sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The mirror spoken of here is a gold-colored metal plate that shamans wear on their chest as protection; Umban, like the majority of Darhad shamans, does not use this shamanic mirror.

<sup>6</sup> *Hadag* is a ritual scarf; the term “reins” is addressed to those who lead.

<sup>7</sup> The term ‘*Manahan*’ is interpreted in the literature as spiritual game-giver or as powerful spiritual protector (Banzarov 1981 [1846]; Dulam and Even 1994).

<sup>8</sup> *Hurmast* is a well-known term in Mongolian mythology denoting “eternal Heaven” or “ruler of Heaven” and is interpreted as a translation of the Indian god Indra (Banzarov 1981 [1846]: 62).

<sup>9</sup> “Black headed” refers here to lay commoners, probably to the shaman's family.

<i>Gai garzgüi enh tunh</i>	Without misfortune, loss or harm; hale and hearty
<i>Eriүүл саруул eleg бүтэн суулгах болтугай</i>	All the family may sit in good health
<i>Hajuud min' han' bolj</i>	Become my partner on my side
<i>Hartsgand min' sod bolj</i>	The lumber spine shall become wings
<i>Magnaid min' tuyaa bolj</i>	The face on the headdress shall become ray
<i>Magnaid min' zayaa bolj</i>	The face on the headdress shall become destiny
<i>Yavaartai tengerүүд min'</i>	My traveling <i>tenger</i>

Umban invokes his *ongod* with a poem addressing them as powerful entities and asking for their protection of his family and herds. The shaman qualified his *tamlaga* as a “soft” *tamlaga*: he refers to the *ongod* as benevolent beings; notions of enraged *ongod* like the ones which can be found in the *tamlaga* cited by Badamhatan (1965) are absent from his *tamlaga*. Umban avoids the term *ongod*, but respectfully entitles them with words like “*tenger*”, “light-beings”, “*tuyaatan*” (“ray-beings”), “aired beings”, “tornadoes”, or “those above”, thus relating *ongod* to rather intangible entities. As an exception he calls the *ongod* reins, a metaphor related to leading, which is associated with the *hadag*, the ritual scarf used in sacred and profane rituals in Mongolia. By adding the suffix –tan/ten, Umban personalizes these phenomena; the salutations in the *tamlaga* perform what is traditionally called the anthropomorphization of nature or, to use Latour’s (1995) concept, the hybridization between “nature” and humans. Umban uses the possessive pronoun “my”, indicating a personal and possessive relationship.<sup>11</sup>

The *tamlaga* does not call particular *ongod* but invokes *ongod* in general. After invoking the *ongod* as powerful entities he supplicates them to protect people and livestock against dangers and sickness in the middle part of the *tamlaga*. The line “become my partner on my side” announces the last part of the chant in which the *ongod* are asked to travel to the shaman and to enter the shaman’s body. The metamorphosis of the shaman’s body turning into *ongod* is indicated in the following three lines, starting with “the lumber spine shall become wings”: Umban explained that the term *hartsgand* refers to the *mansag* or *manjig*, the thick bundles of long tassels on the back side of the shamans’ gown. By a slight adjustment of pronunciation, the term reads “*hartsaga*” or “*hartsagani*”, which means lumber region/spine. This verse thus merges the spine of the human body with the tassels of the shamanic gown, which are asked to metamorphose into wings. In the next lines the shaman asks for the embroidered face of the headdress to be turned into rays and destiny.

<sup>10</sup> Livestock with hard hooves can go far and thus is robust.

<sup>11</sup> This is insofar remarkable as Mongolians prefer to say “our” instead of “my”; even a woman talking about her husband uses the word “our”.



The headdress covers the shaman's face with fringes and in its stead displays a face embroidered on a band covering the forehead. The *ongod* are asked to enliven the embroidered face and to take command of the shaman's destiny. The last line of the chant indicates that the *ongod* are on their way, and when the shaman ends the *tamlaga*, the first *ongod* arrives on the scene.

How do Darhad shamans obtain their *tamlaga*? Umban, like the other shamans I asked in summer 2003, said that he had received the *tamlaga* directly from his *ongod*. The *tamlaga* of other Darhad shamans, he explained, were different; yet, the *tamlaga* of his brother Baljir and of his daughter Höhrüi would be similar to his. A year later, when I asked the old shaman Badrah how he taught his disciples, he answered that he taught them primarily the *tamlaga*, and that he gave each disciple another *tamlaga*. Being accustomed to shamans saying they received the *tamlaga* from their *ongod*, I was surprised. When I thereafter asked shamans whether they provided their disciples with the *tamlaga*, Umban, like others, confirmed (somewhat paradoxically) that it was he as teacher who passed the *tamlaga* on to his disciples.

In the following, I will turn to the analysis of the communication between *ongod* and humans during the seance. Darhad shamans explain that the *ongod* use the body of the shaman as vessel and the shaman's voice as a means to talk. The shaman becomes a messenger who passes the messages of the *ongod* to humans in a language they can understand and vice versa, s/he passes the messages of the humans on to the *ongod*. I first summarize the general features of this interaction and the sequence of events usually present in the seances of Darhad shamans.



Photograph 19: The shaman Umban with his wife Tömör, his daughter Höhrüi and his three youngest children (03.03. 2003).

### The enactment of *ongod* visiting a family

The visits of *ongod* during the seance are in many respects enacted similarly to human visits. Like a human visitor in a household, the interaction with *ongod* during a seance starts with the *ongod* (speaking through the body of the shaman) greeting the members of the household and reporting who s/he is and from where s/he comes. Then the guest is offered drink and tobacco; human visitors are usually offered tea, *ongod* are provided with vodka. Often the *ongod* demands what s/he likes, s/he stops singing, and a helper holds a cup of vodka to the mouth of the shaman to feed the *ongod* and then puts a lit cigarette into the shaman's mouth. The departure of the *ongod* is also similar to human visitors: they stop talking and disappear suddenly, without ample leave-taking or even saying goodbye.

In the chants between the welcoming of the *ongod* and their disappearance, sequences can be distinguished and related as speaker either to the *ongod* or the shaman. The *ongod*'s speeches include messages to the shaman and the shaman's family, the admonition of the shaman, the diagnosis, and the treatment of the client's problem. The shaman answers with a speech entrusting the client's fate to the *ongod*. During the presence of every *ongod*, some or all of these elements occur; when an *ongod* leaves, a new one arrives. The discussion of a concern of the shaman or of a client starts after the *ongod* has been served. The shaman, the assistant, or somebody of the shaman's family submits a problem; often the *ongod* themselves select the person s/he will discuss about and treat. The mentioned family member or client is identified and is conducted by the shaman's helper to kneel before the shaman with the head bowed. Then the *ongod* discusses the problems of the person kneeling and makes a diagnosis by throwing the drumstick into the open side of the drum; the *ongod* reveals the diagnosis and recommends the treatment and finally the client is purified from the spiritual contamination.

After the treatment of the client by the *ongod* the fate of the client is entrusted to the spiritual authorities. Usually, this part, the *daatgal* (which means insurance in every day language) is explained as spoken by the shaman. That means that the shaman, whose soul or consciousness is wandering through the dark, is at the same time present in the seance and conversing with the *ongod*. A few shamans, however, explained the matter in a more "logical" manner: the shaman Yura told me that she did not talk herself during the seance, because her soul was absent, and that it was her mother-*ongod* who spoke the *daatgal*, entrusting the fate of the client to the more powerful *tenger* above her.<sup>12</sup> After the *daatgal*, usually a new *ongod* arrives on the scene, marked by an increase in the tempo and volume of the chant. The new visitor introduces her- or himself, greets the audience, and is offered vodka and a cigarette, and then starts to treat one of the attending clients. The end of the seance can be initiated by the shaman's helper, by an unexpected disturbance, or by an

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<sup>12</sup> Remark of Yura during a week's stay with her in Ulaan Uul and Mörön in September 2003.

*ongod*. Umban is usually called back by the *ongod* of his family hearth, the *ongod* Hosin Aav: Umban sits down on the floor, turns his body towards the fire, ends his chants, and after a short moment in which he seems to be dizzy, he stands up to venerate his home *ongod* hanging on the northern wall. The term used for the end of the seance is *buuh*, to descend, which relates both to the *ongod*'s leaving the body of the shaman and the return of the latter to ordinary consciousness. The number of *ongod* entering the seance and the duration of ceremonies vary widely. A seance "on foot" (by jaw harp) with the attendance of one or two *ongod* can last for some minutes only; a seance with full armor and several *ongod* entering takes longer; about half of the seances I attended during my fieldwork lasted roughly an hour. Some of the shamans perform elaborate seances with numerous *ongod* arriving that last until the early morning. The longest seance I attended in late winter 2003 lasted from midnight until seven o'clock in the morning.<sup>13</sup>

Some parts of the conversation between the *ongod*, the shaman and the audience are standardized, being similar in every seance of a particular shaman and for a particular *ongod*; other parts are unique, depending on the specific matter discussed. For example, a particular *ongod* always presents her/himself in the same words on arriving. Also the shaman's parts may be standardized: Umban for instance recites as *daatgal* ("insurance") the same chant he uses as *tamlaga* to invoke his *ongod* at the beginning of the seance. In conversations and during interviews, shamans use the word *tamlaga* as a central term to talk about their interaction with spirits. When asked which particular part of the seance the term pointed to, the shamans did not agree: often, they restricted the notion *tamlaga* to the calling of the *ongod* (also named *duudlaga*). Some shamans used the term *tamlaga* to refer to those parts the shaman speaks, others related the notion to the parts spoken by the *ongod* and yet others to the standardized parts of the seance in general.

Based on his analysis of shamans' seances from different parts of Mongolia, Bumochir Dulam (2002) outlined a model of different sequences in the shamanic seances: He distinguished an initiatory "general praising of *ongod*" (*maagtal*) from the "calling of a particular *ongod*" (*duudlaga*), followed by the "*ongod*'s greeting words" (*mendiin üg*) and the "*ongod*'s demand" of food or drinks (*ongodin nehel üg*). Bumochir called the "spirits' story telling" *ongodin tamlaga*; the conversation about a client's concern, the diagnosis by the spirits and the treatment he summarizes as "testimony" (*öchil*), and the end of the seance he calls "phrases of the seeing off" (*böögiin ongodoo butsaah*). Dulam states that not all of these parts are always included in a seance and that the different sequences are not always in the same order. Besides his differentiation between the general praising and the calling of a particular *ongod*, which the shamans I talked to did not distinguish, and his different use of the term *tamlaga*, Dulam model is similar to my perception of the sequences structuring the Darhad shamans' seances.

<sup>13</sup> It was a seance of the shaman Baldandorj in Harmai, 06.03. 2003.

Birtalan and Sipos (2004) transcribed and translated a seance of the Darhad shaman Bayar recorded in 1993.<sup>14</sup> Birtalan rightly complained of the lack of transcriptions of shamanic seances in the literature – what can be found are texts of invocations of (Darhad) shamans, cited for example by Rintchen (1975), Badamhatan (1965), and Dulam (1992).<sup>15</sup> These texts constitute, similar to the *tamlaga* of Umban cited above and the *tamlaga* of Yura cited in the last chapter, the praising and invocation of *ongod* at the beginning of seance. The authors usually do not reveal whether they collected the chant during a seance or whether it was dictated to them outside of the context of a seance. Shirokogoroff (1935: 329) considered the record of a shaman’s performance as technically possible, however he assessed a great part of it as not understandable and he disclosed that the majority of chants collected by him and other researchers are “prayers” known by heart by the shaman.

Birtalan and Sipos’s publication on a seance of the shaman Bayar is the only full citation of a Darhad shaman’s seance I have found in the literature. As Birtalan mentioned, she recorded the seance, and although she discussed the transcript with the already deceased shaman’s husband, she still had problems to detect the meaning and to translate some of the expressions. I fully agree with Birtalan that the seances are difficult to understand, to transcribe and to translate: First, it is difficult to distinguish the chants’ lyrics in the midst of loud drumming, the chatting and heckling of the public and all the other noise. The understanding is particularly hampered by the often inarticulate and murmurous pronunciation of the shamans. Further, the chants are characterized by unusual stress of syllables, of omission of syllables as well as added meaningless syllables to conform to the rules of alliteration and the rhythm of the singing. Moreover, the chants contain local dialect, antiquated vocabulary and linguistically reduced fragments.<sup>16</sup> Usually only people well acquainted with the chants, such as family members and helpers, are able to follow the conversations of the shaman and the spirits. Clients visiting from far away often said that they understood only parts or almost nothing of the chants. Being present at several seances of the same shaman, listening to the recordings and discussing them with the shamans, I increasingly became familiar with the structure of the communication; nevertheless, I still had serious problems to understand more than parts of the text of the chants. I learned to recognize particular *ongod* and to understand the diagnosis. For the

<sup>14</sup> The shaman Bayar is one of the first “new” Darhad shamans who started shamanizing with the breakdown of the socialist system. She lived with her family in Harmai near the village of Tsagaan Nuur. In the mid-1990s, the shaman moved with her family to the province capital Mörön and then on to Ulaanbaatar, where she died at the age of forty-five years only in 2001. Her mother Süren (ca. 1917 – 1991) was also a shaman, practicing partly and secretly during socialism. Today, Bayar’s daughter Zolzaya/Höörög is a shaman in Ulaanbaatar, and her brother Mönhöö, living in the Darhad area in Hogrogo, became a shaman in 2003 (according to Bayar’s brother Mönhöö, 23.06. 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Laurence Delaby (1976) similarly complained about the lack of detailed descriptions of seances and particularly the almost complete absence of texts of seances in the reports on seances of Tungus shamans of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>16</sup> See Even’s (1992) analysis of language of the chants of Darhad and other Mongolian shamans collected by Rintchen and Badamhatan.

latter, some shamans stop drumming, and the stories they tell about the client are often less formulaic and bear more resemblance to ordinary language than other parts of the seance, which makes them easier to understand. In the following, I will discuss a transcript of a seance by Umban's daughter, the shaman Höhrii, which was written down by the shaman's assistant from the recording the day after the seance.

### **The seance of Umban's daughter Höhrii**

In late June 2003, I attended the first seance of the shaman Höhrii. Together with my guide Chinbat I spent a week with the shaman Umban and his family and the shaman was proud to present his then 18-year-old daughter, who had begun shamanizing the previous year. A month later, Höhrii and her cousin and assistant Oyun visited Chinbat and myself while we were staying on Lake Hövsgöl. After we left Umban in Tengis on the northern-most extension of the Shishget depression, we had ridden to the lake shore to attend a tourist shamanist event in early July; later on we were staying in Hirvesteg, close to the shaman Enhtuya, whom I visited almost daily to study her interactions with tourists. We spent a month by the lake, passing the national holidays and waiting for the visit of the shaman Umban with whom we had made an appointment to meet on the lake shortly after the holiday. However, Umban did not come. Instead, one afternoon in a period of almost uninterrupted rain, his daughter Höhrii and her cousin Oyun arrived. The two young women arrived completely soaked, after covering around two hundred kilometers by horse on a track they had never traveled before and staying overnight in the mountain range of the *Hor'dol Sar'dag* during the rain, without a kettle to make tea, anything to eat, or a tent. The two women asserted that not Umban had sent them in his stead, but that they themselves had been curious to visit the famous Lake Hövsgöl. It was the young shaman's



*Photograph 20: The shaman Höhrii (left) and her assistant Oyuna at Lake Hövsgöl (21.07. 2003).*

first longer trip and also her first time shamanizing outside her home and for clients. Höhrii and Oyun stayed by the lake for around a week, and when people around – neighbors, Mongolian tourists, and employees of a nearby camp – asked for her services, the shaman performed a divination immediately or a seance at night.

The following text is a transcript of one of these seances; it took place in Hirvesteg, at the home of a young family where all of us were staying, on July 23, 2003. The seance was attended by around fifteen people, including the wife's older brother, some kids, a park ranger who was staying with the neighboring family, young women working in the tourist camp, and two foreign tourists from that camp. All visitors came out of curiosity as they had never seen a shamanic seance before, and no one had asked the shaman for her support. The seance was not planned beforehand. In the late evening, the shaman said: *ongodoo orj irne*, "my *ongod* are arriving", and she immediately started to unpack colored straps of material, her *ongod*, to hang them from the northern wall of the *ger* and to prepare her jaw harp and incense. At around eleven o' clock at night, the assistant waved the headgear around over smoking incense and tightened it around the shaman's head. Höhrii then bowed before her *ongod*, sprinkled them with milk and venerated them by reciting her *tamlaga* in a low voice. Thereafter she sat down on the ground before her *ongod*, turning her back to them and started to pull the tongue of the jaw harp. She then stopped playing to murmureously recite her *tamlaga*. When she started singing, she began to swing her upper body and the scarves attached to the jaw harp in her hand from side to side. The seance lasted for around twenty minutes, comprised the visit of five *ongod* and the treatment of two clients who were not present at the seance.

The next day, the shaman Höhrii, her assistant Oyun and I listened to the recording: Oyun transcribed the chants into a continuous text, translating the dialect terms into Halha Mongolian. The shaman identified the different speakers and commented on the content of the chants. The following text is a slightly reworked version of Oyun's transcript with my proposal of translation; I put the continuous text in the form of the verses of the chants and I added repetitions as well as some words omitted in the original transcript; however I left those words in the assistant's transcript which were not in the recording.<sup>17</sup> The transcript starts when the shaman ended plucking the jaw harp and started singing; the chant starts with the immediate arrival of the first *ongod*, Üzüürii Eej, Mother Üzüür.

*Ongod* Üzüürii Eej (time: 01:10):

*Shshuu, shshuu shuu.... böög, böög, böög*

(Wind sough-like sounds, crow's cries)

*Öndör Üzüür tsengee min' dee*

The Öndör Üzüür, the high crest, is my place of amusement

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Rudolf Trapp in Berlin and D. Oyundelger in Ulaanbaatar, who supported me with suggestions for translations of some of the enigmatic verses of the transcript.

<i>Seriüin Hogrogo nutag min' daa</i>	The cold windy Hogrogo is my homeland
<i>Hulqanan jiltei zurgaan tolgoi</i>	The six head [belonging to those born in] the year of the mouse
<i>Am'tad min', mend üii sain yuu?</i>	My creatures, how are you?
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear

The arriving of the *ongod* is indicated by onomatopoeic renderings of blowing wind, followed by a crow's cries. The crow is the *ongod's* *huwilgaan*, Höhrii explains it as the body of her grandmother as *ongod*. Upon arriving, the *ongod* introduces herself: She tells that she is residing in Hogrogo, at a place called Öndör Üzüür ("high crest"). With this information she can be identified as the *ongod* Üzüürüi Eej, the metamorphosis of the shaman Puntsag, the mother of Umban and the grandmother of Höhrii, who died in 1977. "Üzüürüi Eej" is quite a common name for an *ongod*; this means that in a seance of another Darhad shaman the name probably announces a different *ongod* residing at another place named Öndör Üzüür. The geography evoked is not an inspirational one but rather reveals the concrete topography surrounding the people.

After introducing herself, the *ongod* greets the audience by addressing the "heads" (people) belonging to a year of the astrological calendar. This formula can either relate to a single person or (by using a plural suffix for the subject) for the whole household to which the particular person belongs. The *ongod's* greeting is undoubtedly addressed to the shaman; as the subject is in the plural (*am'tad*, not *am'tan*), probably her whole family is meant.<sup>18</sup> This greeting formula of the *ongod* Üzüürüi Eej is the very same as the greeting of the *ongod* in a seance of Höhrii performed at home. Thus, the *ongod* keeps the salutation also in a context where the family is absent; and the exact addressee in the particular context of the seance is of minor importance. The following expression "*evii zailuul arvaihai min*" is a kind of filler; *arvaahai* is a dialect word probably deriving from *arvai*, barley, thus literally meaning "small barley"; signifying the same as *evii zailuul* or *höörhii am'tan*: "poor dear". Such expressions are a common way of talking of elderly people, which also in daily conversations are hardly related to the particular context of the conversation but rather serve as fillers of conversational pauses.

Following the greeting, the *ongod* approaches the shaman Höhrii by calling her *shidten*, "magician" or "possessor of magical power" and then she identifies two clients whose situation she is going to discuss. She calls the clients creatures of the shaman and in the following line "*tusin tuld yavsan bolbol*" she starts to discuss the inspirational situation or the fate of the clients who are both not present at the seance:

<sup>18</sup> Umban and his wife Tömör were living together with four children at that time; the eldest daughter, who had left the family to live with her husband, is no longer included in the number of heads of the household.

*Ongod Üzüürüi Eej*, continuation:

<i>Hulganan jiltei shidten min'</i>	My magician [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Honin jiltei gahai jiltei</i>	[Those born in the] years of the sheep and pig
<i>Hoyor tolgoi am'tadinhaa</i>	The two creatures of yours
<i>Tusin tuld yavsan bolbol</i>	For the sake of their being
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear

In the following, *Üzüürüi Eej* will consider the affairs of one of the two clients, the one who is born in the year of the sheep. The concerns of the second who is born in the year of the pig will be discussed later by the *ongod Javartin Eej*.

*Ongod Üzüürüi Eej*, continuation:

<i>Za za, za nyalzrai min'</i>	Well, well my newborn
<i>Honin jiltei am'tan min'</i>	My creature [born in the] year of the sheep
<i>Baahan, baahan, nyalzrai min</i>	A little, a little, my newborn
<i>Arhag saihan biyed chin'</i>	In your huge beautiful body
<i>Övchin zovlon ergeldelj</i>	Sickness and sorrow is turning
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Ih tengeriin horloltoihon</i>	A bit poisoned by a high <i>tenger</i>
<i>Gelee ch gesen nyalzrai min'</i>	Nevertheless, my newborn
<i>Buruu sanasan gazarhan chin'</i>	Bad faith is [at] your place
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Ajil üile бүтөмж уgui</i>	Work is without success
<i>Gelee ch gesen nyalzrai min'</i>	Nevertheless, my newborn
<i>Honin jiltei yuugaa ch medehgüi</i>	[The creature born in the] year of the sheep, who does not know anything at all
<i>Am'tand min' heleh baina daa</i>	Say it to my creature

In the part cited above the *ongod* announces her diagnosis: the young man is exposed to sickness and/or other worries and he has no work or his activities are without success. The causes for these worries are identified as poisoning of a high *tenger* by which *haraal*, a spiritual curse transmitted by an *ongod*, can be meant. The line “*buruu sanasan gazarhan chin'*” / “bad faith is at your place” addresses the consequences of the spiritual cursing, bad faith. After the diagnosis the *ongod* instructs the shaman to inform the young lad about his situation. Now, the *ongod* dictates the recommended treatment:

*Ongod Üzüürüi Eej*, continuation:



<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Anhiluun saihaan artsaar</i>	With aromatic fine incense
<i>Gurvan oroin ugaalgig hiij</i>	On three evenings an ablution shall be made
<i>Utsan ulaan tataasigaa</i>	A red band cured in smoke
<i>Hüzüüindee tatuulj avbal</i>	To be worn around the neck
<i>Bodson chin' bodlin zorgoor</i>	Your thoughts will find their way
<i>Sanasan chin' sanaana zorgoor</i>	Your intentions will find their way
<i>Yavna, gedgiig helne biz dee<sup>19</sup></i>	It is surely said that way
<i>Sh sh shsh shuu shuu</i>	(Wind sough-like sounds)

The *ongod* recommends washing the body (of the client) on three evenings with a remedy of incense in water and further giving the young man a red woolen thread enlivened by the shaman to wear around the neck.<sup>20</sup> The *ongod* promises that if the young fellow follows this cure, the obstacles hindering his thoughts and intentions will be removed and the intentions and thoughts of the clients “will find their way”.

Following this, it is the shaman's turn to speak. Höhrii says the *daatgal*, the entrusting of the fate of the young chap to the *ongod*. This change of speaker is indicated in the first line, where the addressee is not “my newborn” but “my mother”. In this passage, Höhrii calls the *ongod buural eej*, lit. “grey mother”, the usual Darhad term for grandmother. It is common to call an *ongod* grandmother or grandfather, yet in this particular case Höhrii is in fact venerating (the metamorphosis) of her (paternal) grandmother. The shaman then entrusts the client to the benevolent power of the *ongod* and requests that the young chap be protected and his heart be filled with trust:

Shaman Höhrii: *daatgal* (04: 25)

<i>Za za, ejii min' dee</i>	Well, well, my mother, [I understood]
<i>Öndör Üzüüriig ezlen törsön</i>	Occupying the Öndör Üzüür, the high crest
<i>Achtaï saihaan ejii min' dee</i>	My benevolent beautiful mother
<i>Honin jiltei am'tanihaa</i>	Your creature [born in the] year of the sheep
<i>Harsan deeree harj</i>	Continue watching from above
<i>Manasan deeree manaj yavaarai</i>	Continue protecting from above
<i>Han buural eej min' dee</i>	My queen grandmother
<i>Tanaas ih hüchten eej</i>	More powerful than you, mother

<sup>19</sup> The word *yavna*, “will go”, belongs to the content of the line above.

<sup>20</sup> Kollmar-Paulenz identified the giving of a red thread as an adaptation from Buddhist rituals (personal communication, 28.02. 2007).

<i>Ugui gej honin jiltei</i>	Is [the creature born in the] year of the sheep not <sup>21</sup>
<i>Am'tan min' alag zürhendee</i>	My creature wholeheartedly
<i>Itgej yavahag eejii min' dee</i>	Becomes trustful, my mother
<i>Yavsani min' yambatai</i>	Where I went is privileged
<i>Hiisnii min' hevteihen</i>	What I did is a little orderly
<i>Yavuulna biz dee eejii min' dee</i>	Send [it] surely my mother
<i>Shsh, shuu, böög, shuu shuu</i>	(Wind-like sounds, crow)

In the last three verses above the subject of the speech changes. The shaman is then talking about herself, about her “privileged ways”, and her actions related to order – probably the diminutive form of “orderly” indicates an understatement; then she requests the *ongod* to send – to send what? I can only guess at the meaning of this reduced formula; the shaman might first invoke her own magical capacities and then requests the *ongod* to send her the power to make her actions effective. After the part spoken by the shaman, one hears sounds like the sigh of wind and the cry of a crow, indicating an *ongod* arriving or leaving. The chants continue with a new *ongod* introducing herself as Javartin Eej.

*Ongod* Javartin Eej: Introduction (05:40)

<i>Buural tagnin, buural tagnin, buyand n' da</i>	The merits of the grey taiga
<i>Bulga suusar, bulga suusar mundaа yuu</i>	Sable and martens are abundant
<i>Ar'l tagnin, ar'l tagnin buyand n' da</i>	The merits of the northern taiga only
<i>Angin ölog angin ölog mundaа yuu</i>	Hunting game is abundant
<i>[Yesön tsagaan erdeneer jiliin jasaa</i>	[The annual tribute of nine white jewels
<i>Tahij yavsan Tsenbegee chin]</i>	Was your Tsenbe venerating]
<i>Öndör Javartin, Öndör Javartin shanaanaas</i>	Of the border of [the place called] Öndör Javart
<i>Ötgön hushni, ötgön hushni yorooloos</i>	From the foot of a thick pine
<i>Harj handaj, harj handaj suuhad min'</i>	I am sitting and watching
<i>Hulganан jiltei, hulganан jiltei am'tan</i>	Creature, born in the year of the mouse
<i>Zurгаan tolgoi, zurгаan tolgoi арvaahai min'</i>	My poor dear [of a] six headed [family]
<i>Dor бүрdee mend үү sain yuu, nyalzrai min'</i>	Each of you, how are you, my newborn
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zajluul, nyalzrai min'</i>	Oh poor dear, my newborn
<i>Hulganан jiltei, hulganан jiltei ulaach min'</i>	My messenger [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Sh, shui, shsh shshsh</i>	(Wind sigh-like sounds)

<sup>21</sup> Probably the meaning of the two lines should be: “The person born in the year of the sheep is not as powerful as you, mother.”

Javartin Eej first praises the merits of the taiga, abundant hunting game (which was traded to Russian and Chinese rulers for centuries but which seems to have diminished tremendously) and then introduces herself as residing under a thick pine in the taiga, at a place called Öndör Javart (Javart means “cold wind”). Javartin Eej is said to be a powerful female *ongod* residing with her son, her daughter-in-law and a nameless *ongod* in an *asar* in Tengis, only some kilometers away from Höhrii’s home. I added a phrase in square brackets which was not part of this particular seance but which is usually part of the self-presentation of the *ongod* Javartin Eej, in the seances of Höhrii as well as in those of her father Umban. In this phrase, Javartin Eej reveals her human name, Tsenbe, and how she brought service with nine white jewels. According to Bawden’s dictionary (1997), the historical term *jasaa*, denoting “service”, was used both for the earlier profane periodic tax and for a (religious) service of households to obtain good fortune.<sup>22</sup> The exact pattern of the following greeting formula is again not clear: according to the transcript of the shaman’s assistant, the *ongod* is greeting the shaman as an individual, however according to the record, she seems to greet a group rather than a single person (*am’tad* instead of *am’tan*). Probably, the *ongod* addresses the whole family of the shaman again, irrespective of the family not being present at the seance. Thereafter, Javartin Eej names the shaman *ulaach*. This historical term grew out of the earlier Mongolian postal system referring to the attendant sent with relay horses to bring them back to the relay station. In the seances, *ongod* address with this term the shaman as a messenger or transmitter. The sough-like sounds indicate the arriving of an uninvited *ongod* who is shooed away by Javartin Eej. Then, Javartin Eej continues her speech directed to the shaman and her assistant.

*Ongod* Javartin Eej, continuation:

<i>Za baiz, za baiz, nyalzrai min’</i>	Well, wait a moment, my newborn
<i>Tavan tolgoi, tavan tolgoi am’tan min’</i>	My creature of a family of five
<i>Üher jiltei hulganан jiltei</i>	[Those born] in the years of the cow and of the mouse
<i>Hoyor tolgoi am’tanihaa araasaa</i>	Whose two creatures from the north
<i>Öndör Javartin, Öndör Javartin Eejeeree</i>	To their Öndör Javartin Eej
<i>Daatgan daatgan suuj baina gej</i>	Are sitting and praising
<i>Harlaa bish shüü, harlaa bish shüü, nyalzrai min’</i>	[I] surely [do not] watch, my newborn
<i>Tahir tsagaan Tsenbegee chin’, nyalzrai min</i>	Your slouched white Tsenbe, my newborn
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul arvaahai</i>	Oh my poor dear

<sup>22</sup> The similar term *iasak* was used for the tax imposed on the people in Siberia colonized by the Russian state in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 27 ff.)

Once again the identification of the person discussed causes problems. The *ongod* talks of a person (in the singular) from a five-headed household. The shaman Höhrii explained that the *ongod* spoke about her family at home, which consisted, during her own absence, of only five members. However, thereafter the *ongod* talks not about the family at home but about the shaman and her assistant. I thus rather suppose that the expression relates to the joint ancestry and that it evokes the family of their mothers (although in the singular only); that the offspring of this family came from the North to praise Javartin Eej. The *ongod* then promises that she certainly will provide protection by literally saying that she will surely not watch – making a grammatical negation to indicate an (evident) affirmation is a quite common way of talking in the area.

*Ongod* Javartin Eej, continuation:

<i>Morin jiltei gurban tolgoi am'tan min'</i>	My creature [born in the] year of the horse of a three headed [family]
<i>Garz gamshig ugui ugui nyalzrai min'</i>	Neither loss nor disaster, my newborn
<i>Gaitai höötei ugui ugui arvaahai</i>	Neither misfortune nor trouble, my poor dear
<i>Enh tunh erüül saruul nyalzrai min'</i>	Alive, well and healthy, my newborn
<i>Sanaa zovah yum ugui suuna gej</i>	Staying without worries and suffering
<i>Harlaa bish shüü harlaa bish shüü Tsenbegee chin'</i>	Your Tsenbe will surely [not] watch

Now the *ongod* talks again to the shaman and turns her attention to the second client, the person born in the year of the pig talked about at the beginning of the seance who is also not present. Once again, it is not the shaman or the assistant but the *ongod* who introduces the concern of a client:

*Ongod* Javartin Eej, continuation:

<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul shidten min'</i>	My poor dear magician
<i>Gahai jiltei, gahai jiltei am'tanihaa</i>	Your creature born in the year of the pig
<i>Tusin tuld, tusin tuld javsan bol</i>	For the sake of [his] being
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul shidten min'</i>	Oh poor dear, my magician
<i>Algani tavan toliond harnuu daa</i>	Let's watch the five spots of the hand's palm
<i>Puh, puh, puh, puh, shu shuu</i>	(Spitting sounds, sough-like sounds)

The *ongod* conducts a divination using the same method as Höhrii herself, namely reading the messages of the five spots in the hand's palm, a common method of Mongolian astrology. Spitting sounds during a seance often signify the spitting out of the client's problems; in this case, I think, it rather relates to a gesture of gentle spitting to enliven the

instruments of divination. In the following, the *ongod* first welcomes the client and then presents her findings. The term *noyon nuruu* (lit. steadiness; steadfastness) is used in shamanic divinations to discuss the general situation of a client:

*Ongod Javartin Eej* continuation (8:50):

<i>Za baiz, za baiz, nyalzrai min'</i>	Wait a moment, my newborn
<i>Gahai jiltei, gahai jiltei am'tan min'</i>	My creature [born in the] year of the pig
<i>Mend uu saina yuu, mend uu saina yuu, nyalzrai min'</i>	How are you, my newborn
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul arvaahai</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Als noyon, als noyon nuruu chin' daa</i>	Your <i>noyon nuruu</i> , in future
<i>Gaigüi, gaigüi, gelee gedgüig heleerei</i>	Will be all right, it is said. Pass this on
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul arvaahai</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Baahan baahan övchin zovlon ergeldej</i>	Some illness and worries go around
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul, nyalzrai min'</i>	Oh poor dear, my newborn
<i>Herüül margaan shuugildaj, nyalzrai min'</i>	Some quarrels make a row, my newborn
<i>Heregtei hereggüi, heregtei hereggüi, yumand</i>	Necessary and unnecessary things
<i>Oron aldaj, evii zailuul nyalzrai min'</i>	Almost happened, poor dear, my newborn
<i>Baahan baahan, baahan baahan, nyalzrai min'</i>	A little, a little, my newborn
<i>Ih tengeriin [shürgeldeentei]</i>	[Grazed] by the high <i>tenger</i>
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Otolt baina gelee gedgüig heleerei</i>	It is an ambush, it is said. Pass this on

The *ongod* first gives a general positive diagnosis which she immediately puts into perspective by a prognosis of illness, worry, and quarrels. The *ongod* continues that “necessary and unnecessary things” almost happened and are lying in ambush. The content of these useless things which should not happen however remains enigmatic. The cause of the threat is identified as *ongod* or another spiritual entity grazing the client. The diagnosis is followed by the recommended treatment:

*Ongod Javartin Eej* end:

<i>Evii zailuul, üneheer namaig gej bodoj</i>	If you truly believe in me, poor dear
<i>Alag zürhendee itgesen bol</i>	If you trust with all your heart
<i>Gurvan oroi ugaalga hijj</i>	On three evenings an ablution shall be made
<i>Hij avbal, evii zailuul nyalzrai min'</i>	If you let it be done, my newborn

<i>Aij tevdeh ugui ugui, nyalzrai min'</i>	Neither anguish nor worries, my newborn
<i>Sh shsh sh shuu</i>	(Interruption with sough-like sounds)
<i>Za baiz, za baiz arvaahai</i>	Well, wait a moment, my poor dear
<i>Erüül saruul, enh tunh nyalzrai min'</i>	Alive and well, my newborn
<i>Bodson bühen chin' bodlin zorgoor nyalzrai min'</i>	All your thoughts will find the ways of thoughts, my newborn
<i>Sanasan bühen chin' sanaani zorgoor gedgüig</i>	All your intentions will find the ways of intentions, it is said
<i>Heleh baina daa, heleh baina daa, shidten min'</i>	Say that, my magician
<i>Bodson bühen bodlin zorgoor nyalzrai min'</i>	Your thoughts will find the ways of thoughts, my newborn
<i>Öndör Javartin Eej gej bodoj</i>	Think that it is Öndör Javartin Eej
<i>Evii zailuul, evii zailuul arvaahai</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Anhiluun saihan ünerten amilj</i>	Enliven a fine perfume
<i>Ögööröi döo, ögööröi döo, shidten min'</i>	Give it, my magician
<i>Shsh shui shsh</i>	(Wind sough-like sounds)

The *ongod* relates the healing to the true believe and the trust of the client; only if he believes in the *ongod* will he be healed. The term used to express belief here is *bodoh*, to think. The recommended treatment includes, like the one for the first client, an ablution on three successive evenings. The recommendation of the treatment is followed by the assurance that if the client makes the ablution his problems will be resolved and his thoughts and intentions will “find their way”. At the end, the shaman is instructed to prepare the incense (for the ablution) and to give it to the client. The wind sough-like sounds following these instructions indicate the departure of Javartin Eej and the arrival of the third *ongod*, Halzan Davaatin Aav.

*Ongod Halzan Davaatiin Aav (11: 25):*

<i>Halzan Davaat nutag min' dee</i>	The <i>halzan davaa</i> , the bare pass is my homeland
<i>Büdüün har modond uyagdsan</i>	From a thick larch I hanged myself
<i>Büdüün Jinjii ner min' dee</i>	My name is fat Jinjii
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Hulganan jiltei zurgaan tolgoi</i>	Six heads [belonging to the one born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Am'tad min' mend üü sain yuu</i>	My creatures, how are you
<i>Erüül saruul bügdeeree</i>	Healthy, all of you

<i>Enh tünh tsömööröö</i>	Hale and hearty, all of you
<i>Suuna gej harlaav</i> <sup>23</sup>	I can see
<i>Halzan Davaatin Aav chin' daa</i>	Your Halzan Davaatin Aav
<i>Yausan chin' yambataihan</i>	Where you went is privileged
<i>Hiisen chin' hevteihen</i>	What you did is somewhat orderly
<i>Hulganan jiltei shidten min'</i>	My magician [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Heden tengeree tüshij javbal</i>	Being the helper of some <i>tenger</i>
<i>Algany tavan toliond chin'</i>	In the five spots of your palm
<i>Büh yum chin' bicheestei gedgiig</i>	Is everything inscribed in you, it is said
<i>Heleh baina daa shidten min' dee</i>	Say that my magician
<i>Sh shuh shiuuh shuu</i>	(Wind-sough-like sounds)

In his self-representation the *ongod* Halzan Davaatin Aav introduces himself as living at a place called Halzan Davaa (bare pass); he recalls his former human nickname “fat Jinjii” and that he committed suicide by hanging himself. Halzan Davaatin Aav does not talk about the clients but to the shaman only. In his salutation, the *ongod* addresses, similar to the first *ongod* Üzüürü Eej, a group of six people, probably Höhrii’s family. Then, the *ongod* talks about the capacities of the young shaman. The *ongod* repeats what the shaman has already said about her “privileged ways” and “orderly actions”; the *ongod* then states that the shaman is the helper of *tenger* (*ongod*) and that everything is inscribed in her palm. The message of Halzan Davaatin Aav is quite short. Höhrii explained that the *ongod* Halzan Davaatin Aav does not bring news but only repeats what other *ongod* have said before. After this short talk the *ongod* leaves the stage to the last *ongod*, Nyarvatin Eej, who is the mother of Üzüürü Eej and Höhrii’s *galin ezen*, Höhrii’s “master of the fire”. Although Höhrii is still living with her parents, she already has her own protector of (her future) household’s hearth. This *ongod* always appears as the last one in Höhrii’s seances reminds the shaman to return to an ordinary state.

*Ongod* Nyarvatin Eej (12: 50:)

<i>Oyooyoo, Oyooyoooyoo</i>	(Moaning of an old woman)
<i>Örgön hurdant quits min' dee</i>	My track is long and hurried
<i>Öndör Nyarvat tsengee min' dee</i>	Öndör Nyarvat is [the place of] my amusement
<i>Evii zailuul nyalzrai min'</i>	Oh poor dear, my newborn
<i>Hulganan jiltei shidten min'</i>	My creature [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Mend uu sain yuu arvaahai min'</i>	How are you, my poor dear

<sup>23</sup> Supposing the term meant here is “*harlaa*”.

<i>Evii zailuul shidten min dee</i>	Oh poor dear, my magician
<i>Gahai jiltei honin jiltei</i>	[Born in the] years of the pig and of the sheep
<i>Hoyor tolgoi arvaahai</i>	Two poor dears
<i>Tusin tuld javsan bolbol</i>	The sake of [their] being
<i>Zor'son hereg chin' bütlee gedgiig</i>	Your duty will be fulfilled, it is said
<i>Heleh baina daa, shidten min' dee</i>	Say that my magician
<i>Puh pu puu puuh</i>	(Spitting sounds)
<i>Za, za, shidten min'</i>	Well, well, my magician
<i>Hulganan jiltei arvaahai min'</i>	My poor dear [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Algani tavan toliond chin'</i>	The five spots of your palm
<i>Gurvan öngiin tuyaa tusaj</i>	Stroked by three colored rays
<i>Evii zailuul shidten min' dee</i>	Oh poor dear, my magician
<i>Gurvan jiliin hugatsaataihan</i>	Within only three years
<i>Algani hee chin' todorno gedgiig</i>	The pattern of your palm will become clearer, it is said
<i>Heleh baina daa, shidten min' dee</i>	Say that, my magician

Upon arrival, the *ongod* is moaning in the manner typical of old women. Nyarvatin Eej again first introduces herself, talking about her *guits*, her running track leading from her *asar* from Öndör Nyarvat to the place of the seance. After the greeting she assures that the attempted healing of the two young men will be successful. The spitting sound here could refer to the implementation of the treatment by the *ongod* as well as to the following divination. By referring to colored rays stroking the spots in Höhrüi's hand Nyarvatin Eej relates the shaman's divinational capacities that are symbolized by the spots on the shaman's hand to *ongod* who are represented as colored rays. The *ongod* continues with the prognosis that within three years Höhrüi's diagnosis will improve. Höhrüi explained that the *ongod* promised that she would receive the full armor in three years. Finally, Höhrüi got her armor in the following year.

*Ongod* Nyarvatin Eej, continuation:

<i>Hulganan jiltei shidtenigee</i>	My magician [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Haanaas tegj hayah bilee</i>	Whence shall [you] throw [it] away
<i>Öshöötei sanasan nöhört chin'</i>	To a hostile friend of yours
<i>Öshöönii tavig hangaj chadna</i>	[I] am able to ensure five revenges
<i>Yerööltei sanasan nöhört chin'</i>	To a congratulating friend of yours
<i>Yerööliin tavig hangaj chadna</i>	[I] am able to ensure five benedictions



<i>Öndör Nyarvatin Eejü chin'</i>	Your Öndör Nyarvatin Eej
<i>Muu sanasan nöhör baiival</i>	If there is a malicious friend
<i>Gurvan shivnej orhival chin'</i>	Three whispers [s/he] should abandon you
<i>Bolno gej shidten min'</i>	That it is possible, [I] say, my magician
<i>Sain sansan nöhört chin'</i>	To a well meaning friend
<i>Sarni tuyaa bolj yavna</i>	Will walk under moonlight
<i>Öndör Nyarvatin Eejü chin'</i>	From your Öndör Nyarvatin Eej
<i>Hulganen jiltei shidteniigee</i>	My magician [born in the] year of the mouse
<i>Haanaas tegj hayah bilee dee</i>	Whence shall [I] abandon [you]

The exact meaning of the verses in the passage above is rather cryptic; it is not clear in the second and in the last lines who shall (not) throw something or someone away: Is the shaman warned against renouncing her magical capabilities, or is the *ongod* threatening to abandon the shaman? However that may be, the main content includes a warning directed to her descendants not to associate with people who are hostile to the shaman's intercourse with *ongod*. She threatens that she will take revenge on hostile friends and orders the shaman to abandon them. In turn, the *ongod* promises to welcome and bless a partner who venerates the *ongod*. Höhrü interpreted this part as a warning not to choose a boyfriend who does not support her as a shaman.

*Ongod* Nyarvatin Eej, continuation:

<i>Evii zailuul nyalzrai min'</i>	Oh poor dear, my newborn
<i>Hüsen chin' hevteihen</i>	What you did is somewhat orderly
<i>Yausan chin' yambataihan</i>	Where you went is with privilege
<i>Öndör Nyarvatig ezlen törsön</i>	Occupying the upper Nyarvat
<i>Han buural eezhiinhee</i>	Queen grandmother's
<i>Ügüig dagaj shidten min'</i>	Magician, who follows my words
<i>Evii zailuul arvaahai min'</i>	Oh my poor dear
<i>Anhuluun saihan ünerteneer</i>	With nice aromatic [incense]
<i>Ariun biyee ugaalgaj</i>	Your sacred body washed
<i>Bolno бүтне shidten min' dee</i>	[It] will become fulfilled, my magician
<i>Bolboi bolboi shidten min' dee</i>	It will become, my magician

The formula about the inspirational capacities of the shaman is now repeated for the third time. Then, the *ongod* admonishes the shaman to follow her advice. She recommends an ablution to the shaman however does not say for what reason. With the following verses,

the *ongod* is requesting the shaman to return back home; the *ongod* promises that they will meet later and she departs with wind sough-like sounds.

*Ongod* Nyarvatin Eej, end:

*Haluun galdaa har'daa butsdaa*

Return back to the hot fire

*Daraa tuhtai uulzana biz dee*

Later unhurriedly we will surely meet

*Shu, shsh, shuii, shuu*

(Sough-like sounds)

While singing these last verses of the chants, Höhrii, who is still sitting on the floor, turns to the fire, ends her singing and rocks her body from one side to the other; then she clamps the jaw harp in her hand and to her teeth and pulls the tongue of the harp. After a short moment of recovery, she gets up to venerate her *ongod* hanging on the wall.

To summarize, the short seance of Höhrii included the visit of four *ongod*, three female (among them the paternal grandmother of Höhrii and her great-grandmother) and a male *ongod*. The shaman herself spoke only one sequence, the *daatgal*, the entrustment of a client to the *ongod* after the speech of the first *ongod*. It is rather unusual that she did not repeat this part to ensure the speeches of other *ongod*. The talks of the *ongod* all included their self-presentation and a salutation of the audience, however it was often not clear whom exactly the *ongod* greeted. The *ongod*'s speeches further included the identification of clients, divinations for two clients, the shaman herself and her assistant, the diagnosis, and the recommended treatments. Furthermore, the magical capacities of the shaman were brought up and the shaman was admonished. The speeches of the female *ongod* included several of these elements, each slightly modified and directed to different persons; the male *ongod*, whom Höhrii characterized as being a repeater only, neither made a divination nor recommended a treatment. The *ongod* were invoked prior to the seance while Höhrii was venerating her *ongod* hanging on the wall. During the seance, the *ongod* arrived without a particular calling, which is common among Darhad shamans.

### **The enigmatic character of the communication**

I have argued that seance is a communication between the shaman, the *ongod*, and the audience. The transcript reveals that the communication is a rather incommunicative interaction. In fact, it is rather the staging of different speeches one after another, mainly of the *ongod*, than an ordinary communication back and forth between two or more speakers. This inspirational conversation consists of a succession of rather formalized messages; and it is not always obvious to whom exactly they are directed (for example, who is greeted) and the content of the messages is sometimes rather mysterious. During the seance the assistant talked to the *ongod* a few times (mainly greetings); this is heard on the record, but is not transcribed. When the family of the shaman is present the seance gains the character

of a communication because the family members interfere with the chain of monologues and talk to the *ongod* during their speeches. The family members greet the *ongod*, they submit questions and they comment on the *ongod*'s diagnosis. Usually, the treated clients are present and answer the *ongod*'s questions or relate the *ongod*'s diagnosis to concrete events in their lives. For clients not used to shamans' seances the assistant translates the *ongod*'s messages. In the seances of other shamans, the shaman may speak more often; they submit the concerns of clients to the *ongod* or they protect a client with the insurance, the *daatgal*. However, the seance of Höhrii is insofar typical as the dominant part of the conversation belongs to the *ongod*, who one after the other appear on the scene, deliver their message and then disappear. Thus, the character of "communication" constituted by sequenced, encoded, formalized statements deployed in the seance of Höhrii is typical of the Darhad shamans' seances.

Although the shamanic seance is staged as a unique event and singular interaction, one nevertheless could ascribe to it the features Tambiah (1981: 119) used to define rituals: the author circumscribed a ritual as "culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts [...] characterized in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition) [...]." Although I will leave the question whether a seance constitutes a symbolic communication unanswered, the discussion of Höhrii's seance has obviously shown the characteristics mentioned by Tambiah. Therefore, I will draw on the insights of the literature on rituals to analyze the seances of Darhad shamans. Following Catherine Bell (1992), I abstain from a definition of rituals and from the decision whether shamans' seances are rituals or not; instead, I approach the ritualization inherent in the shamans' seances. In this sense, I perceive the seances of Darhad shamans as ritualized communication. Hamayon (1990: 530 ff.) located the ritualization of the shamanic seance in the costume of the shaman, the drum, and the purifying incense. She views this ritualization or codification as a requirement for the seance and opposes it to the non-ritualized content, which she assesses as only being symbolically effective. In contrast, I argue that the form of ritualization is inextricably intertwined with the content of the communication and is shaping it: the ritualization is part of the language of the seance with its formalization, linguistically reduced code, repetitions of text fragments, and molds what is and what can be said during a seance.

Meaning, understood in a narrow sense as the content of the messages and thus the relationship between the text and the context, is only in an obscure manner present in the text. If one does not know the codes and the particular matter discussed one remains unaware of how to interpret the verses. Often it is not clear to which other verses a line is related and where the discussion of an issue ends and the next subject starts. The seance is pieced together from fragments, which occur, slightly modified, several times; some fillers

appear very often, independently of the speaker. The speeches of the shaman even include similar fragments as the *ongod*'s parts. The shaman's sequences can therefore hardly be identified by their content, but rather by the use of the address of "my mother" or "my father". In the general description of the seance, I wrote that some parts, like the *tamlaga* or the introduction of the *ongod* are standardized, while the discussion of the concern of the clients is particular and less formalized. The example of Höhrii's seance showed that the standardized parts may vary; in the introduction of Javartin Eej for example a verse is missing that is usually part of her introduction. The example showed further that the "individual" and "particular" parts of the seances, for example the diagnosis and treatment, may be quite standardized. I attended seances where an *ongod* discussed at length and in an idiom similar to ordinary language the living circumstances of a client which obviously formed a particular speech.

An often reported feature of shamanic seances is that their chants are constituted in secret language and therefore the messages of the chants are not or only partly detectable for outsiders. Shirokogoroff (1935: 329) for example wrote that a great part of the shamans' text cannot be understood by the audience, partly being words of a foreign language or being meaningless sounds supposed to be the spirit's language. Although I agree that the seances of Darhad shamans are barely understandable for outsiders, I nevertheless could find only marginal indications of a secret language code that were usually present in single words. The most prominent of these secret codes was the word "*ikra*". The shamans explain this term as being the language of *helgüi ongod*, of *ongod* without language. This is an *ongod* who is not the metamorphosis of a former human, thus not speaking in human language. Often, the word "*ikra*" was used before the *ongod* was served a cigarette or a drink. A rather simple and evident explanation of the word "*ikra*" is to be found by reading it backwards; then, the term almost becomes "*arhi*", vodka.

A further indication of a "secret language" is that some *ongod*, being the metamorphoses of former Tuva-speaking shamans, do not speak Mongolian but Tuvan. In general, the impression of secrecy derives from the mumbled speech being drowned out by loud drumming and other noise, the reduced language code, the use of old-fashioned metaphors, and dialect idioms, and finally from the fragmented and cryptic messages. The question of secrecy is in my view not about the existence of a secret language completely distinct from ordinary language but it rather points to a social inclusion and exclusion. The language of the seance is secret for outsiders who do not understand, while insiders – family members and other people (from the area or not) often attending seances and thus being familiar with the manner of expression and the matters discussed – are able to follow the chants and to communicate with the spirits.

### Negotiations of the meaning of the *ongod*'s messages

I initially hesitated to present the transcript of Höhrri's seance in this chapter; I had doubts about uncovering the secrets of a young inexperienced shaman and exhibiting them detached from the smell of incense, the fire in the hearth, the secrecy of that rainy night, and the social context of the attending people. By presenting the seance here, I have transformed an elusive performance into a written text, allowing what was a unique event to be read and reread, and to be analyzed out of context of the direct experience. Thereby, I partly deprive the shaman of her authority of authorship and her control over the interpretation of the chants. I was afraid to reveal the shamans' mysteries, which have been attracting travelers, explorers, and anthropologists for centuries, and which might better be left secret?<sup>24</sup> However, while I was struggling with the translation of the transcript in search of the meaning of the chants, I realized that I could not disclose the mysteries of the seance; the meaning of the chant eludes revelation. I may have disclosed the character of the chants and I can propose more or less appropriate interpretations of the messages. The meaning of the seance however, I claim, is not hidden behind the enigmatic evocations, and therefore cannot be disclosed. The meaning is left to the listener and the shaman to interpret. Furthermore, the shamans themselves sometimes seem to be insecure about how to interpret one or the other statement of an *ongod* or they are unsure in identifying speakers. For examples, the shamans I met do not agree on whether the *daatgal* is part of the shaman's speech or of an *ongod* invoking a higher *tenger* above.

In "The Effectiveness of Symbols" Lévi-Strauss (1963) interpreted the text of a shamanic chant as providing a symbolic order and meaningful experience for the patient's chaotic and inexplicable sickness. Michael Taussig (1987: 390, 442 f.) rejected this interpretation and pointed at the likelihood that the female patient did not understand the text of the shamanic chant. He criticized Lévi-Strauss (and other anthropologists) for the association of shamanic seances and rituals in general with order; instead, he proposed to view the meaning of shamanic seances as staying in disorder. Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) argue that coherent meanings and consistent interpretations are instead possible responses to rituals than the constitution of it. Similarly, I contend that the meaning of a Darhad shaman's seance is not determined by the content of the chants but that the meaning is produced in the conversation between the shaman and the client, partly before but primarily after the seance. Usually, a client seeking the support of a shaman first asks for a divination, receives an inspirational diagnosis, and is then requested to attend a seance for treatment. Immediately after the seance, the shaman reports and explains the messages of

<sup>24</sup> Hugh B. Urban (2001) discussed similar problems concerning his fieldwork on Bengal tantric sects; becoming first "initiated" into secrecy and then disclosing the received "secrets" by publication is assessed by the author as epistemological and ethical double bind one cannot escape. He argued that the tactics of secrecy operate as sources of symbolic power and he advocated focusing more on these visible strategies than on the elusive content of the secrets. I will follow the strategies of the shamans to accumulate their symbolic capital in the following chapters.

the *ongod*. In this discussion between shaman and client, the shaman asks the client about particular events or afflictions which could correspond to the *ongod*'s messages, and the client brings up events, economic circumstances and family relations. By merging the client's experiences with the messages of the *ongod*, the shaman and the client together create the meaning of the *ongod*'s messages.

Such a meaning-giving discussion did not take place after the reported seance of Höhrii as her clients were not present. In this case, the meaning of the chants was partly constituted in our discussion while listening to the recording. I write "partly" because during our conversation I got the impression that I was able to follow the chants and to understand their meaning; it was only later at home, while working on the translations, that the meaning became increasingly blurred. I wonder whether the experience of the clients is not in fact quite similar: it was usual that the clients nodded during the shaman's comments and explanations after the seances. At the end of the conversation, clients often asked for detailed instructions on the actions they had to carry out at home; when and how much and how often they should, for example, burn incense or wash their bodies with the received lotion. The passive reception of the amazing inspirational explanations, without asking questions about the meaning of that which was said, along with the concern for the details of the shaman's concrete instructions, makes me believe that the insights to the meaning is restricted to the encounter with the shaman. The meaning and "order" produced in and immediately after the seance becomes elusive.

### **The staging of power relationships**

Already three decades ago, Maurice Bloch (1974) rejected the dominant approach of searching for the hidden cultural meaning of rituals and instead proposed viewing religious rituals as performance of power. Bloch argued that the power of religious rituals is executed through the formalization and restricted code of ritual language. The formalization of speech restricts the choice of what can be said, repetitions substitute and avert arguments. According to Bloch, the performative force consists not in reporting facts but in influencing people. Bloch compared the performative force of formalization in religious ritual to the political oratory of traditional elders and perceived possession by ancestor spirits, where an elder speaks eternal truth. The virtue of Bloch's essay is echoed in the critique it attracted, for example by Tambiah (1981) about Bloch's negation of meaning and his simple Marxist stance of religion as mystification and concealment of harsh facts of reality; by Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) that formalizations are not only limitations but also open up possibilities to introduce new elements, or by Schieffelin (1985) about Bloch's too narrow focus on formalization of speech, neglecting other elements like the particular situation and the context.

Although I follow these critiques, it was nevertheless the reading of Bloch's article which reminded me to include into my analysis what I experienced again and again while attending shamanic seances: that seances are, not exclusively but also, performances of relations of authority and hierarchies. Other than Bloch, I do not perceive the seance as a mere expression of power but, following Bell (1992; 1997), I see the seance as a stage where relationships of authority and submission are constituted. Furthermore, I will not confine my focus to the formalization of language only but I will include, as Schieffelin (1985) proposed, the dramaturgy and non-discursive elements of the seance. Höhrii's seance, like the seances of Darhad shamans in general, enacts hierarchical relationships between *ongod* and humans, between elders and youngsters, and finally between the shaman and clients. The hierarchical relationships are enacted in those repetitive parts of the chants which seem not to carry messages but seem to be redundant and superfluous fillers only: the speaking *ongod* call the humans "poor dear" or "my newborn". The shaman entitles the *ongod* Üzüürü Eej as "mother" and "grandmother" and the *ongod* Nyarvatin Eej speaks of herself as "queen grandmother". In a social context that emphasizes the authority of elders, obviously such forms of address constitute hierarchical relationships between *ongod* and humans. In this enactment of hierarchies of seniority, the shaman occupies an ambivalent node: she is called "poor dear" and "my newborn" like other humans in one moment and is entitled as "possessor of magical power" in the next.

The hierarchical relationships indicated in the forms of address are powerfully performed through the dramaturgy of the seance. As in Höhrii's seance the clients were absent, I will now leave this seance and discuss the dramaturgy of those seances that include a treatment, in particular of seances with the shaman wearing the armor and shamanizing with the drum. Usually in these seances, a client to be treated by an *ongod* is asked to kneel in front of the shaman with the head bowed. The *ongod*/shaman then discusses the concern of the client; the client is in the meantime asked by the assistant to venerate the *manjig*, the long tassels of the shaman's gown. The client is usually asked to tie a ritual scarf to the shaman's gown, which contributes to increase the impressiveness of the shamans' figure with each client. The inspirational treatment is carried out by drumming over the head and around the body of the client; finally with the bundle of tassels the client is usually dealt three sometimes quite heavy strokes on the shoulder. I believe that kneeling and bowing one's head are powerful bodily performances of subordination, which culminate in the excessive beating. The performance of authority and power is also reflected in the terms used: Badamhatan (1965) termed the bundle of tassels of the shamans' gown as *mörgöl*: the related verb *mörgöh* means to venerate but also to butt, to knock (Hamayon 1990).

As the shaman literally embodies the *ongod*, the shaman and the *ongod* merge into one. Thus, the client is nominally subordinated to the *ongod* but is kneeling before and beaten

by the shaman. To illustrate how coercive the enactment of power can be, I will render one of my personal experiences. During the seance of a male shaman, of whom I had heard that he sexually exploits a relationship with female clients, the *ongod*/shaman asked the adolescent girl kneeling before him to open her gown, whereupon he stroked over her naked breast with the drumstick. I was disgusted by this act I had never observed before in a seance, judging it not to be a necessary part of the treatment but a brute sexual transgression of the shaman; and I thought that if the shaman tried the same with me I would not let him. However, when it was my turn, kneeling in front of the shaman, I let him do the same – I was just unable to push away the shaman’s hand with the drumstick. Contrary to my expectations, I did not experience a brute transgression but felt a gentle stroking over my skin that made me consider that what I felt as too intimate might not be a transgression but part of the treatment. Moreover, I just did not dare to disturb the seance by repulsing a treatment of which I was not sure whether the other attendants assessed it as a transgression. What I would like to illustrate with this example is that it is exactly this moment of uncertainty – causing doubt about whether the *ongod* or the shaman is acting, and whether the physical integrity of the client is transgressed – which demonstratively enacts the subordination of the client in the encounter with the *ongod*/shaman.

It is striking that the enactment of this power relationship does not depend on whether the audience understands the chants and their meaning: to the contrary of what one might expect, I argue that the authority of the *ongod* and the shaman can be even more powerfully enacted when the audience only partly understands the meaning of the chants. In those seances I attended together with an unfamiliar audience the atmosphere usually was rather “sacred” with the visitors sitting with folded hands – enthralled, awestruck, obviously startled when something unexpected happened. In seances attended by an audience that is familiar with the intercourse with spirits, the seance still had the character of an event but not an extraordinary one. These seances could develop into an exhilarating happening with the *ongod* exposing the private affairs of clients or playing with clients to the delight of the audience, for example by offering a cup of vodka to an alcoholic, only to splash it into the client’s face. These seances exuded a rather “profane” character; the attendants recognized the different *ongod* and talked to them. The people present knew the *ongods*’ names and their residences in the landscape, and they were familiar with the *ongods*’ stories about their former life as humans or maybe they even had known them as human persons.

The initiated audience is used to following the protocol of reverence and subjugation; but by laughing, impudent remarks, or inattentiveness to the seance they might pursue strategies to undermine the authority of the shaman and the authenticity of the seance.<sup>25</sup> For those clients who are unfamiliar with the coded language and the content of the inspirational encounter, the seance enacts anonymous authorities. Not being able to

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<sup>25</sup> Attendants disturbing the shaman during the seance are also reported by Shirokogoroff (1935: 332-333).



understand – neither the content of the messages nor the underlying symbolism – thereby constitutes the concrete experience of powerlessness. Precisely this performance of powerlessness calls the spirit into being and enacts the *ongod* as powerful authorities.

### **Power deriving from the performance of powerlessness: the cataleptic trance**

It is obvious that the performance of the *ongod*'s power results in the attribution of authority to the shaman: when clients bow and grovel before an *ongod*, they also bow before the shaman who embodies the *ongod*. However, the shaman does not attain power by a simple equation with the *ongod*'s power. Rather, I argue that the shaman becomes powerful through the enactment of his/her powerlessness vis-à-vis the embodied *ongod*. The discussion of Höhrii's seance showed that the *ongod* calls the shaman both (powerful) magician as well as (powerless) newborn and *ongod*'s helper. This ambivalent form of address puts the shaman in a potentially powerful position, subordinated at the same time to the authority of the *ongod* as the holder of magical power. This hierarchical relationship between *ongod* and shaman is impressively demonstrated in the cataleptic trance, a term pointing to that moment of the trance when the shaman falls into unconsciousness. In the discussed seance, Höhrii did not fall into cataleptic trance; I never witnessed a cataleptic trance during a jaw harp seance. The cataleptic trance is a common feature of the seances with armor and drum; usually the shaman falls once or twice, sometimes more often, but I also remember several seances by drum without the falling of the shaman into a cataleptic trance. The cataleptic trance interrupts the seance immediately: the *ongod* stops talking, the drum hurtles through the room, the shaman falls backwards with a rigid body – and is usually caught by the assistants standing behind him/her who gently lower him/her to the floor. While the shaman is lying motionless, the assistants and family members act hastily to revive his/her consciousness: they light incense and hold it under his/her face, they collect the drum and put the drumstick in the hand of the shaman and lead her or his hand to beat the drum. Suddenly, the shaman jerkily beats the drum her/himself, and the seance continues where it had stopped; the *ongod* resumes the exact sentence where s/he interrupted the talk.

The emic and etic interpretations of the cataleptic trance are oppositional. In the scholarly literature, the cataleptic trance is presented as the most intensive moment of the trance, and is often denoted as “deep trance”. Some authors even perceive it as the very moment when the shamans enters trance and thus enters in contact with spirits. Waldemar Bogoras for example wrote of a shaman that after “some most violent singing, and beating of the drum, he falls into a kind of trance, during which his body lies on the ground unconscious, while his soul visits ‘spirits’ in their own world, and asks them for advice” (Bogoras 1975 [1904-1909]: 441).

In contrast, Darhad shamans explain that moment of the seance that a powerful *ongod* who is angry with the shaman, enters the seance and overthrows the shaman, who then lies unconscious on the ground. The shamans make clear that lying on the ground, incapable of speaking and moving, is a dangerous state for them; if their helpers cannot return them back into the performance of the seance, they will die. The shamans here relate the term “unconsciousness” not to their conversations with *ongod* and their wanderings through the dark but point to their ejection from the interaction with spirits. In the moment when they lie unconscious on the ground they are unable to talk and to fulfill a shaman’s proper task. The shamans leave no doubt that their falling is an indication of their own powerlessness. And a shaman who falls often is perceived as a weak and powerless shaman.

Yet another response to the cataleptic trance is the reaction of the audience: when the drum is hurtling and the shaman falls backwards an uninformed audience usually jerks, reacting in an obviously startled manner. Often people fold their hands and, wide-eyed, observe the following flurry of the shaman’s family around the shaman lying on the ground. In the sparse candlelight and in the crowd of the seance one usually cannot observe more than several people leaning over the shaman’s body. I think that this moment of the shaman lying on the ground becomes for the frightened (part of the) audience the triggering instant of the performance: their own reaction proves that they are witnessing something dangerous and real. Thus, the audience authenticates both the *ongod* into existence and the shaman into a “genuine” shaman.

Hence, rather than presupposing a community of believers, I propose a view which sees “belief” as constituted through the performance of the seance. In the instant when the *ongod* does not talk, the *ongod*’s presence is demonstrated by a frightened audience. And in this same instant, when the shaman lies motionless and powerless on the ground, s/he becomes powerful by demonstrating his/her relationship to dangerous and powerful *ongod*. It is exactly through the performance of the shaman’s powerlessness that the shaman might be perceived as being powerful. For the audience, the shaman lying on the ground can be, similarly to scholarly accounts, the evidence of the shaman’s trance and ability to contact spirits. For the (Mongolian, not particularly local) audience, the demonstration of “genuine” trance is related to the power and the magical capabilities of the shaman; for scholars, the performance of “genuine” trance is evidence of cultural authenticity.

The performance of the shamans’ ambivalent power position in relation to the *ongod* during the seance reflects what shamans explain: that they are not themselves powerful but only transfer the messages of the *ongod*. Umban for example, answering a question about his relationship to his *ongod*, said that the *ongod* were his masters above him and that he honored and respected them, and that when an *ongod* arrived in an angry mood he begged this *ongod* to become gentle. This explanation contradicts the famous claim of

Shirokogoroff (1935) that the shamans are “masters of the spirits”. I propose to combine the two perspectives: the shamans master the spirits from a subordinate position. They strive to interact with powerful *ongod* who are dangerous for them and can easily overthrow them. Finally, by surviving the dangerous moment of the cataleptic trance, the shamans prove to be able to deal with the enacted powerful spirits, thereby finally demonstrating their own power.

### The performance of *ongod* as cognatic ancestors

There is one quality of the hierarchical relationship performed in the seance which is so obvious that it might be ignored: by calling the *ongod* mother/father or grandmother/grandfather, the relationship between humans and *ongod* is enacted in terms of kinship and, more narrowly, of children-parental relationship. This invocation of a parent-children relation includes the enactment of the authority of elders, and further implies notions of kinship and gender. It is a popular feature in the literature on Siberian shamanism to describe shamans as being in the duty of the patrilineal clan, or as being powerful members of their clan; however the particular relation of the shaman to the social organization of the clan is usually not further discussed.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Hamayon’s (1990) model of pastoral shamanism, in which the shaman symbolically enacts the reproduction of the patrilineage, the idea of kinship evoked in contemporary Darhad shamans’ seances is symbolical rather cognatic. Shamans invoke both male and female *ongod* alike. They relate to cognatic ancestors, to affinal ancestors, and further to any ancestral power embodied by *ongod* in their reach. Thereby they make all *ongod* they relate to into their “dry ancestors”, (*huurai aav eej*). Mongolians use the term *huurai* to extend the metaphor of kinship to closely related people not integrated in usual kinship relations. Instead of an evocation of patrilineal descent, shamans just tap the sources of powerful ancestors in their reach. This logic is confirmed by the cognatic inheritance of shamanship of Darhad shamans, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Searching through my field notes for gender patterns in the relationship of shamans to their *ongod*, I did not find any. All of the shamans contact both female and male *ongod*; male shamans contacted predominantly female *ongod* during their seances or reported their most important *ongod* as being female, just as female shamans mainly interacted with male *ongod*. In the discussed seance of Höhrii, she contacted three female and one male *ongod*, among them her paternal grandmother turned *ongod* and her great-grandmother. The following summer, when Umban introduced her to shamanizing with armor and drum, she encountered nine *ongod*; in between, she had augmented her *ongod* by one female and four males, to whom she had no kinship relation. Overall, I collected the names of eighty-

<sup>26</sup> For example Eva Jane Neumann Fridman (1999) describes present-day Buryat female and male shamans as representatives of their “clans”; or F. Georg Heyne (2003) relates also female shamans to “clan” organization of today’s reindeer Evenki of Northeast China (Manchuria).

two female and sixty-two male *ongod* during my fieldwork: from thirteen male shamans I collected fifty-one female and forty-three male *ongod*, and from six female shamans I collected thirty-one female and twenty male *ongod*. Thus, I encountered a narrow majority of female *ongod*; yet these numbers are somewhat arbitrary as the shamans usually only indicated their most important *ongod* and as some *ongod* are counted several times. However, the list of Darhad *ongod* included in O. Pürev's (2002) book on Mongolian shamanism shows a similar gender distribution.<sup>27</sup> There is a tendency that *ongod* who are close kin and recent ancestors are in the majority female. This indicates that there have been more female shamans than male ones in the recent past.



Photograph 21: Umban and his daughter Höhrüi posing in front of the new TV the day after Höhrüi's first seance with armor and drum (17.8. 2004).

The cognatic idea of kinship performed in the seance is related to ideas of gender equity. Shamans refuted in discussions that the gender of the *ongod* matters and emphasized that female *ongod* were as powerful as male ones. The shamans denied a gendered division of spiritual labor, but instead pointed to the individual characteristics of *ongod* qualifying them for particular treatments. Although the widespread presence of female *ongod* and the perception of female *ongod* as equal to male *ongod* demonstrates gender equity, I will qualify this impression later. I will show in Chapters 7 and 8 that nevertheless the social recognition of contemporary shamans as well as the power of female *ongod* shows gendered features.

To recapitulate the thread of this chapter: It is through the performance of powerlessness both by the shaman and the clients that the *ongod* as magical authorities

<sup>27</sup> O. Pürev listed 127 *ongod* of the Darhad area with name and place of residence (*asar*) on a map; he indicated fifty-six *ongod* as female and forty-nine as male, while of twenty-two further *ongod* the gender was not given.

come into being. It is through the enactment of a subordinated position towards the *ongod* that the shaman inherits the *ongod*'s magical power. Thus, rather than viewing the seances as an expression of belief in spirits, I perceive the belief in spiritual entities as being constituted through the performance of the seance. When people assess the capabilities of a shaman they usually do so by assessing the shaman's performance: a shaman judged as powerful is one of whom people say that s/he is "shamanizing beautifully". The performance is evaluated rather than the later results of the shaman's treatment. Of course, if the seances of some shamans are assessed as beautiful, others are perceived as less beautiful or even as bad performances and some would-be shamans fail in their ambitions altogether because they do not achieve a successful performance of the seance. The successful shamans, authorized by an impressive performance of powerful spirits, explain and interpret the enigmatic messages of the *ongod* in the discussion with the clients after the seance. The authorization of the shaman's seance to constitute meaning is related both by local and scholarly discourses to the shaman's transgression of ordinary states, the trance. The condensation of the trance is the cataleptic trance, that moment when the shaman falls to the ground and lies motionless. By the shaman's transgression of the ordinary, the explorations of the margins between the living and the dead, and by the performance of her/his relationship with the dead, the shaman is empowered to negotiate important issues of life. Or, as Howe (2000: 68) argued "[w]hen a life is at stake, a ceremony to effect a cure needs to be challenging, otherwise the life is undervalued".

It is important to note that the shamans' production of power in a successful enactment of the seance cannot to be mistaken for the shamans' powerful position in society, a claim often read in publications on Siberian shamanism. On the contrary, I maintain that the power of shamans outside the context of the seance and the treatment of clients is by no means assured: Darhad shamans are just common members of their neighborhood and are sometimes even poor or otherwise marginalized figures. Besides, clients impressed by the performance of a shaman and expressing their belief in him/her can later easily change their mind and question the capacities of the same shaman. The following chapters will discuss the legitimization strategies and the social production of shamans' power. The next chapter will start with a description of failed attempts to shamanize in the way discussed in this chapter.



*Photograph 22: The shaman Baljir's headdress (07.08. 2003).*

## Legitimization by illness and ancestor shamans

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*Siberian shamans, as we know well from numerous historical accounts, are “chosen by the spirits”:<sup>1</sup> (Ancestor) spirits cause an illness that can only be healed by accepting the spirits’ call and becoming a shaman. Indeed, contemporary Darhad shamans present their shamanism as forced upon them by spirits and inherited from ancestors who were shamans. However, I will show that the spirits’ call is not a determinant cause in the becoming of a shaman. Starting with unsuccessful attempts of disciples at shamanizing, I will introduce the social dimensions of the shamans’ selection by ancestor spirits. Thereby, I approach shamanic illness and the inheritance of shamanism as part of the legitimization of shamans.*

In her analysis of a failed seance of a Naxi shaman in China, Emily Chao (1999) reflected on ritual theory, arguing that anthropological analysis favored rituals that are routinely performed while ignoring failed rituals. She suggests

[...] that examining failed ritual redirects our analytic gaze to local processes of legitimation and authentication, while it simultaneously avoids accepting merely temporary arrangements of power as a timeless cultural essence. Although shifting the analytic focus from ritual to ritualization avoids the reification of ritual by attending to processes, it is still informed by the functionalist celebration of normative practice. Understanding the failure of ritual draws us into the complex arena of conflict and contingency, where social dynamics enable new identities or create marginal ones (Chao 1999: 505-6).

Chao addresses a central concern of this and the next chapters: focusing on processes of legitimization and authentication, and abandoning a view of Darhad shamans as functionaries of a community of shamanists who reproduce the social order. In the last chapter, I analyzed the Darhad shaman’s seance as performance of power relations. With the successful performance of a seance, a person however is not automatically recognized as a shaman in local arenas. This and the following two chapters are concerned with several dimensions of the legitimization and contestation of shamanizing people as shamans. This chapter is concerned with the initial illness and the inheritance of shamanism from shamanic ancestors as legitimizing fields; the next chapter focuses on the relationship to the urban center for Darhad shamans’ reputation and, finally, Chapter 8 discusses how the evocation of historical shamans is intertwined with the authenticating processes of shamans.

To introduce these fields of legitimization, I follow Chao’s advice and start with a discussion of failed rituals. Whereas Chao discussed a seance that was rebuffed by the local audience as not successful in terms of healing, the episodes I will present here are

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<sup>1</sup> From Basilov’s title (1990).

concerned with shaman's disciples who failed to perform a seance. I will talk about people who were designated to become shamans but who were at that moment not or not yet able to receive the spirits, *ongod*, they called, which was recognized by the audience in that the *ongod* did not talk during the seance. The aim of this focus on failure is not to delimit a category of shamans from failed disciples or non-shamans. Rather, I use the episodes of failure as a first dislocating perspective on processes of legitimization and contestation of shamanizing persons in general. When people whose ancestry contains shamans and who have been ill fail to perform proper seances, this is a hint that the election by ancestor spirits is not the determining cause for them to become shamans.

Shirokogoroff (1935: 346-358) is one of the very few authors writing about Siberian shamans who has illuminated the social processes of legitimization. Shirokogoroff discussed the social acknowledgment of shamans, which could include an informal selection, periods of trial, the examination of the disciples' seance and the formal recognition of shamans. Particularly interesting is his detailed description of the making of a new shaman from a well-known family, which he observed over a period of two years. He showed the competition between the son and his brother's wife to become the successor of a shaman who had been an official in the Manchu banner organization and, after being accused of being a Russian spy, was executed. In a several day-long trial in January 1917, the jury of older clansmen finally elected the son as future clan shaman. The account reveals that Shirokogoroff himself was involved in the process of selection. He mentioned that it was due to his good relations with the Chinese authorities that the performance could be carried out at all; furthermore, he was invited to participate in the jury as an expert, where he took a firm stance for the daughter-in law. Shirokogoroff was persuaded of her honest aspirations and had no doubts about her shamanic illness, as he had witnessed several of its outbreaks and had even tested the loss of sensitivity of her body with a needle. In contrast, he suspected the former shaman's son of being a fraud. Although the performances of both candidates were each assessed as failures by at least some of the jury members, Shirokogoroff presumed that finally the son was preferred not because he was better in the trials, but because his sister-in law was a social transgressor and had been the executed shaman's lover.

Shirokogoroff's account shows that shamans are not elected by spirits only, but that social recognition and disapproval are intertwined into the becoming of shamans. In contrast to Shirokogoroff's example, there is today no jury who formally recognizes a new shaman among the Darhad. To give an impression about the processes of legitimization and contestation in absence of a formal recognition, I will render comprehensive descriptions about my encounters with shamans' disciples and their teachers during fieldwork. These descriptions shall make transparent how I followed networks, recommendations and rumors. By following these threads, I made not only the acquaintance of shamans and



disciples and could collect data about their practice. Moreover, I gained insight into the arenas and processes of shamans' legitimization.

### **Failed attempts to shamanize**

In view of the scarce accounts on failed rituals, I start with detailed accounts on the unsuccessful attempts to shamanize I encountered before I proceed to the more general implications. The following stories introduce several apprentices and their unavailing efforts: a young woman and her brother from Ulaanbaatar, two fifty-year-old women, Nyamsüren from Mörön and Othüü from Tsagaan Nuur, as well as the young man Ganbaa from Höndii. With the exception of the woman of Mörön, they all were the disciples of the old shaman Badrah and their teaching took place in the small settlement of Höndii *bag* in the southwestern part of Renchinlümbe *sum* in August 2004. Badrah stayed for his teachings at the blacksmith Mishig *darhan*, who is one of the few persons living year round in the settlement. The blacksmith is well known in the wider area for forging jaw harps, metallic weapons for shamanic gowns and for making shamans' drums; he was assisting the shaman during his teachings.

I heard the first time about the forthcoming teachings in early August, when my guide Davaanyam and I stayed with Ölzii, the shaman Badrah's younger brother. Ölzii shamanizes himself and he is well known for his divinations. He told us about a family group from Ulaanbaatar who was staying at the blacksmith's, preparing shamanic paraphernalia. It was said that the head of the group originated from Bayanzürh, the southwestern Darhad *sum* and might be a successor of a shaman and thus a potential heir of shamans' power. Our host discouraged us from meeting the visitors from Ulaanbaatar, arguing that the urban people avoided contact with locals and did not talk about themselves. As we were curious to see the visitors and anyway intended to meet the blacksmith Mishig *darhan* eventually, we ignored the advice and rode to the settlement, which was around twenty kilometers away.

In view of the meeting with the visitors from Ulaanbaatar, the ride was rather unsuccessful. As Ölzii had warned, the people who were staying near the blacksmith's house with a *ger* and tents received us with reserve and were reluctant to disclose their concerns. Moreover, a man, probably the head of the group, rudely attacked my guide Davaanyam for not acting like a local by asking intruding questions and moreover bringing a foreigner with him. After the man left in anger, a woman started to talk with us and complained that they had not been able to find the skin of a three-year-old hind (*sogooni ar's*) needed for the drum, and that instead of the planned couple of days, their stay had already lasted several weeks and that they would have to stay even longer.

We left the *ger* and entered the house to wait for the blacksmith, who was working behind the house. There, we met Nyamsüren, an amicable fifty-year-old woman from the provincial capital Mörön, who originated from Renchinlhümbe. She was sewing *manjig*, colorful tassels, for her shamanic gown, and she frankly talked about her life and her accession into shamanizing. She introduced herself as a paternal relative (*avag egch*) and as apprentice (*shav'*) of the shaman Baljir *zairan*. She had traveled the two hundred kilometers from the provincial capital to the blacksmith Mishig in order to prepare her shamanic gown, and from there she had even gone further to the north, first on foot until she was given a ride to Tsagaan Nuur, in search of a skin of a three-year-old hind for her drum.

The woman told us that she had grown up on the pastures in Tengis and Hogrogo, that she had married a veterinarian from the south of the province and that she had first lived with her family in the village of Renchinlhümbe, where she worked in the cultural center as singer and music teacher. In the early 1980s, the family moved to Mörön where she worked as an assistant in the animal hospital. Why was she becoming a shaman? She recalled how she had dreamt about the deceased shaman Has *zairan*, whom she remembered from her childhood, when she had received lump sugar from him. After this dream, Nyamsüren fell ill. In addition, the family lost ten cows. Therefore, the woman consulted the shaman Baljir, who relayed to her that the *ongod* Javartin Eej asked her to become a shaman.<sup>2</sup> Four years ago, the shaman Baljir enlivened a jaw harp for her and since then, Nyamsüren was venerating this *ongod* by the enlivened jaw harp. However, the spirit did not relate to her (*ongodoo har'tsangüi*). Finally, Nyamsüren decided to shamanize with armor and drum in the hope that it would be easier this way to connect with her *ongod*. When her teacher Baljir was to return from the capital, he was to teach her to shamanize with armor and drum. The woman argued that the main obstacle to communicating with the *ongod* was her age and that it would have been easier to begin to shamanize as a young person.

### **The inspirational exercises of Othüü**

Two weeks later, after a journey to the reindeer herders in the Eastern Taiga, my guide Davaanyam and I returned to the settlement in Höndii. We kept an appointment with Othüü, a woman from Tsagaan Nuur village, who had given us the permission to be present during the meeting with her teacher, the old shaman Badrah. On the way to the settlement, we had already heard that the old shaman was staying in the settlement and that he had instructed a young man and his sister from the Ulaanbaatar family to conduct a seance the night before. On our arrival, the people from Ulaanbaatar were packing up their *ger*, while

<sup>2</sup> The female *ongod* Javartin Eej appeared in the seance of the young shaman Höhrüi (the daughter of Umban, Baljir's brother), which I analyzed in the last chapter. In her life as a human, the *ongod* was the female shaman Tsenbel, who is included in my chart as an ancestor of today's shamanizing people Mönhjii, Sharhüü and Mönhöö.

in the blacksmith's house the teacher Badrah taught one of the women how to pluck the jaw harp. People around said that the woman, the sister-in-law of the family head, had fallen unconscious during the ceremony of the two youngsters. Later, the old shaman received his three disciples for a formal leave-taking, where he let each of his disciples tie a white *hadag*, a ritual scarf, to his shamanic mirror, keeping a materialization of their obedience and increasing the bundle of scarves attached to his mirror.<sup>3</sup> Later that day the people from Ulaanbaatar left.

The next day in the afternoon Othüü was exercising in her mother Avid's home on the outskirts of the settlement, where we arrived just after a heavy shower had started. In the small shabby-looking *ger*, into which the rain soon was leaking, Badrah was sitting on one of the two beds, dressed in an exclusive golden shiny Mongolian gown, *deel*. Besides the shaman, Othüü's mother, her husband and two sisters, a woman and some children from the neighborhood were attending the seance. Othüü was sitting on the ground in the *hoimor*, the place of honor in the north of the *ger*; she wore a common *deel* and a white scarf tied around her head and she was facing the northern wall. There, on top of some boxes standing on a small commode, a rather big photograph was displayed showing her grandmother, the shaman Horol *udgan*, which I recognized as it is contained in O. Pürev's (2002: 199) book on Mongolian shamanism. When I had seen the picture for the first time, I had wondered whether it showed a man or a woman. On my visit in Höndii, Avid and Othüü told me without being asked that the shaman Horol, who lived from 1900 until 1978, indeed had behaved like a man. That she walked and talked like a man, smoked pipes and that her privileged amusement was to invite passing drivers to a wrestling match, which they would never have accepted had they known she was a woman. Nevertheless, she did the women's work, milking cows and cooking, but she did not give birth to children. Othüü's mother Avid was the shaman's adoptee, the women explained.<sup>4</sup> O. Pürev explained later that Avid is the daughter of the shaman's husband Has *zairan* with another woman.

I had made Othüü's acquaintance the previous year, when I stayed at the shaman Baldandorj's in Harmai in June 2003. Othüü arrived with her husband on motorbike to ask the shaman for scapulimancy, a divination by a sheep's shoulder blade (*dal shataah; dalaar mergeh*).<sup>5</sup> At that visit, I was impressed by her gaze from behind big thick eyeglasses, wandering around while she talked in a hashing and restless manner. I could barely understand her words due to her unclear pronunciation caused by several gaps in

<sup>3</sup> A "mirror", *tol'*, is a small round metallic plate of golden or bronze color. Badrah is one of the few Darhad shamans who use a mirror for divination.

<sup>4</sup> Pürev explained later that Avid is the daughter of the shaman's husband Has *zairan* with another woman (interview of 07. 09. 2004). It might be that Has *zairan* was the same shaman Has about whom Nyamsüren, the woman from Mörön, had dreamed.

<sup>5</sup> The shaman burns the shoulder blade in the stove and thereafter interprets the cracks. This kind of divination is known all over Mongolia (Bawden 1989).

her teeth. Othüü talked frankly about herself, that she was *tataj unadag* (lit. twitching and falling, the term will be discussed later), that she had to become a shaman and that her teacher, Batbayar *udgan* would soon arrive from Ulaanbaatar to teach her. However, the teaching never happened: Othüü's jaw harp was not ready when her designated teacher visited Tsagaan Nuur and, only some months later, the shaman Batbayar died in a car accident.



Photograph 23: Othüü and her mother Avid after Othüü's seance (20.08. 2004).

A couple of days before our meeting in Höndii, we visited Othüü in the village of Tsagaan Nuur, where she lived with her husband in the house of her adoptive parents. She told us about the upcoming meeting with her new teacher Badrah. Some months ago, Badrah had enlivened a jaw harp for her. She was proud that Badrah confirmed in that first instruction that she was shamanizing easily and that the *ongod* told her she would have to take the drum and armor the following year. Othüü said that she had already found the hind's skin for the drum and that she was still looking for nine eagle feathers for the headgear. Almost enthusiastically talked she about her new teacher Badrah and called him an *aihtar zairan*. The term "*aihtar*" literally means terrible, or dreadful, and is used, often by young people, with the meaning of "awful good". Badrah was already her third teacher. Several years ago, she said, she had been instructed by an old man in the neighborhood; but at that time she was not able to shamanize and thus had dropped it. Othüü said that she was already forty-nine years old and that she should have started shamanizing at the age of thirteen; that all these long years she had been *unadag*, falling, and that was why she had lost all her teeth.

When we arrived at Othüü's mother Avid's, Othüü had already started her seance: she was tugging the jaw harp, accompanying the rattling sound by moving her upper body from one side to the other; she was trembling and her gaze was *hajim*, strange – but she, or the

*ongod*, did not talk. While she continued to tug the jaw harp calling her *ongod*, further people dropped in, until the small room was quite crowded with around twenty spectators. By-and-by the observers lost their interest in the inspirational exercise and began to chat and to play cards, while Othüü continued to tug the jaw harp. Several times her husband circled around her body with incense and turned her body back in position towards her grandmother's image. Meanwhile, her mother Avid venerated the *ongod* hanging on the wall by sprinkling milk towards them. However, the *ongod* still did not respond. The teacher Badrah said that he did not understand as during the first instruction in early summer, her *ongod* had entered her body easily (*ongodoo amar orj irsen*). To find the reason, Badrah sent for his mirror he had forgotten at the blacksmith's, and when the mirror was brought, he rotated it several times and gazed into the rotating disc in search of the obstacles hampering his disciple in receiving her *ongod*. The teacher instructed the husband to take Othüü's jaw harp away and he purified the harp over incense, after which he gently beat his disciple with the *manjig*, the long tassels tied to her jaw harp. Thereafter, he offered Othüü a cup of cold water, of which Othüü drank a mouthful and spewed it out. Suddenly, Othüü started to cry; her eyes were wide open and took on a fixed gaze. She fell. Lying on the ground, her whole body started quivering, as if she were suffering an epileptic attack.

Badrah tugged the harp of his disciple a few times, and tied the end of the tassel to her and blew from the harp softly onto her body. Othüü was still lying on the ground. Her husband was seemingly irritated and nervous; he asked the shaman whether his wife was coming back. The shaman answered that Othüü was strongly polluted by a defilement deriving from vodka (*ih buzartai, arihni dev buzartai*). Two people put Othüü back into a sitting position, and her teacher pressed the harp and a blue ritual scarf against her forehead. Othüü reacted with single syllables sung in a loud voice "haa, haa, ... haaa" while bouncing on the ground. Her husband pressed her harp back into her hand, and she again plucked the harp. Interrupting the play with laughter and groaning noises of "aaa, ooo", she moved her body sideways and forward while swinging the tassels of the harp from side to side. Finally, single words came out of her mouth: "*horlon ... Hodon ... horlon ... Hodon ... Aavaa ... tolgoi sanaa... aav... aav min ... malgai bish ... huvtaistai bish ... medehgüi ... medehgüi ... malgai*". "Harming [?], ... my father of Hodon [addressing an male *ongod* by his name], ... no headdress, ... no clothes, [meant is the shamanic armor] ... [I] don't know, ... [I] don't know, ... hat". After she had stopped talking, her teacher decided to bring her back. Badrah unwrapped a small paper bag from which he poured some red powder into a bottle of vodka, and her husband offered Othüü a bottle's cap of this mixture to drink. Her husband said to her in a low voice that he was going to take the harp away from her. Othüü stopped moving. Her husband asked her to bow towards the *ongod* and she followed his

instruction. He handed her a towel and asked her to wipe her eyes and face. The mother commented that her daughter's eyes were bad because shamans had to see a lot.

Still sitting on the ground, Othüü smoked a cigarette and examined the tassels tied to the jaw harp. Then she turned around and looked wide-eyed at the audience, obviously astonished by the presence of a crowd of people. Almost two hours had passed since we entered the ger. Badrah told Othüü to venerate her *ongod* by sprinkling milk. She tried to do so, but her hand was shaking so hard that her husband had to guide it. She sat down on a bed, inspected her *deel*, her gown, and muttered several times that a knife and a little box for tobacco and wool, a traditional man's accessory, which had been tied to her *deel* before, had disappeared. Her husband told her that there had been no tobacco there.

I asked the old shaman about the obstacles that hindered his disciple to receive her *ongod* and perform properly. Badrah explained his apprentice's failing by pollution from vodka: strangers had brought her vodka and had cheated her by asking for a divination for an already dead person, which in turn had scared the *ongod*. Othüü asked whether her two *yum* ("things", a term used to talk about *ongod* without calling them as such) had arrived (*orj irsen*). Badrah answered that the high *tenger* (lit. sky, here used to address a powerful *ongod*) had not arrived because she was contaminated. Badrah handed her the bottle with the mix of vodka and powder and instructed her how to wash her body on three consecutive evenings. He asked his disciple whether it was true that she had drunk vodka, which Othüü confirmed, so the teacher forbade her to drink for a week. Furthermore, the teacher demonstrated how she could tug the jaw harp to achieve a better sound. Soon after, the old shaman was met by a man on motorbike and left the place. Othüü said that her teacher was right, that she drank vodka. After recalling the magical deeds of her grandmother, Othüü and her husband set off for the north by motorbike. When Davaanyam and I arrived back at the family we were staying with, one daughter, who had been present at the seance, was entertaining some family members by imitating Othüü's attempt to shamanize.

### **A failed seance of the young man Ganbaa**

For the night, the old shaman had arranged his last task in the small settlement: the instruction of the young man Ganbaa with drum and armor. Davaanyam and I had already visited the home of the young man the previous day. At our visit, we had found the head of the household, Ganbaa's mother Dejid, while she was preparing festive food, supported by her married daughter and other visitors. Her son Ganbaa, the mother said, would shamanize for the first time with the drum. She said that her son venerated the *ongod* for his own sake only and did not know anything about the shamans' affairs. The mother vaguely addressed what people in the neighborhood told about the skills of the young man: that he had summoned his *ongod*, but that the *ongod orj ireegüi*: that the *ongod* had not

yet entered the body of the shaman and had not talked yet. After the mother's short comment on her son's shamanizing, the people entertained each other with stories about shamans who had lived long ago and reminisced about how *id shidtei*, how powerful their magic had been.

When we arrived on the evening of the seance, the mother Dejid, who had openly received us the other day, was not pleased to see me again. The *ongod*, she expressed her disquiet, would be angered by the presence of a foreigner. Undecided on what to do – I had received the explicit permission to attend the teaching from both the young disciple and his teacher and was curious to see the teaching of the disciple, but I felt uncomfortable to stay in view of the mother's disapproval – Davaanyam and I sat down right next to the door. This place holds the lowest prestige in the social hierarchy of a Mongolian *ger* and, like neighbors' children who usually occupy this place, we silently observed the preparations for the seance, hoping that the mother would change her mind by the beginning of the seance. The old Badrah addressed our presence and said that I would not constitute an intrusion, but it would be better to offer a white *hadag*, a ritual scarf, to the *ongod*, which we did not have with us.



Photograph 24: The shaman Badrah in his home, examining his divining mirror (06.08. 2004).

During the preparations, which went on for hours, neighbors came in to attend the teaching. Badrah and the blacksmith Mishig held an expert conversation about the appropriate kind of incense, about the orderly course of a seance, and about the magical capacities of earlier shamans. From time to time the blacksmith Mishig rotated the drum over the stove to dry it. On a table in the northern part of the room, the offerings for the *ongod* were arranged: the table was laden with a sheep's back (*uuts*), a plate with milk products (lit. "white food", *tsagaan idee*), and pastries in the form of the sole of a shoe (*ul*

*boov*). These offerings were far richer than the usual small plate with biscuits and sweets prepared for a seance; they were rather similar to the delicious dishes served on a wedding or on the New Year holiday. The disciple Ganbaa and his mother Dejid adorned a small pine tree with colored ribbons. The small tree would be enlivened in the seance and later offered as a gift (*örgöl*), to the *lus*, the spiritual lords of a river. Ganbaa told one of the incoming spectators that he had possessed the drum and armor for two or three years already but that it would be the first time he would shamanize with it.

Shortly before midnight, the blacksmith dressed Badrah in the gown of his disciple. I was astonished, as I had never heard nor seen that a teacher shamanizes in the armor and with the drum of the disciple; however, I had before only attended a few teachings that were conducted by jaw harp. The rangy old man looked impressive in the armor with the high feathers of a big vulture (*tass*) on the top of the headdress and with the long tassels covering his face. The gown and headdress that turned the person into a huge figure seemed to belong to a powerful shaman rather than to a disciple. Badrah beat the drum in the rhythm of a walking horse for a long time; he then bowed before the household fire, turned to the north and bowed before the *ongod* hanging on the wall. The rhythm of the drumbeat changed into a trot, as did the movements of the shaman's body. One could hear the cries of a cuckoo and of a crow before the shaman started singing. Ganbaa and his mother fiddled with a tape recorder that was not working. I offered them my mini disk to record the seance; thereby I mentioned that an *ongod* had already arrived and was talking. Hearing this, the mother winced in surprise. Then she shooed me out of her home, along with a German student who was also present. Back at our hosts' some kilometers away, we could surprisingly still hear the drumming of the seance; I then realized that it was not possible to shamanize by drum without the whole neighborhood taking notice of it.

In the late morning, Davaanyam and I again passed by the family's place before leaving the settlement. We found the old shaman and his disciple still sleeping, and the mother cleaning the *ger*. Dejid received us in a cheerful and chatty manner. She frankly told us that her son had not been able to shamanize, that the *ongod* had not arrived and entered his body (*ongod orj ireegüi*). At that moment, I was glad that she had thrown us out; otherwise, I could have been held responsible for the failure of the seance, which had caused large expenses for the obviously poor family. Later, Badrah and the blacksmith Mishig made a ritual offering for the family's *seter*, a white gelding dedicated as mount for the *ongod*, in front of the *ger*. Nearby, a single fat male sheep was waiting in an enclosure. I assumed it the compensation for the teacher's instruction. Davaanyam and I went on to the raft in Dood Tsagaan Nuur, lying around fifteen kilometer to the north, to see whether the shaman Baljir had come back from his visit to Hogrogo in the far north.

As Baljir did not return back home the following day, we left his family in the early evening to visit the family of Davaanyam's brother close to the village of Renchinlhümbe.



On the forty-kilometer-long way we passed Badrah's home and, as usual, we stopped for a short visit. The old man was lying in bed, obviously exhausted after his several day-long engagements in Höndii. We asked him what had happened during the seance of the young man Ganbaa. Badrah explained that he himself shamanized in the paraphernalia of his disciple to warm up the disciple's armor and drum. He called his disciple's *ongod* and they communicated as they were expected to do. Thereupon, the young man started to shamanize and the *ongod* arrived and left immediately (*ongodoo ireed yavsan*), without talking. His disciple, Badrah explicated, was afraid of his *ongod*; this was why the spirits did not behave properly. Besides, the young man did not know a *tamlaga*, an invocation chant to call his *ongod*. As he did not recite the *tamlaga*, the *ongod* did not respond.

Further, we were curious to hear about the family from Ulaanbaatar, and Badrah told us that the head of the family originated from Bayanzürh in the Darhad area and that they had first consulted him the previous winter when he had gone to Ulaanbaatar for a treatment in the hospital. Several years ago, the family's son had become "seeing" (*üzdeg*) and his mind had turned bad (*mederleg muutsan*). The family consulted a well-known Buryat shaman in Dornod. This shaman, Badrah said, instructed the young man inadequately, as he used magic and the disciple did not realize what was happening. Finally, the shaman equipped the disciple with a drum made of goatskin. Darhad shamans do not take any skin but that of a three-year-old hind to make a drum. As the drum is perceived as the mount of the shaman and the spirits during the seance, Davaanyam and Badrah mockingly wondered how a man should ride on a goat. Badrah continued that despite the initiation by the Buryat shaman, the health of the young man did not improve. Finally, the family consulted him while he stayed in Ulaanbaatar the previous winter. Badrah diagnosed that the young man's sister should have become a shaman instead of her brother, and that only she could cure her brother by becoming a shaman herself. Badrah recommended that, like his sister, the young man should shamanize according to the Darhad tradition and, following the shaman's recommendation, the family had visited the Darhad area to let their adolescent children become shamans.

What I have translated as "shamanizing" and "instructing" respectively, is in the local manner of talking expressed by the same term, *böölöh*, "to shamanize", deriving from the term *böö*, shaman. People use the verb "to shamanize" both intransitively and transitively: they use it to talk about a shaman performing a seance, as well as to talk about a shaman teaching a disciple or about a shaman treating a client.

### **Failings despite multiple authorizations**

Exceptional is not only the concentration of disciples at the same place and during a short period. All the disciples we met in the settlement of Höndii *bag* were in a liminal status -

they were designated to become shamans but they were not, or not yet, able to shamanize properly. All of them failed in the main task of a shaman, to communicate with *ongod*. Although the disciples invoked their *ongod*, they could not literally embody them – thus to make the *ongod* enter their body and talk with their voice. Only Othüü succeeded in saying some words after two hours of exercise. The failings of the disciples were usually expressed with “*ongodoo hüleej avaagüi*” or “*ongod orj ireegüi*”: (the shaman) could not receive the *ongod* or the *ongod* did not enter (the body of the shaman).<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, it is remarkable that the apprentices had already prepared the drum and armor, although they had not yet been able to shamanize by jaw harp. Usually, disciples first shamanize by jaw harp and only when they are skillful on the harp and treat clients by their shamanizing do they acquire armor and drum to shamanize at night. Nyamsüren, the elderly woman from Mörön, explained that she hoped it would be easier to shamanize by drum than by jaw harp; the young man Ganbaa had received the drum and armor immediately after the harp. Concerning the people from Ulaanbaatar, it seems obvious that in view of high travel costs they prolonged their stay to make the drum and the gown, to collect all the needed paraphernalia on a single trip. Othüü received on the first attempt to shamanize from her *ongod* the order to prepare the paraphernalia. During her second instruction, when she was hardly able to communicate with her *ongod*, the only thing her *ongod* addressed was again the paraphernalia.

With the exception of the youngster from Ulaanbaatar, I heard reasons explaining the failing of the disciples. Badrah explained the failure of the young man Ganbaa with his fear of his *ongod* and his lack of an invocation chant: if the apprentice himself did not talk, how should the spirits? Othüü’s problem was according to her teacher’s divination, that she had received visitors who had brought vodka to her home and asked for a divination for an already dead person, which scared the *ongod*. It is said that *ongod* only respond to living people. The woman from Mörön explained her inability with her advanced age. Although the rationalizations of the failings were different, the reasons were found in the behavior of the disciple, to which the *ongod* reacted by not entering the disciple’s body and by not talking. People concluded that a disciple was not able to shamanize.

When these disciples talked about how they got into shamanizing, they told the same narratives as successful shamans: they said that they had been ill and consulted a shaman, who diagnosed that they had to shamanize. Furthermore, they all were said to be descendants of earlier shamans. All of them had a well-known shaman as teacher; the elderly woman from Mörön was the disciple of the shaman Baljir, the others were Badrah’s apprentices. In sum, all of the failed apprentices had multiple sources of authorization: an

<sup>6</sup> The expression “*ongodoo hüleej avaagüi*”, with the *ongod* as subject is grammatically ambiguous (lit. meaning “my *ongod* did not receive). When I asked “who is not receiving whom” people answered that the shaman was not able to receive the *ongod* in his body. The use of the term *ongod* as subject, instead of direct object, might indicate that the *ongod*, not the shaman, is perceived as deciding actor.

illness narrative, a shaman's recommendation to become a shaman, ancestor shamans and a well-known shaman as a teacher. Despite these authorizations they failed in the performance of the seance. The first conclusion deriving from these episodes of failure is obviously that not all people elected by the spirits' call are automatically able to perform a proper seance. This insight questions an exclusive view on the becoming of shamans as being coerced by a shamanic illness sent by ancestor spirits. Rather, the failures and their rationalizations imply that the disciples' agency, responsibilities, and individual capacities are articulated in the spirits' election.

There is another indication that the becoming of shamans is not coerced solely by the spirits' call. I met people who told me that they had the shamanic illness during their youth, that a shaman had advised them to shamanize and that they had shamans among their ancestors. Nevertheless, they did not become shamans. Instead, they rejected the spirits' call. In this case, people sometimes asked a shaman to calm the *ongod*, to persuade the *ongod* to give up the demand and to stop the infliction. When I asked about the reason, they said that they just did not want to become a shaman, or that their parents considered it too dangerous in view of the repression at that time. People who refused the spirits' call show that the spirits' demand can be manipulated; disciples not being able to follow the spirits' call show that the making of shamans includes also the individual capacities of the person, above and beyond the spirits' selection. Therefore, I suggest approaching narratives about shamanic illness, spiritual calls and shaman ancestors as fields of authorization and legitimization rather than as chains of causes and effects. Furthermore, also people who do not shamanize review experiences of inexplicable illness and have shamans amongst their ancestors. However, the experiences are only then molded into an authorizing narrative if a would-be shaman is able to perform the seance and achieves recognition as a shaman by clients.

### **Authentication instead of categorization**

I take the episodes of failure furthermore as a starting point to blur the term "shaman" as a category in the sense of a delimitation of practitioners based on fixed criteria. The question about a categorical distinction arose when I attempted to count the Darhad shamans. The above-discussed disciples were designated to become shamans, they were using shamanic paraphernalia, they were instructed by reputed shamans, they were venerating and summoning *ongod*, however they had not achieved so far to perform the central communication with spirits. Should these disciples be counted as shamans? Alternatively, should a category "shamans" better encompass only those persons shamanizing with armor and drum, as the widespread image of a shaman is centered on the drum and armor? However, shamans state that shamanizing by jaw harp does not differ from shamanizing by drum; others narrow this statement by arguing that shamanizing by drum is more powerful

than by jaw harp. Obviously, the performance by drum is more impressive. If the category “shaman” included only those with drum and armor, Badrah, one of the most respected inspirational practitioners in the area, would be excluded as he owned no drum. His disciple Ganbaa however would be included, as he possessed a drum and armor, although he had not been able to shamanize. Furthermore, shall the category “Darhad shamans” include shamans originating from the Darhad area but who live in Mörön or Ulaanbaatar? Shall the category even encompass Badrah’s young disciples from Ulaanbaatar whose father is a Darhad?

Hamayon (1995a: 20) argued that shamanist societies make a distinction between shamans recognized by their community and people who merely shamanize:

In this respect, one should not confuse *shamanizing* (i.e. indulging in an individual practice void of ritual value for the community), which is more or less open to everyone in most shamanistic societies, and *acting as shaman*, which is reserved for those who have been recognized as such by their community. Shamanistic societies never confuse the behaviour of the shaman with that of the shamanizing individual (Hamayon 1995a: 20; her emphasis).

Indeed, some Darhad people say that they shamanize in private, for the sake of their families only, without aspiring to become known as shamans. These persons call themselves secret shaman (*nuuts böö*), an expression which is also used for shamans which maintained their practice in hiding during socialism. However, I have a problem in following Hamayon with the clear delimitation of a category of shamans recognized by their community: the Darhad are not a community of shamanists that select shamans to carry out the rituals for communal affairs. I will discuss thoroughly in the next chapter that the acknowledgment and refusal of people performing as shamans is a highly disputed affair.

For reasons of counting, I neglected local processes of appreciation and contestation. After numerous attempts to categorize among the shamanizing people, I finally distinguished ambitious persons working for clients from disciples and people who shamanize in private only. Disciples and private practitioners I counted as “shamanizing people” instead of “shamans”. A very rough summary of my counting looks as follows: I became acquainted with almost sixty shamanizing people of the Darhad and of the small group of neighboring Tuva/Tsaatan; around forty of them were shamans who shamanized for clients, the rest were either disciples or people who shamanized “secretly”.<sup>7</sup> My categorization is ultimately not so far away from Hamayon’s, with the distinction that I

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<sup>7</sup> Among the forty-one shamans offering their services to clients I met, ten persons shamanized not with drum and armor but with jaw harp solely. Of this category, ten lived in the provincial center of Mörön or in Ulaanbaatar. Among the ambitious shamans, women shamans accounted for around forty percent, and these lived mainly in Mörön and Ulaanbaatar (see next chapter). In the number of ambitious shamans, I included the four Tuva shamans living as reindeer herders in the taiga. Of the rest of the almost twenty shamanizing persons, I assigned around half as disciples and the other half as privately shamanizing people. Of the shamans I interviewed, two passed away during the period of my fieldwork. Besides the shamanizing people I met personally, I heard of about twenty more shamanizing Darhad, living either in the Darhad area or in other parts of the country.

focus on the ambitions of individual persons as shamans and do not presuppose their recognition by a community. Furthermore, I am conscious that the categorical delimitation is artificial and rather reflects the scholarly interest of categorization and counting than local concerns.

Local discourses are not concerned with categorical distinctions. There are different terms to address male shamans (*zairan*) and females (*udgan*), and there is a gender-neutral term, *böö*. However, people usually use the verb and say somebody is shamanizing (*bööldög*). In contrast to Hamayon's claim, to describe a person as shamanizing does not mean that the person is perceived as private practitioner only but is rather an expression used for persons perceived as shamans. The nouns, *udgan* and *zairan* are often used as a title. When local people however call a shaman *tom zairan* ("big shaman") or *hündetgelen zairan* ("adored shaman") it may well be that they use the title in an ironic sense; by this strategy of ridicule they not only point to the presumed aspirations of the shaman but also contribute to undermining her or his recognition.

Instead of categorizations, local concerns are occupied with the magical abilities of particular persons. Thus local discussions do not bear on the question "what is a shaman?" but rather on "who is a shaman?" or, more precisely, "who is a powerful shaman?" or "who is a real shaman?". Locals do not agree about whom to accept as shaman and further they do not agree on the deciding criteria. The ascription of being a "real" or a "powerful" shaman depends, first of all, on the perspective of the speaker and on the context of the conversation. The same practitioner can be venerated as powerful and honorable shaman by one speaker and be contested by the next one. The appreciation can include the assessment of a shaman's earlier treatment and the performance of the seance, it can include a discussion of whether the person in question has *udam*, shamanic ancestors, or it can include loyalty to relatives or neighbors or the valuation of the person's character. Often, the opinions are not based on personal experiences but rather reflect dominant discourses.

More than in delimiting categories of practitioners based on criteria set by myself, I am interested in these local processes of legitimization and contestation of shamans and shamanizing people. In the following, I will focus on the traditional fields of legitimization, the shamanic illness and shamanic ancestors. I call these fields "traditional" because they are usually part of the narratives of shamans and they dominate scholarly accounts about how persons become shamans. The shamans themselves as well as the accounts in the literature present the becoming of shamans as a chain of causal incidences provoked by the impact of spirits. I do not attempt to replace the infliction of spirits with people strategically pursuing solely their own interest; yet my analysis will focus on the social processes involved in the making of shamans beyond the selection by spirits.

The local processes of authentication and legitimation may also include the engagement of outsiders, of clients from far away, of tourists and particularly of anthropologists. By introducing myself as an anthropologist, coming from distant Switzerland to study Darhad shamans, I animated locals to talk about shamans and thereby to engage in the authentication and contestation of the shamans living in their neighborhood. By interviewing shamans, I contributed to their legitimation: listening to and writing down the shamans' biographies, I took part in the forming of diverse experiences into a labeled illness narrative; and by my collecting of ancestors' names I contributed to the constitution of shamanic genealogies. Finally, by presenting persons as shamans in my dissertation, I contribute to their international reputation. Therefore, I include scholarly accounts as part of the processes of shamans' legitimation into my analysis. Now, I will first discuss the field of illness by introducing an extraordinary illness narrative I heard. Thereafter, I will analyze the subject of ancestor shamans to contend and contest a person's shamanship.

### **How the young Tulgat became a shaman**

Usually people started their account about how they became shamans by mentioning that they fell ill and hence consulted a well-known shaman, who diagnosed that spirits caused the illness and that the only way to cure the illness was to become a shaman. Often the shamans referred to this illness by the expressions "repeatedly falling" (*unadag*) or "twitching and falling" (*tataj unasan*). Bawden (1997) translated the latter notion with "to have convulsions" and along with the term sickness (*tataj unadag övchin*), as "epilepsy". A further way of talking about their period of illness was to declare that the body turned bad (*biye muutsan*). The shamans' statements coincide with the widespread depiction of initial shamanic illness in the literature, where it is often identified as epileptic seizures.

However, shamans who mentioned briefly that they had been "falling" left me with nothing more than an image of a sickness called epilepsy and gave me little insights into the illness experience the person talked of. Asking shamans about their concrete experiences during the period of earlier illness, I gathered an array of symptoms: people said that their "mind became mixed up" (*uhaan samchihsan*), that they became mad (*galzuursan*), that they saw specters or ghosts (*hii üzegdel*) or other things that did not exist. Shamans further said that they talked nonsense without being conscious of it, that they talked during their sleep, that they left alone for the forest where they stayed for days, that they suffered attacks of fear and anxiety, and that they lost consciousness and fell. The expressions for the illness experience and the explanations are related to both extraordinary behavior as well as a change in the state of mind.

Although the subject of illness was a common element of conversations with shamans, it was only once that I saw a manifestation of the illness with my own eyes and that I heard a

lively and long account about the initial illness. It was by Tulgat in summer 2004, a young man of eighteen years who was just in the process of becoming a shaman. So as to show his experiences as being embedded in local processes of authentication, I will not start with the meeting with the young man but with the moment when we first heard about him. We met Tulgat three weeks before we attended the disciples' instruction in Höndii *bag*. In contrast to those episodes of preliminary failure, the case of Tulgat looked at the time of our meeting to become a story of success.

In late July 2004 I accompanied Davaanyam on a short visit to a maternal relative, *nagats*. The old man Dūjii spent the summer with his wife Ichinhorol and several of their children and grandchildren close to our route in Hurgant, a wide river valley and summer quarter of herders belonging to the Soyoo *bag* of Ulaan Uul *sum*. On the way, Davaanyam mentioned that he had heard that his relative had recently had a stroke and that a new young shaman had cured him. When we arrived at the old couple's, the old man seemed to have recovered a bit and he recounted the events of the past weeks. He told us about the visit of Tulgat, his wife's daughter's son, who had told them that the chosen locality was not suitable for the family's camp (*nutag taarahgüi*), and that the recent loss of livestock was due to an inspirational infliction of angry spirits. The young man recommended the family to move the camp a bit in order to appease the spirits. The couple did not listen to the grandson; after all, they stayed in an area where the wife's parents had also spent their summers. Later, the old man had the stroke. Tulgat visited the family again, he shamanized once more and repeated that the locality was not suitable and that the family should move their camp. This time the family heeded his advice and moved. A few days before our visit, Tulgat had shamanized the third time for the family, this time at their new place.

The old man said that before he was seeing Tulgat, he had not believed (*shütdeggüi*). He thought that the present day shamans were all profit shamans (*ashig böö*). However, what the young man Tulgat said became *ünen*, true, and so he came to believe in Tulgat. How did he know that this shaman was true? When he was young, the old man answered, he had seen many shamans, both Darhad and Tuva. In earlier times, he said, shamans were the only entertainment in the area. Because he had seen many shamans before, he knew that this shaman was true. To support his assessment he described how Tulgat had put a cup of water on the table in front of the *ongod* before shamanizing, and how after the seance the cup had been filled with *arts*, incense, and that several people had been present and had witnessed it. It is noteworthy that the old man did not say that the experience made him believe in shamans in general or in shamanism, and that further he did not talk about being converted to a belief in spirits. He merely said that the experience had made him trust in the inspirational capacities of this particular shaman.

In order to visit the young man the next day, we left our horses in the area and hired a jeep to go back to the village of Ulaan Uul from where we had just arrived. Entering the

small *ger* at the outskirts of the village, we found a young woman who told us that her brother had left to collect berries. We stayed sitting on the beds, silently sipping our milk tea, knowing that the young man might come back in the evening but just as likely might not. A wooden showcase on the armoire in the place of honor (*hoimor*) displaying a white, longish figure made out of fabrics and feathers, caught my attention. The puppet was winged and had a metallic arch on the back, to which a small horse and two *shagaa*, anklebones, were tied with red yarn. In the home of a shaman, I considered the figure to be an *ongod*. However, the figure rather brought to mind images of angels than resembling the usual *ongod*, who were materialized by simple pieces of fabric hanging on the wall. I moreover could not remember that I had ever seen an *ongod* of such a kind in historical pictures.

After a short while, a young man wearing a military cap and trousers entered the low door, crossed the room on the eastern female side signaling therewith that he was familiar with the household, and sat down on a stool on the northwestern edge, the place of the household head. He lit a cigarette, and then his hand holding the cigarette began to tremble. The man inhaled deeply, the trembling became stronger, until the whole body was shaking. Neither he nor we spoke. Davaanyam and I, only assuming that the person we were looking for was sitting in front of us, gazed at the young man whose strange body movements made me feel uncomfortable, scared even. Finally, Davaanyam broke the silence, asking the young man whether he did not feel well. The young man answered that he was alright but that his body reacted like this when he was visited by people whose names he did not know. He then asked our names, and after we had introduced ourselves, his body calmed.



Photograph 25: Tulgat sitting in front of his shamanic headgear and his *ongod* (30.07. 2004).



I started to ask some questions, and Tulgat reported that he had been shamanizing for some months already, that his shamanic gown and drum were prepared but not yet in use; that his father had already made an armor before but had then sold it to a passing foreigner. He further told us that his teacher was an old Tuva man from the neighborhood who was only privately shamanizing and not known as shaman. Tulgat revealed that he did not know his *udam*, his shamanic inheritance, but that his teacher told him he had shaman ancestors from his father's side. Davaanyam asked him about the root-stick with "faces" standing on both sides of the armoire with the showcase. Tulgat answered that these were roots of shamans' trees (*böö mod*) from places with spiritual masters (*ezentei gazar*). By recounting how he had found the roots, he entered into a narration about his extraordinary experiences during the previous months. He gave the impression of no longer briefly answering an anthropologist's questions, but of talking about what he himself was concerned with and of reliving the experiences, which he depicted in detail and by jumping back and forth between different events. Sometimes, I could not follow his emphases, or I could not see the relation of a certain aspect to the whole account. The following paragraph is a summary of what I understood from his account, arranged into a chronological order.

Tulgat was neither believing (*shütdeg*) nor was he curious (*sonirhoh*) about shamans. He was an ordinary young man and mainly interested in passing his time together with his friends. His life changed the previous autumn when one afternoon he heard the calves being restive; checking what had happened, he found an old jaw harp in the calves' enclosure. He put the instrument in his pocket and forgot about it. Later that day, when he lay down, the harp dug into his leg and thus he remembered it. He tried the harp out but its sound was rattling. The following two weeks he had the jaw harp on him. Once he sat down on a big rock in the forest nearby and played the old jaw harp. While he was plucking it, the harp's tongue broke and sprang over the rock. Tulgat commented that this happened exactly as he had dreamed about it some days earlier. He went into the mountains where he threw the harp away. He spent around three weeks straying through the mountains, completely alone; he vagrantly went here and there, going further and further, advancing deeper into unknown areas; he was scared he might get lost or even die. Returning home, he stayed overnight but, feeling uncomfortable and anxious, he again ran into the mountains. Although he knew that it was dangerous to stay in the mountains alone, and although he was scared, he could do nothing else but go. Once he dreamed about a white man who pursued to kill him. The next day he came to the place he had dreamed about. There he found a shaman's tree, and he venerated the master of the place. Back home, his father forged a new harp for him but Tulgat did not care about the harp and left for the village.

His "awakening" (*sergelj bolj*) was in early spring: he spent the holiday of Tsagaan Sar, the Mongolian New Year, in the village of Ulaan Uul. For several days he visited relatives

and friends to celebrate the holiday. During a visit, Tulgat collapsed and was brought to the hospital, where he spent a week being without consciousness, (*uhaangüi*) and staying between life and death. Later, people reported to him all that he had said during his delirium, and that he had been plucking the jaw harp. In this week, the *böögiiin tamlaga* entered him. Here, the expression means that the *ongod* started to talk. His parents wanted him to become a disciple of the shaman Yura from the village, yet his *ongod* warned him against choosing this shaman as his teacher, that this would threaten his life. Instead, he opted for his neighbor Tsevegдорж, an old Tuva man shamanizing for his family only. The young man regained life by the help of the old man, who enlivened his harp and the *ongod*.

Before, the young man Tulgat had never seen another shaman at work; only by becoming a shaman himself did he become curious about the shamans' affairs and *shütdeg*, believing. Tulgat lost interest in being with his friends and in the kind of life he had lived before and even condemned his former life and admonished that one should *shütej zalbiraaj javah heregtei*, that one should lead a life guided by believing and praying. Tulgat venerated one *tiiren ongod*, which he explained to be an *ongod* deriving from nature and not a former human as *ongod* in their majority are. Furthermore, a big crow would tell him everything and thus he knew also to recognize good or bad people. Tulgat was dreaming about future events; for example, he said that the night before he had dreamt he would receive visitors from far away. Today he had intended to go picking berries but while he was at his neighbors', he heard a car arriving at his home and thus he returned.

On the evening of our meeting, just as Tulgat was preparing to shamanize at my request, a drunken man entered and asked Tulgat for a divination. Tulgat advised him calmly but authoritatively to come back at a later date and to arrive sober. After the man had left, Tulgat commented that the same man had laughed about him when they had met in spring and the man had been drunk then, too. He seemed to be rather displeased that only a few months later the man visited him to ask for his advice. Tulgat put on his headdress and started to shamanize by jaw harp. His headdress was different from all the ones I had seen before; it was a helmet made of deerskin with a white eagle's head on the top. As distinct as the headdress and the *ongod* were, so too was the seance: it started with a long invocation, which retold in a hasty manner how Tulgat roamed about through the mountains and the veneration he made there, evoking the fear he had had during his wanderings. The invocation was suddenly interrupted by a cuckoo's cry, followed by derisive laughter and further bird's cries. Then an *ongod* started to sing in a light, mellow melody. The two different styles, the veneration that gave the impression of a hounded individual, and the raised floating mellow singing, were alternating, interrupted by longer sessions with sounds of animals, murmuring wind, and laughter. After finishing his chants, Tulgat doffed his hat, sat on a bed and asked whether we had any questions. Davaanyam replied that he had already asked a question in the afternoon. Tulgat took a divining mirror, rotated it, and

gazed on the mirror. He revealed that we should not enter the home of an old person, that this would become dangerous for us, and that we should be careful. He stopped talking and smoked a cigarette. He moaned and yawned, and he started again to talk.

He spoke in a strange way, as if he were not himself or was talking during a dream. He repeated parts of the conversation with the drunken man, parts of our conversation and parts of his earlier narrations about his roaming through the mountains. Repeatedly he assured that his task was difficult and admonished himself to do good deeds and to avoid bad ones. He talked in several voices and worked himself up into a fervent and frenetic monologue, interrupted only by laughing and crying. Then he started to whistle the *ongod's* melody. I had never heard people whistling in a *ger* before, and when I had done so, people had asked me to stop and explained that it would attract malicious spirits. After another peaceful chant, Tulgat talked to Davaanyam and I again, still in a strange way as if possessed: he said that we were on a long journey, crossing named rivers, and he warned us again that we should be cautious about entering an old person's home. He continued with venerations and addressed issues I did not understand, and finally he talked about visiting his brother once the weather turned nice.

This was the most outstanding seance of a Darhad shaman I have attended. It lasted an hour and a half; during the first half, the shaman was performing with jaw harp and headdress, thus signaling that he had transgressed the ordinary and was performing a shamanic seance. However, after Tulgat had put his paraphernalia aside, he continued to shamanize without utensils and without adhering to the usual progression of a Darhad seance described in the previous chapter. The melody, the chants and the kind of communication with spirits was unique in this seance. It was also exceptional that the illness narrative was part of the seance.

Tulgat's illness narrative included several of the elements which other shamans mentioned very briefly: a loss of consciousness, a madness, dreams, deliriums, anxiety, leaving home for the forest and staying there alone. In similar words, already Badamhatan (1965: 225) had described the shamanic illness. The author wrote that the *ongod* possessed the person who should become a shaman and this person felt worried, anxious, disturbed, delirious, talked nonsense, and showed the "falling sickness". After one of the earliest conversations on the subject, when a shaman told me that he was *tataj unadag*, I asked my guide Chinbat, what the term meant precisely. Chinbat laughed about the question and said that the term did not mean much or anything exceptional as falling was a widespread phenomenon in the area. This answer did not help to give me a notion of the illness of people before they become shamans. However, by referring to the commonness of the phenomenon and, further, by his laughing he characterized the illness as a disputed field of shamans' legitimacy.

To say, like Tulgat did, that one was not interested in the shaman's affairs before becoming one is quite common and is insofar a legitimizing strategy as the statement emphasizes that one did not choose deliberately to become a shaman but was forced to. The shaman Baljir for example stated, that he was not *shütdeg* (believing), neither *shar* (yellow, referring to Buddhism) nor *har* (black, referring to shamans), but that he was *ulaan* (red), a communist. As a further strategy of legitimation, it is widespread among the older shamans to situate the beginning of their illness attacks in the period between childhood and adulthood. A standard way to refer to the illness is the sentence: "When I was thirteen I became falling". The early time in life and the potentially long duration of the suffering serves to underline the seriousness of the infliction.

I can remember only one shaman who explicitly stated that he was not ill before he became a shaman. It was the shaman Lhagvajav, living in Soyoo, Ulaan Uul. When telling how he became a shaman he did not mention an illness period and, when I asked directly, he denied having been ill. My interpretation is that he did not consider it necessary to have this legitimization as he is the son of the Nadmid *udgan*, who was before her death in autumn 2001 a nation-wide renowned shaman. Around a year later, Lhagvajav became the disciple of the shaman Nergüi, who was a neighbor of the Nadmid *udgan* and one of the earliest of the postsocialist shamans. In March 2003 I accompanied Nergüi to his disciple Lhagvajav's for his second tutorial: the instruction was a short affair, first the teacher shamanized by jaw harp and then the disciple shamanized on his own. The following autumn I met Lhagvajav again and I saw him performing an elaborate seance by drum and armor (see later this chapter).

I will now leave the discussion of the initial illness and turn to the inheritance of shamanship, which seems to be more important for the legitimization of shamans in the local area.

### **How Batmönh's ancestors hindered her shamanizing**

Badamhatan (1965: 225) started his short paragraph about the becoming of a shaman with the remark that "in the old times" people usually became shamans by *udam dagaj*, by inheritance. The succession of shamanship by inheritance is the concern of the second half of this chapter. My interest is in the ways Darhad shamans talked about this inheritance and the relationship to the scholarly depiction of the succession of shamanship. Once more, I will approach the subject with an episode of preliminary failure. I will tell how Batmönh, a fifty-year-old woman, failed in her attempts to shamanize – despite reportedly being *unadag* since infancy and despite having well-known shamanic ancestors both from her father's and her mother's side. In this story, her failure is connected with her shamanic ancestors. The account takes us to the northernmost pastures in Hogrogo, where Batmönh

lives with her children in a small house close to her parents and the families of her sisters, forming together an *ail*, a small group of related households.

Initially, I heard about Batmönh only indirectly without knowing her as a person or even hearing her name. It was in June 2003, when the shaman Umban and I were listening to the recording of his seance of the previous night. The shaman elucidated a passage of an *ongod*'s chant, saying that the *ongod* Narin Buriani Aav was talking about a grandchild who was the disciple of Umban. This general remark was the first hint of Batmönh. I met Batmönh personally some months later in autumn of that year. Davaanyam, my partner and I were on the way to the Eastern Taiga reindeer herders' camp, a destination we later abandoned due to the wintry weather. On the way we met an old friend of Davaanyam's who invited us to stay overnight at his future wife's; he also recommended that I talk to his future father-in-law, an eighty-year-old man who was a shaman's son and knew much about earlier shamans. Sanj, the old man, was indeed interested in meeting with the foreigners visiting his *ail*, however he did not give the impression of being interested in talking about shamans. He just left when I addressed him about the subject. His oldest daughter Batmönh, however, seemed to be delighted to talk about the topic: she told me about her *udam*, that she could identify several shamans among her mother's as well as her father's ancestors; and she told me stories about a brother of her grandmother's, the shaman Damdin *zairan*, whom she could remember. Together we studied the *tamlaga* of the *ongod* Narin Buriani Aav cited in the book of Badamhatan (1965), which I carried with me. I asked her why she did not become a shaman as she was obviously interested in the subject and had an impressive number of shaman ancestors. She answered briefly that there were just no good teachers around.



Photograph 26: Batmönh with her grandson (09.08. 2004)

Our conversation took place while we visited the different homes of the *ail*, in the *ger* of her sister, in her own house, and finally in the *ger* of her parents to pay our respects to her mother Zana. What caught my attention in the parent's home was a photograph showing Lenin with the Mongolian revolutionary Sühbaatar under a picture of Marx hanging on the wall behind the two men. The photo showed Lenin talking to Sühbaatar and putting his hand on Sühbaatar's arm in a gesture of fatherly insistent admonition; Sühbaatar wore a serious expression and pointed to an open booklet on his lap.<sup>8</sup> It was the only occasion that I saw such obvious imagery recalling socialist heroes during my whole fieldwork.



Photograph 27: Marx looking down on Lenin and Sühbaatar (25.09.2003).

When the old Sanj again joined us, I asked him too why he had not become a shaman. This time he answered my question, saying that he had not been believing (*shütdeggüi*), that he had not at all been interested in shamans. When he was young, he had been a party member and had been the chief of the adolescents. As a party member, he said, he knew that monks and shamans had been imprisoned. Today, he commented, we knew that it was a mistake: in the 1930s, the party first studied the lamas, and then they had been arrested and murdered. He told me about two Darhad shamans who had been arrested during the religious purges in the 1930s; the shamans in his family however, although they were practicing, had never been detained. His mother, he said, had burnt her drum twice, once in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, to adapt to socialist policy. She had acquired a new drum and armor in periods of sickness or loss of livestock. In talking about his mother he was referring to Choyogoo *udgan*, his adoptive mother; his genetrix had been a shaman too. Because of his lack of interest, he said, he did not know the shaman's *tamlaga*. However, he

<sup>8</sup> Baabar (1999: XVI, before page 183) showed a similar drawing and commented that there was some doubt whether the meeting between Sühbaatar and Lenin had ever taken place.



kept his mother's *ongod* who were hanging on the northern wall of honor, just beyond the picture showing Marx, Lenin, and Sühbaatar.

The following day we continued on to the shaman Mönhöö, whose summer camp was located only a few kilometers away. Mönhöö is kin to both the old Sanj and his wife Zana: he is the grandson of Sanj's (adoptive) mother and, like Zana, he is a descendant of the *ongod* Narin Buriani Aav. Mönhöö became a shaman in 2003, two years after the early death of his sister, the shaman Bayar. His mother Süren and his sister Bayar had become renowned as shamans shortly before the death of the mother in 1991; the mother was shown in several Mongolian and foreign documentaries, and one of Bayar's seances was seen around the world in Ulrike Ottinger's eight-hour documentary "*Taiga*" (1992).



Photograph 28: Mönhöö in his home in Hogrogo, in front of his drum and *ongod* (28.09. 2003).

Mönhöö told us to our surprise, that he would teach, (*böölüülöh*) his neighbor Batmönh on one of the following nights. He said that his friend Umban had tried to teach her some months ago but that Batmönh had not been able to shamanize in that attempt. Supposing that the disciple and her father had deliberately remained silent about the upcoming teaching, Davaanyam nevertheless returned to ask Batmönh and Sanj whether we could attend the tutorial. Unsurprisingly, they refused. This was the first time that we were not allowed to attend a seance; the second and only other time we were excluded was the teaching of Badrah's disciple Ganbaa reported above; thus, both times people did not want us to witness a teaching session which was expected to be potentially unsuccessful. In contrast, we were never refused to attend a seance of a shaman performing successfully. Sanj further asked Davaanyam not to tell Umban that Mönhöö would teach his daughter so as to avoid angering him. Some days later, we met the old Sanj in the village of Tsagaan Nuur at the home of his sister Batgaa. We visited the home to meet with the son of the old

woman, Erden-Ochir, a disciple of the shaman Umban, who had recommended us visiting his disciple. When we arrived, Sanj was just leaving and Davaanyam asked him about the seance. Sanj answered briefly that his daughter had shamanized; he obviously did not like to talk and his short answer provoked doubts whether his daughter achieved communication with her spirits. Later that autumn we heard from somebody present at the tutorial about the result of the attempt: Batmönh had again failed to perform the seance.

At our visit the following year, in August 2004, Batmönh said frankly that she had not been able to shamanize in the seance the previous year, that she could not receive her *ongod*. She explained her failing with reference to her youth: the shaman Damdin, her paternal grandmother's brother, had told her in the mid-1960s, when she was thirteen years old, that she could become a powerful shaman. However, her father had been opposed to her becoming a shaman and had warned that it could land her in jail. Therefore, Damdin had made a *haalt*, a barrier against the inspirational infliction that was causing her shamanic illness, by giving her a piece of lump sugar. Thereafter, the girl stopped being *unadag*, falling. The shaman Mönhöö, she said, was a good teacher but he alone could not open the barrier set up by the deceased shaman. She reported how her teacher Mönhöö, her father and she together had attempted to open this barrier the previous spring. They wanted to visit the *asar* (the residence) of the *ongod* Ugastagin Eej, who is the spiritual metamorphosis of her great-grandmother Tseveg *udgan* (the mother of Damdin *zairan* and of her father's mother Choyogoo; see Figure 5) to venerate the *ongod* and to request her to open this barrier to enable Batmönh to shamanize. However, they could not realize the planned enterprise: on the day they had set to venerate the *ongod*, the third day of the first new moon in spring, a flood prevented them from crossing the rivers. On the later alternative, on the ninth day of the new moon, the raft necessary for crossing one of the big rivers was missing.

Later that year, I met with her teacher Mönhöö in Ulaanbaatar. He said that his disciple was an honest woman, that she knew the *tamlaga* well but that she had not been able to shamanize, as the *ongod* were *ireed yavsan*, they came and returned immediately. Mönhöö guessed that it would have been better if Batmönh's grandmother had introduced her into shamanizing as a child, and that maybe Batmönh had become too old to start shamanizing. This argument was also put forward by the woman Nyamsüren from Mörön who was the same age, to explain her problems to perform a proper seance. However, hearing the argument from Mönhöö concerning Batmönh does not lack a certain irony as he himself became a shaman at the age of forty-nine years, only some months before taking on Batmönh as a disciple.

Batmönh failed the seance in the same manner as did the young man Ganbaa instructed by the old shaman Badrah. Her teacher Mönhöö described her failing similarly to Ganbaa's teacher Badrah: the *ongod* arrived on the scene and returned immediately without talking.



However, the explanations why the performance failed were different: Badrah said about the young man that he did not know the *tamlaga* and, without being invoked by a *tamlaga*, the *ongod* would not speak. Furthermore, his mother said that he did not know anything about the shamans' affairs. In contrast, Batmönh showed herself interested in shamanic traditions, she had seen shamanic performances when she was young, and her teacher said that she knew the *tamlaga* well. Nevertheless, she also was unable to perform.

In Batmönh's narrative, socialist repression intrudes into the relationship between humans and ancestor spirits. Her account shows how the spirits' call can be manipulated by shamans producing an inspirational halt to the demands of spirits. The memory of socialist repression and the following manipulation of the *ongod*'s call now had become an argument to explain her failing to conduct a proper seance. Outstanding in Batmönh's episode is further that her ancestors played a vital part in the rationalizations of her failing. Her father's mother's brother Damdin *zairan* had said that she had to become a shaman and had later stopped the inspirational illness. In advanced age, when Batmönh decided to start shamanizing, she again intended to ask an ancestor to release the barrier. She planned to ask the next higher authority above Damdin – his mother (turned into an *ongod*). Thus, she held her ancestor shamans responsible both for preventing her from shamanizing and for enabling her to do so. The ancestors involved in these negotiations are both from her father's side, although she could also trace some powerful *ongod* among her mother's ancestors. To interpret this supremacy as a hint at patrilineal transmission would be a rash conclusion, as the powerful entities among her father's shamanic ancestors are mainly women.

### **Shamanic genealogies**

The inheritance of shamanship is predominantly addressed by the two terms *udam* ("origin" or "lineage") and *ovog*, clan. Although shamans as well as scholars emphasize the inheritance of shamanship from ancestors, their focus is different. I start with how shamans talk about their *udam*, the inheritance in terms of the number of generations they represent. Then I switch to the scholarly discussion of the transmission of shamanship. I am particularly interested in the tension produced by the association of shamans with patrilineal clan names, *ovog*, and the cognatic transmission of shamanship and the existence of female shamans. Finally, I will show how ambiguously shamans relate themselves to the scholarly genealogies.

The term *udam* is translated by Bawden's dictionary (1997) as follows:

*Udam*: origin, line, lineage, pedigree

*Udam damjih*: to be hereditary, to be passed on

*Udam zalgah*: to continue the line<sup>9</sup>

The term *udam* was often part of the introductory conversations with shamans. In initial, rather formal and unfamiliar interviews, shamans usually introduced themselves with a number, saying that they were representing the third, the seventh, or even the ninth generation of shamans (*üjiin udamtai böö*). Typically, shamans referred to their *udam* with an odd number, similarly to other numerical evocations.<sup>10</sup> The term *üye*, included in the expression, signifies both “generation” and “bone-joint”, the later being a metaphor historically related to the counting of agnatic generations in view of exogamy rules. The shaman Umban once explained that to pass down shamanship (*udam damjih*) was important: by relaying the shamanic fortitude from generation to generation, the *udam* could be strengthened (*udam hücheer zalguulj yavna*); one takes the strength of the preceding generation to improve one's family's life and to transmit the traditions and fortitude to the following generation.<sup>11</sup> The higher the number of generations with which a shaman introduced her/himself, the more powerful s/he presented her/himself as.

When I enquired in such introductory interviews the names of ancestor shamans my interlocutors usually knew the shamans in the first and second ascending generation by name; then they became quite vague and only summarized further ancestors. Possibly they knew one or more names, but not the particular relationship to them, or did not know names but said that there were x generations back to one well-known ancestor. Ancestor shamans comprised in the count do not necessarily refer to a “line” of ancestors at all but can include an ancestor and his/her brother or sister, or even a vague allusion to earlier generations. I interpret the shamans' evocation of *udam* in numbers as an attempt to enhance their legitimation by claiming a long succession of the shamanic tradition; the higher the stated number, the more weight and power derives from the past and supports the shaman. Asking shamans for the names of all ancestors they had evoked with the generous gesture of dropping a simple number, I often felt that I was bothering them with finicky details.

<sup>9</sup> A further meaning of the term is “breed”; *udam oirtoh* means “inbreed”, *udam züich* means “geneticist”, or *udam san* means “genetic resources”. Therefore, I consider the term to have a biological connotation. Hamayon (1990) translated the similar Buryat term “*udha*” with “essence”.

<sup>10</sup> The use of numerical evocations is widespread, e.g. for groups of shamans or *ongod* titled with numbers, for example *gurvan hairhan*, “the three gracious”, or *doloon nüisdeg böö*, “the seven flying shamans”. Other examples for the use of numerical evocations are numbers of herbs or stones included in a cure (e.g. “nine times nine equals ninety-nine”) and the widespread definition of the odd days of the lunar calendar as good days to carry out a seance.

<sup>11</sup> This conversation took place at his home, 20.06. 2003.

A few people however could recite an impressive number of names and arrayed them in a line, starting with either their father or their mother and going back for several generations. The most impressive of these genealogies were included in a chart showing a “Tsagaan Huular” shamanic genealogy included in Pürev’s (2002) book on shamanism. Around a third of the shamanizing people I met could relate themselves to the ancestors showed in the chart of Pürev.

The chart in the annex of Pürev’s book (2002: 368) is the most well-known page of the book among the Darhad shamans. The author titled his chart “*Mongolin tsagaan huular ovgiin Bayar udgan Tömöjii zaarin narin ug eh*”, which can be translated as: “The origin/genealogy of the Mongolian Tsagaan Huular clan shamans Bayar and Tömöjii” (see Figure 4).<sup>12</sup> I have already mentioned the two shamans in this chapter; Bayar is the deceased sister of the shaman Mönhöö, and Tömöjii is the local nickname of the shaman Nergüi from Tsagaan Nuur. Besides Nergüi, the shaman Baljir is the second of the contemporary Darhad shamans included in the chart. That only these two of the present-day shamans are integrated into the chart might derive from the book being first published in 1998, when the majority of the present-day shamans were not yet shamanizing or at least not yet publicly known. Moreover, the author once admitted in a conversation that he was more interested in the historical shamans, than in the contemporary ones. The chart relates shamans prominently to the Tsagaan Huular *ovog*; shamans however did not usually introduce themselves with an *ovog* name.

Reading Pürev’s chart from the right side of the page, the contemporary or recently deceased shamans can be connected in a line over seven to nine generational steps to the same ancestor *Jotog zairan*, who lived at the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. Thus, the chart shows the inheritance of shamanship as unilineal succession; every shaman can trace his *udam* unambiguously via one line stretching back to the sixteenth century. Reading the chart from the left side, *Jotog zairan* is shown as having four children (three sons and one daughter) who all are labeled shamans. However, only the descendants of one of these children, of *Haj zairan*, are included in the chart. In the following generation, the two sons of *Haj zairan* are both identified as non-shamanizing. In later generations, too, some people included are denoted as *har* (black) suggesting in this context that they did not shamanize. Thus, the chart depicts shamanship as transmitted also via non-shamanizing people, the lines leading to *Baljir zairan* and *Bayar udgan* even while leaving out three successive generations. As some people included in the chart are labeled as lamas, inheritance was even transmitted via Buddhist monks.

<sup>12</sup> My copy of Pürev’s chart adopted the layout of the original; I have changed only some smaller graphics, excluded some nicknames, and transcribed the Cyrillic into Latin letters. Bawden (1997) translated the term *ug eh* as both “origin” and “lineage”; *zaarin* is the old spelling of *zairan*, male shaman.



Remarkable is the existence and position of women in the chart: women are located in the fifth and later generations only; among earlier generations, no women are included. In the fifth generation, three women can be found, and in the sixth generation, six of sixteen ancestors are women. As far as I heard about the lives of people representing these later generations, the women shown in the chart lived in the early twentieth century. Thus, the chart includes women who are remembered as persons by their descendents, but women are absent in earlier generations whose representatives are no longer personally remembered. With the denomination Tsagaan Huular *ovog* (clan), the imagery of unilineal transmission of shamanship, and the predominance of men, the chart produces the impression to show a patrilineage of the Tsagaan Huular clan and an agnatic transmission of shamanship. I will later show that this impression of patrilineage causes ambivalences for present-day shamans in identifying themselves with an *ovog* name.

My own chart (see Figure 5) shows a cluster of shamans anchored in the “lineage” of Pürev. It focuses on the last generations included in Pürev’s diagram, adding some further traces of inheritance not included in Pürev’s chart. My concern was to scrutinize the image of unilineal transmission of shamanship and I therefore aimed to include also cognatic inheritance of shamanship, as far as I knew of. In addition, I aimed to show the recent shamans, who in their majority were not included in Pürev’s chart. This cluster of shamans is the only one I could draw with my data. Beyond the shamans integrated in this drawing, I can relate two or three shamans here or there but I could constitute no second cluster with such dense and numerous relations. The chart given by Pürev is also the only one included in his book. The overlap between the two charts is further no coincidence as the chart of Pürev accompanied me during my fieldwork, where I often compared the collected data with the chart, hoping that I could anchor some of the ancestor names I heard. Furthermore, shamans often referred to the chart of Pürev, saying for example that they did not remember their *udam* exactly but that it was included in Pürev’s book and I should check it up there. Sometimes I studied the chart together with a shaman, who told me the people excluded from the chart. Pürev mentioned in a conversation that he has been researching the Darhad shamans for decades; he originates from Renchinlhümbe and has been collecting his material during frequent visits to his birthplace since the early 1960s, when he accompanied his teacher Badamhatan.<sup>13</sup>

I arranged my chart around the disciple Batmönh discussed above, as the discussion with her in autumn 2003 gave the impulse to link some of the genealogies of single shamans I had collected before. When I visited Batmönh again in summer 2004 I brought forward the discrepancies I had found in my notes, deriving both from contradictory information and my own misunderstandings. Her father Sanj joined our discussion, and shortly he took over the lead, verified and corrected the compilation of kin relationships.

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<sup>13</sup> Conversation in O. Pürev’s home in Ulaanbaatar, 05.11. 2003.



Thus, although I collected the information from different people, my depiction relies mainly on Sanj's perspective. Nevertheless, the chart renders not an "emic" perspective, but mine. It was my decision to integrate the narrations of several shamans into one chart and to show the kin relationships between them; and it was my decision to put together the maternal and paternal inheritance of shamanism in one chart, although people usually enumerated their maternal and paternal ancestors separately. I indicated whether a person is or was shamanizing (as far as people told me) but I did not differentiate between people shamanizing privately or for a public audience. Where I had the information, I differentiated between adoptive parents and genitor/genetrix.<sup>14</sup> Due to the space available, the order of design, and so as to include as many shamans as possible in the chart, I neglected several issues which would have been relevant: I neglected the relational age, of siblings as well as of ancestors. I further excluded all people who are not directly related to shamanizing, which means that either themselves are/were shamanizing or that they make a link to an ancestor who was shamanizing. I have to emphasize that the chart does not show descent in general but is concerned only with the transmission of shamanism. The exclusion of people not used for the constitution of shamanic descent was usually already done during the conversations with shamans: I was asking for shamans among ancestors and my interlocutors answered accordingly.

The chart shows that with a few exceptions the inheritance of shamanism is traced through both male and female ancestors. Besides the offspring of the shaman Baljinnyam (a well-known shaman mentioned in Diószegi's report of 1963), every living shamanizing person is connected to ancestor shamans also via women. Apart from Erdenochir, all contemporary shamanizing people have also female shamans among their shaman ancestors. Batmönh, her teacher Mönhöö, his niece Höörög, and the siblings Mönhjii and Sharhüü traced their *udam* via ancestors both from their mothers' "side" (*nagats*) as well as from their fathers' "side" (*avag*). Like in the chart of Pürev, also in my chart *udam* are traced via ancestors who are not remembered as shamans. The combination of Pürev's and my drawing suggests that among the present-day shamans only Baldandorj and his neighbor Nergüi in Harmai trace the inheritance of shamanism via patrilineal descent only, reaching via these paternal links back to the ancestor Jotog *zairan*. All the further shamanizing people state that they inherited their shamanism both from maternal and paternal ancestors; however not all of these *udam* are included in Pürev's chart; and certainly my drawing does not show all possible traces of inheritance.

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<sup>14</sup> I depicted the relationship between adoptive parents and their adopted children with full lines and marked the adopted children with an asterisk\*. Where I knew it, I connected the parents who lived outside the household in which the child was brought up (the genetrix or genitor of a child adopted out, or the genitor in the case of an extramarital relationship) with dotted lines. Thereby I infringe upon anthropological graphics conventions, which usually show the relationship between genetrix/genitor and child with full lines; I do so because I perceive the adoptive relation as the primary parental relation for children and thus prefer to depict it as a "normal" parental relation.



Photograph 29: The shamans Nergüi and Baldandorj in Harmai, Tsagaan Nuur (25.06. 2003).

The Tsagaan Huular genealogy shown by Pürev's chart was, in a less extensive version, already published in the 1960s: Diószegi (1963: 73), the well-known Hungarian scholar of shamanism, visited the Darhad area in 1960 and he integrated in one of his publications a chart showing a "genealogical tree of a branch of Huular clan". His chart started like the later one of Pürev with the shaman Jotog (spelled as "Dzatagawa"), leading over six generations of males to two shamans living at the time of his visit (however it contained fewer names than the later one by Pürev).<sup>15</sup> Badamhatan (1965: 259) had as well mentioned this succession-line of shamans, starting with the ancestor Jotog (spelled Jitaga) *zairan*. In this shamanic inheritance line, he included only males, some of whom he called not shamanizing. It is notable that Badamhatan mentioned this only in a footnote. Besides the short remark that shamanship was usually hereditary, he did not further discuss the transmission of shamanship. In 1927, the Buryat scholar Sanjeev had visited the Darhad area and mentioned that only those could become shamans who had ancestor shamans (Sanjeev 1930). The author noted two examples of transmission of shamanship, one of a male Tsagaan Huular shaman inheriting shamanship from his mother (who was unmarried and belonged to the Tsagaan Huular); as a second example he mentioned a woman who became a shaman after the death of her brother, who should had become a shaman.

In sum, all twentieth-century sources report that, among the Darhad, shamanship can be inherited by both males and females. Furthermore, these authors, from Sanjeev in the early twentieth century, to Badamhatan and Diószegi and to the contemporary author Pürev, all affiliate Darhad shamans with an *ovog*, clan denomination. It is irritating that the authors did not discuss the existence of women shamans and the cognatic transmission of

<sup>15</sup> Diószegi (1963) stated that the seven generations span a period of 210 years, thus starting in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century; in contrast, Pürev situated the first ancestor at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century.



shamanship in the context of the affiliation of shamans to *ovog*, clans. When women shamans marry, do they contact their father's or their husband's ancestor spirits and on behalf of whose clan or lineage? As shamans are generally associated with power, women shamans can be seen as threat to agnatic succession of authority. Hamayon (1984; 1990: 645 ff.) argued that women shamans and cognatic transmission of shamanship are in conflict with the patrilineal order of clans of shamanistic societies in Inner Asia. In the following, I will approach this tension between cognatic transmission of shamanship and agnatic descent. To introduce this discussion, I will briefly summarize a historical view of the term *ovog*; I follow this with a discussion on how female shamans and cognatic transmission are related to "clans" in Inner Asia, and I will conclude by discussing how shamans relate to the Tsagaan Huular *ovog*.

### Ovog, clans, and the inheritance of shamanship

Vladimirtsov (1948 [1934]) designated the *oboq* as the basic element of social organization in the period of "the ancient Mongols" between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, thus the period preceding Chinggis Khaan.<sup>16</sup> The author explained the *oboq* as "patriarchal" kin organization based on agnatic descent and exogamy, including some ancient cognatic "survivals" giving particular rights to the oldest and the youngest son, living with an individual household economy on common pastures. According to Vladimirtsov, the disintegration of the kin-related social organization started with Chinggis Khaan's rule in Inner Asia: with the constitution of Chinggis Khaan's military organization, the ancient Mongol *oboq* were repartitioned into groups of thousands (*tümen*). Later, after the fifteenth century, the "patriarchal Mongol clans" became replaced by a "nomadic fief" organization constituting territorial-economic units, *otoq*. In that time, the author claimed, the majority of the Eastern Mongols ignored the regime of the clan; only the Western Mongols (Oirat) had retained the clan regime and exogamy. Vladimirtsov did not mention the term *oboq* in the last chapter about the "modern period", starting in the late seventeenth century with Qing rule.

Referring to Vladimirtsov, Badamhatan (1965: 58) claimed that until the turn of the twentieth century, the Darhad *yastan* (nationality) was organized into *ovog*, clans, which strictly followed the rule of exogamy.<sup>17</sup> Badamhatan mentioned that the earlier *ovog* had

<sup>16</sup> In Mongol Studies the term is usually transcribed as *oboq*; Mongolians usually use the contemporary spelling *ovog*; other spellings are *obog*, or *obok*. A related term seems to be *omog*. The term *otoq* however is related not to kin organization but to military-administrative units.

<sup>17</sup> The author used the term "eksogami" from Russian, and added in Mongolian "*harias gerleh yos barimtaldag*", "to follow the rule of marriage with strangers". The term *hari* for "strangers" referred to people perceived as non-kin in presocialist Mongolia, belonging not to the same *yas*, bone, or *ovog* (Bulag 1998: 143). The presocialist Mongol concept of exogamy referred to the metaphors of *yas* (bone), related to agnatic descent groups, and *mah*, flesh, related to the "maternal links". People of the same *yas* should not intermarry, whereas marriage with maternal relatives was not prohibited. However, today incest prohibition is expressed in bilateral terms and with the metaphor of blood; the term "incest" is

distinct ancestor cults, the different *ovog* venerating their respective *ongod*. He added that until the nineteenth century the attribution of pastures to *ovog* had remained and that the contemporary people living in Tengis were still called “those of the *Huular* side” and the vicinity of Hanh was attributed to the *Haasuud*. However, in other parts of the Darhad area he did not find any attribution to *ovog* territories. Diószegi wrote about his visit in 1960 that “[c]lannish consciousness is [...] still existent among the Darkhats, so that every Darkhat knows the precise clan to which he belongs” (1961: 195). Badamhatan mainly used the term *ovog* when writing about history and in the chapter on shamanism, where he denominated the shamans he cited with an *ovog* name.<sup>18</sup> As neither Badamhatan nor Diószegi nor Pürev discussed how female shamans and the cognatic transmission of shamanism was related to agnatic clans, I reviewed reports on the transmission of shamanism in the early twentieth century in neighboring areas.

I found several authors describing the succession of shamanism with the term “zig-zag lines”: Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1928) about the Alarsk Buryat, Shirokogoroff (1935) about different Tungus groups (today called Evenki) and Humphrey (1996b) about the Daur of the early twentieth century. All three authors state that shamanism was transferred via both males and females, that the succession can leave out a generation, and that males as well as females can be selected as shamans.<sup>19</sup> How did the authors relate the “zig-zag” metaphor to patrilineal clans? Humphrey (1996b: 36 f.) stated that “the connection between shamans was in principle not a patrilineal affair, unlike Daur male-oriented society in general.” Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1928: 978) mentioned that the shamanic profession could be succeeded in the female line if there were not enough males: a female could become a shaman and her succession was perpetuated in the line of her husband even if he showed no shamans among his ancestors. In contrast to this interpretation of the metaphor “zig-zag line”, Shirokogoroff (1935: 346) related the metaphor to a transmission leading back to the natal group of a female shaman. If shamanism was inherited by a daughter who left her father’s clan by marriage, her spirits acted for the clan of her husband and her natal clan. After her death, the spirits succeed to one of the sons of her brothers becoming a shaman, thus returning to her natal clan. Concerning numerical gender dominance, he mentioned, first that groups could tend to the one or the other gender and

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today expressed as *tsus oirtoh*, “blood closeness”.

<sup>18</sup> Badamhatan used the term *ovog* also to give the patronyms of informants who were not shamans. According to Bulag (1998: 121 ff.), the first socialist government re-introduced the term *ovog* with the aim of providing people with surnames to facilitate the first census of the new People’s Republic. To supply people with surnames, they were asked to add their father’s, mother’s or any other name to their own name.

<sup>19</sup> By analyzing different sources on the transmission of shamanism in Siberia (for example Wassiljewitsch 1963), Ulla Johansen (1993) concluded that the skipping of generations was rather the rule than the exception. She perceived this rule as obvious, as at the time when a shaman’s son reached the age of puberty, the shaman would not yet be old enough to retreat and therefore would better pass on his shamanism to his grandson. In contrast to the above-discussed examples of southern Siberia, Johansen claimed that all analyzed sources stressed the inheritance in the male line.

he added that “a preference for males is natural in all groups, based on agnatic relationship in clans, for the women go away” (1935: 349). This last citation of Shirokogoroff indicates that the author perceived a tension between the cognatic transmission of shamanship and agnatic succession of clan membership.

One can relate the image of “zig-zag” transmission of shamanship in the early twentieth century to a bilateralization of kinship. Szykiewicz (1977) claimed that despite several Manchu attempts to reconstitute the disintegrated kinship organization from the early seventeenth century onwards – first by registering *ovog* groups and later by the imposition of lineal exogamy for agnatic relatives over nine ascending generations – the disintegration of agnatic lineal kin organization continued. Camps increasingly also included non-lineal relatives and affines. As early as the eighteenth century, Szykiewicz perceived camps of extended families, which no longer had a common descent line, as the basic corporate kin grouping. The term *ovog* according to Szykiewicz no longer denoted a corporate group, but its meaning had become restricted to the classification of agnatic relatives largely for the purpose of exogamy. Bacon (1958) altogether rejected the common interpretation that the term *ovog* denoted a clan as corporate group. She argued that also among the thirteenth-century Mongols the term *ovog* was used in a flexible way for groups on different levels of kin organization and bore foremost a principle of agnatic descent related to exogamy.

The tension between a cognatic succession of shamanship and the assignment of shamans to *ovog* can thus be read as the interfering of two distinct ideas of succession. The term *ovog*, either in the (earlier) sense of corporate groups or in the (later) classification of agnatic relatives, is connoted with what Bacon (1958: 65) called a “patrilineal bias”. In contrast, the inheritance of shamanship transmits ideas of cognatic descent. Thus, the scholarly attribution of shamans to clans, *ovog*, contributes to the evocation of agnatic descent of shamans, whereas the “zig-zag” metaphor emphasizes cognatic succession. In the context of clan organization, cognatic transmission of shamanship is in conflict with the association of shamans to clans. The interference of these two metaphors of succession is mirrored in the heterogeneous ways Darhad shamans refer to *ovog* denominations.

### **How present-day shamans refer to their *ovog* affiliation**

The association of Darhad shamans with *ovog* denominations is emphasized in the scholarly accounts of Badamhatan (1965), Diószegi (1963), and Pürev (2002), although Badamhatan had admitted that the *ovog* were no longer the basis of the social organization. He talked about *ovog* only when he related to history and the origin of the Darhad clans, and he affiliated the shamans he mentioned with an *ovog* name.<sup>20</sup> Thus, *ovog* names are

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<sup>20</sup> In other contexts, Badamhatan used the term *ovog* with the meaning of patronym.

primarily associated with shamans. In contrast to the scholarly representation, the *ovog* affiliation seems to be of minor importance for the shamans themselves. Important for their legitimacy is the number of generations of ancestor shamans, *udam*, they can represent. However, they usually did not relate themselves to an *ovog* denomination. Explicit questions about their *ovog* affiliation roused ambiguous answers that included the tension between cognatic inheritance of shamanism and agnatic descent associated with *ovog* denominations.

Not yet conscious of this tension during my fieldwork, I naïvely followed Pürev and Badamhatan and asked the shamans about their *ovog* affiliation. However, the simple question usually caused a long discussion about what I was asking for. Probably I asked in a barely understandable manner, but beyond the formulation of the question the shamans were irritated about the very term *ovog*.<sup>21</sup> The term *ovog* today has a double meaning; in the socialist past, the term *ovog* usually was related to the patronym (or matronym) used as surname; only in postsocialism did the government try to re-introduce the term with the meaning of “clan” (Bulag 1998).<sup>22</sup> Thus, when I asked a shaman to which *ovog* s/he belonged, s/he reacted in an irritated way to the term. In the ensuing discussion, some people recommended asking instead for the term *omog*. However, the next shaman asked about his or her *omog* did not understand this alternative word either. I collected several explanations concerning the distinction expressed by the two terms; that one of them referred to a bigger group than the other, e.g. that an *omog* included several *ovog*; or that the term *ovog* was used for the mother’s and the term *omog* for the father’s ancestors or vice versa.<sup>23</sup>

To avoid this tedious discussion, I by-and-by abandoned asking about *ovog* affiliation, and people did not talk about it of their own accord. The affiliations I collected were Tsagaan Huular, (“white swan”), Ulaan Huular (“red swan”), furthermore Har Darhad (“black Darhad”), sometimes Sharnuud (“the yellows”), Chögd and Joot. The dominance of Ulaan and Tsagaan Huular was once explained by the assignment of the people of Tsagaan Nuur *sum* (lit. “white lake”) to Tsagaan Huular, and the people of Ulaan Uul *sum* (“red mountain”) to Ulaan Huular, suggesting that the districts, *sum*, were called after the *ovog* names. As alternative interpretation, I would suggest that the *ovog* designation Ulaan Huular was named after the *sum* name Ulaan Uul, following the socialist preference for the color red. The Ulaan Huular were not yet mentioned by the earlier reports of Sanjeev (1930;

<sup>21</sup> I was asking “which *ovog*”, instead of asking about the name of the *ovog*, in accordance with the question about the name of a person.

<sup>22</sup> Bawden (1997) translated the term *ovog* along with the term *aimag*, as “clan”. Further translations given were “family” and “family name”, “patronymic”; the expression *ovgiin bichig* was translated as “family record”.

<sup>23</sup> Bawden (1997) translated the term *omog* in combination with the word *aimag* as “tribe, clan”, and “community”. Together with *üülder*, he translated *omog* as “breed, strain”.

distinguishing between white and black Huular) and Zhamtsarano (published under the name Tseveen 1997 [1934]; mentioning only one Huular *ovog*, without qualifying color). The denomination Ulaan Huular was for the first time included in Badamhatan's (1965) record.

The descendants of ancestor shamans included in Pürev's Tsagaan Huular genealogy related heterogeneously to the Tsagaan Huular *ovog*. Particularly interesting is how those shamans who inherited shamanship from female ancestors relate themselves to the Tsagaan Huular *ovog*. The shaman Baldandorj, who traced his *udam* through patrilineal ancestors only, was one of the few shamans who unambiguously called himself a Tsagaan Huular shaman. Baljir, a shaman charted by Pürev as Tsagaan Huular, stated his *omog* as Ulaan Huular. Apparently, he associated his *omog/ovog* affiliation not with his mother's patrilineal ancestors included in Pürev's chart but with the *ovog* of his father (I did not ask whether of his adoptive father or his genitor). His younger brother Umban mentioned both his father's (Ulaan Huular) as well his mother's father's *ovog* (Tsagaan Huular), thus he did not relate himself to one of the two *ovog*. Both brothers stated as their most important *ongod* their maternal grandmother (metamorphosed into an *ongod*). The brothers never mentioned an *ovog* affiliation of their mother or their grandmother. In short, they neither relate their shamanic inheritance to the father's nor the mother's "patrilineage" but to their mother's mother as a person. Umban said that he represented the third generation of shamans and by this he meant that he followed his mother and his maternal grandmother. Were Umban to trace his shamanic inheritance according to Pürev's chart, he could claim to be a shaman in the ninth generation, just like the shaman Baldandorj. Umban did not, although he knew Pürev's chart well; he bitterly complained that his brother Baljir and his (adoptive) mother Emgen were included, while Umban's mother Puntsag (Baljir's genetrix) and he himself were not shown in the chart. My interpretation is that he considered the chart as an important representation; nevertheless, he neither traced his inheritance of shamanship as given in the chart (via paternal ancestors of his mother's) nor did he, as an heir of the Ulaan Huular *ovog*, call himself a Tsagaan Huular shaman.

Similarly to Umban, the shaman Mönhöö, whose deceased mother Süren is integrated in Pürev's chart as a Tsagaan Huular shaman, refers to the chart in an ambivalent manner. Asked about his *ovog*, he did not associate himself with an *ovog* but distinguished between the *ovog* of his mother and his father: he said that his mother was a Tsagaan Huular shaman, but that his father belonged to the Chögd. His father had not shamanized, but he introduced his father's mother Choyogoo and her mother Tseveg as shamanizing. Mönhöö perceived his father's mother Choyogoo and her mother Tseveg as the most powerful *ongod* among his ancestors. Thus, he is relating his shamanic abilities to three female shamans, to his mother and, further, to the two paternal female ancestors Choyogoo and Tseveg – but neither to the Tsagaan Huular *ovog* nor to the *ovog* of his father. His avoidance to relate

himself to an *ovog* denomination, I think, derives from the tension of agnatic descent associated with the term *ovog*, his cognatic inheritance of shamanism, and the association of his mother and his sister with the Tsagaan Huular in Pürev's chart. Neglecting the chart and the inheritance of shamanism and focusing on *ovog* association only, he probably would have associated himself with the *ovog* of his father, Chögd.

With Batmönh, I did not talk about her *ovog* affiliation; she mentioned venerating both the ancestor shamans from her mother's and from her father's side. In her stories she stressed the *udam* of her father's side, as she chose her second teacher belonging to this *udam* and, furthermore, she had planned to ask the father's maternal grandmother Tseveg to allow her to become a shaman. Batmönh is one of the descendents of the well-known ancestor shaman Shagdar, listed as Tsagaan Huular shaman in Pürev's chart; however the descendents of Shagdar are not included in the chart. Batmönh did not talk about the *ovog* of her father or the *ovog* of shaman ancestors from her father's side; Diószegi (1963: 58) had mentioned the brother of her paternal grandmother as Har or Ulaan Huular shaman. Besides the shamans who refused to associate themselves with only one *ovog* denomination, some shamans said that they did not know their *ovog*. Only rarely was the accuracy of Pürev's chart questioned by the claim that the mentioned ancestors belonged not to the Tsagaan Huular, but for example to the Ulaan Huular.

I conclude that Pürev's chart causes ambivalences for the affiliation of present-day shamans. Darhad shamans distinguish between their *ovog* affiliation and their inheritance of shamanism. Therefore, they do not talk about *ovog* affiliation when they speak as shaman. In contrast, Pürev amalgamated the transmission of shamanism and the *ovog* descent in his chart. The depiction of shamanic inheritance as unilineal and the association with the Tsagaan Huular *ovog* in an authoritative scholarly representation creates ambivalences for the majority of the shamans related to the chart. For those shamans who trace their inheritance via their patrilineal ancestors (for example for Baldandorj or Nergüi), the association with the Tsagaan Huular *ovog* causes no ambivalences as their inheritance of shamanism coincides with patrilineal descent associated with the term *ovog*. The ambivalences arise for all other shamans who trace their inheritance of shamanism also via and to female ancestors. The chart of Pürev proposes also for these shamans to call themselves Tsagaan Huular shamans. However, this means that these shamans have to neglect agnatic descent. Furthermore, the chart demands that inheritance of shamanism to be restricted to only one line.

That shamans trace their inheritance of shamanism via multiple links of cognatic ancestors goes with the idea of ancestors performed in the shamanic seance discussed in the previous chapter. In the seance the shamans invoke cognatic male and female ancestor shamans, they invoke also ancestor shamans of their spouses, and further *ongod* residing in their vicinity or in the wider area. All these *ongod* are addressed as "mother" or "father" of

the particular place where the *ongod* reside. Thus, those *ongod* who are not metamorphosed ancestors are also addressed as ancestors. The *ovog* affiliation of the *ongod* is not of importance. When shamans talk about *ongod* or about the *ongod*'s former life as a human being, they never mention an *ovog* affiliation of an *ongod*. Often, shamans do not even know *ongods*' former names as humans. Jotog *zairan*, according to Pürev's flowchart the original ancestor of all the cited "Tsagaan Huular shamans", seems not to have an outstanding significance among today's Darhad shamans. Jotog *zairan* was hardly mentioned by shamans as representing one of their *ongod*. His son Haj *zairan* however seems to be better remembered: people talk about him and they venerate his metamorphosis Harmain Aav. Some shamans even risk invoking this *ongod*, who is feared as being very powerful, in their seances. The most well-known *ongod*, Hosin Aav in Ived, and Agarin Hairhan in Bayanzürh, are supposedly not associated with the Tsagaan Huular. I only once heard an *ovog* affiliation of the *ongod* Hosin Aav: he was called an Ulaan Huular *ongod*; Pürev (2003) assigned this *ongod* as Har Darhad.

### **Authorization by scholarly genealogies**

An open question remains the striking cluster of shamans who can be related by cognatic links to the Tsagaan Huular ancestors included in Pürev's chart, which partly were cited also in the reports of Badamhatan and Diószegi in the 1960s. Diószegi (1961) listed in a footnote the shamans he could trace in the Darhad area and, besides some individual shamans belonging to different *ovog*, he mentioned the number of thirty shamans belonging to the two Huular *ovog*. I can connect more than a third of the shamanizing people I know to Pürev's enumeration of Huular ancestors. In all historical accounts about the Darhad mentioned earlier in this chapter, the origin of the Huular is related to different areas of the former Tannu-Urianhai, to the neighboring eastern as well as to western parts of present day Tyva (see for example Vainshtein 1980 [1972]). But even assuming that the Darhad shamans' tradition originates from the reindeer herders and hunter traditions of the Sayan taiga, this is not a sufficient argument to explain the dominance of the Tsagaan Huular shamans. Other *ovog* in the area are also said to originate from the Sayan taiga but do not contain as many shamans as the Huular do.

I cannot explain the Huular dominance among the shamans from the second half of the twentieth century. However, I believe that the scholarly research and the scholars' accounts since the 1960s have contributed to the authorization of shamans related to the Tsagaan Huular ancestors and to the importance of shamanic genealogies and *ovog* denominations itself. Even if shamans do not trace their inheritance of shamanship via the lines suggested by Pürev's chart, they do indeed profit from the scholarly representation. Pürev's chart is an authoritative representation, which defines legitimate lines of inheritance of shamans, *udam*; being included, or having close ancestors listed, enhances the legitimacy of a

shamanizing person. It might be that the very existence of the Tsagaan Huular genealogy since the 1960s has encouraged shamanizing people to emphasize *udam* related to the Tsagaan Huular and to neglect other links. When I talked with the sixty-year-old diviner Mönhjii living in the village of Renchinlhümbe and her daughter Dolgormaa about their *udam*, the mother first told me the *udam* from her father's side (see my chart).<sup>24</sup> She listed shamans in three ascending generations of fathers; from her father Gombo to her grandfather Shagdar *zairan* to his father Jamba *lam*. Thereafter, she mentioned some names which are scattered all over the upper positions of Pürev's chart and commented that they were all brother's of her great-grandfather. Later, her daughter Dolgormaa again dictated her mother's paternal *udam* to me so as to check and correct my notes. However, she started her account with the earliest ancestor Jotog *zairan*, proceeding down from generation to generation, reciting all the names included in Pürev's chart. She replied to the question about the source of her encompassing knowledge with the statement that she had received the information from Pürev himself. Dolgormaa was not the only one who relied on Pürev's chart to furnish me with her shamanic genealogy. The irony of the episode is that in the footnote where Badamhatan (1965: 259) mentioned the succession of shamans starting with the ancestor Jotog, he mentioned as his informant Shagdarin Gombo, thus Dolgormaa's mother's father (whom the author did not identify as shaman). It seems as if the genealogical information passed through the scholars back to the granddaughter of the primary informant. Badamhatan characterized the information as legend, *domog*. Four decades later, the legend returned as an authoritative chart showing a shamanic "lineage".

I suggest contextualizing Pürev's depiction of the Tsagaan Huular genealogy in the context of postsocialist national identity discourse. Bulag (1998: 114 ff.) reported on a campaign to introduce written *ovog* genealogy records (*ugin bichig*) in the early 1990s. The campaign was advocated by both individuals and the government and envisioned genealogy books for each family to revive the forgotten *ovog* system. This promotion of written *ovog* genealogies was an attempt to build a new genealogical culture based on the image of the written genealogies of the Chinggisid ruling elite to foster a postsocialist Mongolian national identity.<sup>25</sup> With his genealogical chart – the only one in a book with the title "Mongol shamanic religion" – Pürev contributed to the promotion of the term *ovog* in postsocialism. As I have mentioned, the reintroduction of the term is not at all a new phenomenon but as early as in the seventeenth century the Manchu attempted to reinforce the term *ovog* in the sense of corporate groups. Later, the Manchu used the term to insist on their concern with exogamy related to agnates over several generations, and finally in

<sup>24</sup> Conversation of 29.08. 2003, in the village of Renchinlhümbe.

<sup>25</sup> Bulag (1998) connected the celebration of *ovog* to the postsocialist Mongolian obsession with mental retardation ascribed to incest or "inbreeding". Reviving the old traditions of social organization was thought, for example by the Ministry of Health, to contribute to incest prohibition and thus to the "protection of the Mongolian gene pool".



the early twentieth century the new socialist government reintroduced the term, this time referring to surnames or patronyms. Thus, I do not perceive Pürev's association of shamans with *ovog* affiliation as a "survival" of traditional clan organization at the state's backward periphery, but rather see the assignation of the term *ovog* to Darhad shamans as a renewed postsocialist evocation of patrilinearity and "clans". By this evocation, Pürev bestowed upon shamans from the margin of the state a flavor of chieftainship, modeled on historical ruling elites.<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, shamanic genealogies matter for the scholarly perception. This is demonstrated by Pürev's chart and my discussion of the topic in this chapter. By asking people about their shamanic ancestors and about their *ovog* affiliation, I was contributing to producing a shaman's ancestry as an important part of the shamans' legitimization and to provoking suitable answers to questions on the subject. However, what is the importance of these *udam* in local arenas? How much does a long list of shamanic ancestors contribute to the legitimation of shamans in local discourses? In my view, to know the *udam* of a shaman over several generations back into history is not of noteworthy concern in local arenas. At the most it seems to be a concern of a few elderly people like the eighty-years-old Sanj. I perceive people without shamanic ancestors as not caring about the details of a shaman's *udam* and those early ancestors. Shamans themselves seldom know shamanic ancestors in more than two ascending generations.<sup>27</sup> More important for the perception of a shaman in the neighborhood are the recent ancestors; it matters whether a parent or a grandparent of the person in question is remembered as shaman or not. However, people from the area perceive the chart included in Pürev's book as authoritative evidence for somebody being a shaman.

### Various traces of inheritance

Although the subject of inheritance of shamanism promised to be unambiguous at first glance, it emerges as a field that creates space for the contention of shamans' legitimacy; to both establish and contest a shaman's authority. This space is generated from different angles: the paths to ancestor shamans are not restricted by two parents, as one could assume, but are enhanced by multiple parenthoods. Adoptive parents or step-parents increase the number of possible links to shamanic ancestors in each ascending generation. In addition, the repression against shamans during socialism now creates space for the contention of shamanism: the dominant view acknowledges that shamanic practice was oppressed and people were shamanizing only secretly, if they risked shamanizing at all. Some people even stated that they did not know of their own mother whether she was

<sup>26</sup> Baabar (1999: 267) mentioned that, since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the nobles called themselves "*tsagaan yastan*" (white bone-group) to distinguish themselves from the "black" commoners.

<sup>27</sup> Szyrkiewicz (1977: 36) claimed that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a "normal" genealogical memory in Mongol territories had not exceeded two generations.

shamanizing, as they never saw her do so and she never talked about it.<sup>28</sup> This means that even the identification of rather recent shamans is blurred. Local people do not know for sure who was shamanizing during the socialist past; nobody can rule out with certainty that the parent of a shaman in question was shamanizing secretly.

The blurring generated by multiple parenthoods and socialist repression renders the establishment of shamanic *udam* an ambiguous undertaking which always can be challenged. Questioning whether a shaman's parent was shamanizing is one of the dominant methods of undermining his or her legitimacy. Another way to question a shaman is to question that s/he is the legitimate descendant of a claimed ancestor shaman. An ostensibly innocent argument used to offend shamans is to refer to the numerous shamanic ancestors of the past and to impute that every Darhad could claim an *udam* to a shamanic ancestor if s/he aspires to become a shaman.

The better I became acquainted with families I visited regularly in the field, the more I got to know how common adopted children (*örgömöl*), extramarital children (*surs* in the local idiom), or children from earlier relationships in a family really were. Arguably, every person can find a parent-child relationship not adhering to the imagery of "biological parent-children nuclear family" in the wider family, among the living as well as among the ancestors. Adoptees usually referred foremost to their adoptive parents when talking about their parents. Children who grew up with their mother solely usually just did not talk about their genitor, but people described their stepfather (*hoit aav*, "later father") as father. In short, when people talked about their parents they first referred to those persons who brought them up; parenthood seems to be constituted primarily between adults and children living in one household. This primary quality to refer to the parent-child relationship is expressed by the term for adoptive parents, *örgösön eej aav*; an expression which is derived from *örgöh*, to raise. Thus, I view parenthood not as "biologically" defined, i.e. the genitrix and the genitor of a person, but as an intergenerational social relation constituting a family or a household. People who grew up with adoptive parents are usually in contact with their genitrix, and often also with their genitor, and can talk about them as mother or father.<sup>29</sup>

The multiple parental links in succeeding generations are mobilized by shamans to constitute traces to shamanic ancestors. So also Othüü, whose tutorial with her teacher Badrah at her mother's Avid I have described earlier in this chapter. Othüü lives in a separate part in the house of her adoptive parents in the village of Tsagaan Nuur; the tutorial took place in the home of Avid, her genitrix in Höndii (some fifty kilometers away). Othüü stated that she inherited shamanship from her grandmother Horol *udgan*, who is

<sup>28</sup> However, stories do circulate about a few well-known shamans of the 1960s in the area (see Chapter 8).

<sup>29</sup> It is common that children from young unmarried mothers are given up for adoption; children retain the relationship to their mothers, however less often or less close to their genitors.

prominently represented by Pürev (2002). Othüü constituted the *udam* to Horol *udgan* via her genetrix Avid and, further up, to Avid's adoptive mother Horol *udgan*. Later Pürev told me that Horol's husband Has *zairan* was the genitor of Avid. Nevertheless, Othüü traced her *udam* to her grandmother and not to her grandfather, to whom she could trace her *udam* as "biological" succession.

The women Batmönh and Mönhjii can trace their *udam* via double parenthood in ascending generations to the same ancestor shamans (see Figure 5). Thus, the multiple links reinforce the relationship to a particular ancestor. Batmönh intended to ask the *ongod* Ugastagin Eej, the metamorphosis of Tseveg *udgan*, who is the grandmother of her father, to release the barrier preventing her from shamanizing. This means that she perceived this *ongod* as the most powerful among the impressive list of her shaman ancestors. Tseveg *udgan* was the grandmother of her father both via his genetrix Norjiin *hüühen*, the adoptee of Tseveg, as well as via his adoptive mother Choyogoo, who was the "biological" daughter of Tseveg. Mönhjii constituted her *udam* via her father Gombo and her mother Ayuush in our first conversation; a year later, she told me that she had been adopted by her genitor's sister Dejid. Thus, she could have traced her *udam* via her adoptive mother, however she preferred to constitute her *udam* via her genitor. Badrah traced his *udam* to his father's as well as his mother's ancestors. It was only in a later conversation with his brother Ölzii that I realized that the father and head of the household was not Badrah's genitor but rather his mother's second husband. Consequently, shamans choose how they trace their *udam*; they select either parental links by birth or by adoption, or combine the two links. There seems to be no obvious preference for the one or the other parental relationship.

To trace the inheritance from genitors outside the children's household might be the least used parental link. I assume that *udam* stemming from extramarital genitors are only reluctantly used. The shaman Davaajav from Hogrogo for example traced his shamanic succession to his mother and further to his mother's father. Although he mentioned the name of his genitor, who is included in the chart of Pürev as a descendant of well-known earlier shamans, Davaajav did not relate himself to his genitor's *udam*. Furthermore, the shaman did not include the ancestors of his genitor as *ongod* invoked in his seances. When I asked him why he did not use his paternal *udam*, he answered that his genitor had promised his mother to live with her, but that in the end he had not kept this promise and Davaajav, his sister and his brother had lived alone with the mother. Similarly, Sanj, the father of Batmönh, traced their *udam* via adoptive links, however he did not consider the *udam* of the shaman Gänge, the genitor of his adoptive mother Choyogoo. In contrast, Batgaa, the mother of the shaman Erdenochir, traced her son's shamanic inheritance via her adoptive mother Choyogoo, her genitor Chagdar and to Chadgar's genitor Gänge; both fathers were genitors outside recognized marriages.

### Contestation of the inheritance of shamanism

In postsocialist local arenas, the subjects of adoption and extramarital descendants are appropriated as fields to contest a shaman's legitimacy. People use social parenthood to question that a shaman is the legitimate descendant of an ancestor shaman; for example by claiming that a shaman is not the "real" son or grandson of a famous shaman but had "only" been adopted and was "in fact" the child of somebody else. In this context, people argue that social parenthood is not equal to a "real blood relationship". In this argument one can see the impact of a blood metaphor, which was adopted by the Soviets and which interferes with the earlier kinship metaphor of bones of patrilineal lines with women as flesh in between (Bulag 1998). This biologicistic argument contradicts the widespread representation also of non-shamanizing people of adoptive parents as "real" parents.

However, it is not a rule that shamans who inherited their capabilities via adoption are accused of not having legitimate *udam*. My impression is that it works rather the other way round: if one attempts to contest a shaman's legitimacy, then a social parenthood in the *udam* can be welcomed as rationalization for the contestation. The example of the changing local estimation of the shaman Baatar is a case in point. Baatar lives with his family as a herder in Soyoo, Ulaan Uul. He is better known under his local nick name, Michbaatar, which changes the meaning of his name from "hero" to "monkey hero", a subversive allusion to his slight build and his whimsical smile, which indeed gives his face a distant resemblance to a monkey's. In spring 2003, Davaanyam introduced me to Michbaatar, of whom he knew that he was a diviner, *mergechin*. In late summer 2003, When spent two weeks in Soyoo, neighbors denied that Michbaatar had "real" *udam*, arguing that his mother, Tesheree *hüühen*, who was shamanizing by jaw harp, was not his "real" mother but his adoptive mother "only". The local appreciation of Michbaatar had completely changed when I returned the following summer. Michbaatar had in the meantime acquired a drum and armor. When I asked him for a seance he hesitated, arguing that he was not yet a good performer. Finally, he agreed to hold a seance the same night and uncased the drum to hang it over the stove to dry. During the seance, which was attended by several neighbors, he fell often, more often than shamans usually do. His assistant was an inexperienced neighbor, who was taken by surprise every time he lost his equilibrium, and let him fall to the ground. The following day, when we discussed his seance, Michbaatar jested about himself, saying that he had warned me that he was not yet a good shaman; that he was too weak to deal with powerful spirits.

However, I had already heard that Michbaatar had become much respected as shaman in the neighborhood, that people had come to recognize him as a shaman. Local people consulted Michbaatar, and tourists from a nearby camp were brought to him to attend his seances. It was surprising news that local people preferred Michbaatar to his neighbor

Lhagvajav, who had become a shaman in the same period as Michbaatar. I had estimated before that Lhagvajav's legitimacy was assured, as his mother, the shaman Nadmid *udgan*, was renowned nation-wide in the 1990s whereas Michbaatar's mother Tesheree was not a well-known shaman at all, even in the local arena. Obviously, the argument of being "only" the adoptive son of his mother, which was used to question Michbaatar's legitimacy the previous year, was no longer worth mentioning. Concerning Lhagvajav, the argument of being the son of a reputed shaman, which had predestined him to become a powerful shaman before, was no longer brought forward. Instead, people alleged that before her death, Nadmid *udgan* had not wanted her son to become a shaman. I think that the change in local assessments of the two shamans was related to ordinary neighborly relationships and beyond that to the perception of the seances of the two neighbors. Interestingly, it seems that it was rather the frequent falling and thus the performance of weakness in the seance of Michbaatar, which might have impressed the people. Lhagvajav on the other hand, no more experienced in the seance by drum than Michbaatar, was already a perfect performer at that time.



*Photograph 30: The shaman "Mich"baatar with his wife Dashbaljid and their son Ariunbayar (01.08. 2004).*

Even though ancestor shamans are an important source of legitimization, it is not necessary to have shamanic ancestors that neighbors remember so as to be accepted as shaman in the local arenas, as the example of the young shaman Tulgat showed. That nobody in the area knew about his shamanic ancestors, not even he himself or his parents, did not prevent him from acquiring a reputation as a promising future shaman in a short time. The local assessments of shamans are unstable, they can change quickly and hardly ever do people of a neighborhood or the larger area agree in the assessment of a particular shaman. Besides, many people are just not interested in the subject and have never seen a shaman shamanizing.

### Teacher and disciples as legitimization

Related to the authorization of shamanism by ancestors is the mutual legitimization by teachers and disciples: to call a renowned shaman one's teacher, underscores one's claim to shamanism. The disciples I introduced in the beginning of this chapter were all taught by the shaman Badrah. The shaman was seventy-four years old at that time, and he was one of the oldest and most reputed shamans in local arenas. To choose Badrah as teacher means to confirm one's potential shamanism by an authoritative shaman and thereby to enhance one's legitimacy. Numerous shamans mentioned in their narratives about how they became shamans the old female shaman Nadmid, who passed away in 2001. Shamans told me how Nadmid advised them to become a shaman or that she had taught them to shamanize. By stating that one was the disciple of the reputed deceased woman, people claimed authorization by an impeccable authority, who herself would not contest the relationship after her death. To say that one was a disciple of Nadmid *udgan*, or another shaman who is dead, also underscores that one is not a new shaman but that one had started to shamanize some years before.

To have disciples reciprocally contributes to the reputation of a teacher shaman. To be the teacher of several disciples and to be mentioned by other shamans as teacher confirms that one is a capable shaman. Although the power to educate the new shaman lies with the teacher, the disciple has the power to choose the teacher and thus to contribute to the reputation of a shaman. Disciples select their teacher consciously; usually they seek a teacher with a good reputation and often they consult more than one teacher; they change their teacher if the teaching is not successful. A disciple's failing however can also affect the teacher. In the story of the failed would-be shaman Batmönh for example, also her teachers were affected by her failings. She accused her first teacher Umban for not being able to teach her. Then, when she failed with her second teacher Mönhöö, Batmönh judged him a good teacher but considered him not to be powerful enough to liberate her from the spell of an ancestor shaman. In the case of Badrah however, his disciple's failings seemed not to influence the reputation of the teacher.

In this chapter I have discussed in detail the processes of legitimization of shamans associated with their initial illness and the inheritance of shamanism from ancestors. The chapter explored the processes of legitimization between the perception of the becoming of shamans as exclusively "chosen by the spirits" (Basilov 1990), and the perception of the transmission of shamanism as following "social rules" (Johansen 1993). I attempted to show how the initial illness and the inheritance of shamanism from ancestors are strategically occupied fields on whose grounds shamanism is claimed, supported and contested. By locating the discussion of the subjects of illness and ancestors in local encounters, I might have given the misleading impression that the making of shamans is

primarily a local affair of the Darhad periphery. In the following chapter, I will relocate the perspective and integrate the exchanges with the urban centers, which are of central importance for the establishing of the reputation of shamans.



*Photograph 31: A storm is coming up near the summer camp of the shaman Badrah (06.08. 2004).*





## The shamans' economy of reputation

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*This chapter will discuss the wider context of the ambiguous economy of reputation of Darhad shamans. The shamans' reputation is not constituted in their homeland alone, but in the interaction with the urban centers: I will show how Darhad shamans are questioned in their Darhad homeland while they are venerated as the most powerful shamans of Mongolia in the capital. The venerating and the denigrating discourses together produce the social marginalization of shamans. Contained in a marginalized position, Darhad shamans serve as a duct to power which one can request in times of need. Confined in the imagery of the wild periphery, the practices of Darhad shamans are used to imagine shamanism as a genuine Mongolian national tradition.*

In contrast to the dominant view of the Darhad as shamanists, I argue that the social recognition of Darhad shamans in their neighborhood is by no means assured. A few shamans are respected in the local area; most of them however are instead marginalized. In lack of a formal recognition, the reputation of a shaman is established and contested in the interactions of the shaman with clients and neighbors, in private healing seances, in public collective rituals, in the media and in the conversations and gossip about shamans. The reputation of Darhad shamans is volatile, permanently exposed to potential doubt and attacks, and it has to be constantly re-established and re-assured. In taking the discourses that constitute and contest the reputation of shamans as the subject of analysis, I am not interested in following their content by judging the quality of present-day shamans. Rather, I am interested in analyzing the very processes that constitute and dispute the legitimization and reputation of contemporary Darhad shamans. With the term “economy of reputation”, I address the social conditions of the production of shamans' inspirational authority. Discourses celebrating Darhad shamans in general open up fields for Darhad people to practice as shamans, while discrediting discourses about contemporary shamans confine the fields of shamans' power.

The main argument of this chapter is that the reputation of Darhad shamans is not constituted in rural communities alone, but in the interaction with urban centers. Expressed most bluntly, Darhad shamans enjoy in the capital Ulaanbaatar a reputation of being the most powerful shamans in Mongolia; by contrast, shamans are exposed to overall denigration in their local home areas, where people question the magical power and the seriousness of contemporary shamans. My intention is not to dissect an example of a deteriorated tradition that has lost its authenticity for locals and is only attractive for an uprooted urban public, but rather I aim to show how the shamans' economy of reputation is part of the production of “the periphery” and “the center”. The reputation of shamans is based on practices of marginalization of the shamans as representatives of the periphery. As

I have pointed out in the analysis of shamanic seances, the shaman's power and her/his powerlessness lie close by each other. Ascriptions of inspirational power as well as denials of shamanic capacities similarly constitute two opposing but related discourses that confine shamans to the role of transgressors and workers of the marginal.

In the tension between the overall celebration of Darhad shamans mainly staged in the capital city and the derision dominating the perception in their homeland, some Darhad shamans can achieve to build a reputation as powerful shamans. Some of the contemporary shamans are ambitious individuals and extraordinary performers of the self who are active in pursuit of establishing a good reputation. Thereby, shamans expose themselves as persons and take the risk of being personally attacked.

By exploring the discourses that constitute the shamans' reputation, I touch on the brittleness of what we usually call "belief". My stories show "belief" as constituted by experiences, practices, performances and discourses, framing doubts, hopes, disbelief, entertainment, connotations of danger and power, and question a concept of belief presuming a doubtless state of mind. I encountered the question of belief not as one concerning believing in spirits or believing in a worldview. The question about belief in *ongod*, for example, was hardly ever a subject of conversation. For instance, I cannot remember anyone asking me whether I believed in the existence of *ongod*. Only the *ongod* themselves addressed this question, by attesting me in their speeches during seances to be *shütdeg*, venerating them. In contrast, people constantly asked me to evaluate the quality of the shamans I studied. Belief – and thus disbelief – emerged as a question of believing in shamans, or more precisely, of believing in the capacities of particular persons, expressed by the following questions: Who is a powerful shaman? Who is a weak shaman? Who is a genuine, *jinhene*, shaman?

To trace the production of the shamans' reputation, I follow the shamans' travels between the rural borderland and the urban center and I will locate the Darhad shamans as interacting in the new scene of urban shamans. I further will discuss the particularities of women's reputation and compare the shamans' power with those of chiefs. I start my discussion at the periphery with impressions of the denigrations I so often heard during fieldwork.

### **How shamans are belittled in local arenas**

A good example to show the ambiguous relationship of locals to the shamans in their neighborhood is Vanchii. During a longer stay with the family of Vanchii and Hürel in Högiin *gol* in Soyoo *bag*, Ulaan Uul, in August 2003, my hosts unremittingly supported my studies with advice and information. Vanchii introduced me to shamans in the area, he told me legends about long-dead shamans, he taught me chants and practices, and recalled the

memories of his own ancestors who were shamans. He told me about his mother, who became a shaman in the 1920s at the age of sixteen, and who hid her drum and armor in the 1950s when the *negdels*, the collective farms, were built and “when it became dangerous for shamans”: he told that afterwards she shamanized secretly and by jaw harp only. Looking back on shamanic ancestors, knowing about shamanic practice and traditions, why did Vanchii not become a shaman himself? Vanchii's answer points to the ambiguities in becoming a shaman in postsocialism and to the doubtful reputation of present-day Darhad shamans in their neighborhood:

My mother wanted to introduce me into shamanizing before her death in 1986. But I didn't want to become a shaman. - Why not? - It was forbidden during socialism. And I was the *bagin darga*, the chief of the herders belonging to the Soyoo *brigad* at that time. Then, in the early 1990s, neighbors asked me to become a shaman. With my *udam* [“line” of ancestor shamans] I should become a shaman, they said. But I was not *unadag*, not falling. And I did not want to become a *zah zeelin böö*, a market economy shaman. I have a good reputation; I do not want that people start to talk bad about me. Besides, I don't think that I would be a good shaman (Vanchii, 18. 08. 2003).

Vanchii reported on a certain social pressure, exerted first by his mother and later by neighbors, to follow his mother and to become a shaman. He reasoned his refusal with the lack of the initial sickness and the risk to lose his good reputation. Even if Vanchii is no longer in an official position of authority, he is still a well-known and respected person in the *sum* of Ulaan Uul. Vanchii implicitly presumed in his statement that today's shamans are “*zah zeelin böö*”, “market economy shamans”, shamanizing for economic reasons and without a spiritual calling; and he assumed that by becoming a shaman he would lose his reputation and become exposed to disdainful gossip.

The local appreciation of shamans in the neighborhood is at best ambivalent: some people perceive a particular shaman as being a skillful performer, a helpful healer or a capable diviner; other people fear the power this or that other shaman. The dominant discourse in local arenas of gossip however generally disparages contemporary Darhad shamans. During fieldwork I was overwhelmed with stereotypical statements: present-day shamans were in sum scorned as being “weak” or not “genuine” shamans, as mere actors, without any magical mastery, as “money” or as “market economy” shamans performing to gain an income only.<sup>1</sup> People claim that the present-day shamans no longer know the *tamlaga*, the shamanic chants. Such denigrations were poured out to me by neighbors, by shamans denouncing their competitors, by old and young people, by those who knew shamans and their seances well and others who had never experienced a seance. I heard discrediting remarks in first contacts as well as by people I knew well; I heard them in group conversations and in late-night gatherings drinking vodka after a shaman's seance.

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Buyandelgeriyn (2007) reports that many Buryat in Dornod distrust the magical capabilities of shamans, presuming that they might be “business-driven actors”. She argues that the socialist disruption of religious practice and the arrival of market economy have raised the suspicion against shamans.

Usually, when I introduced myself as an anthropologist studying the Darhad shamans amongst them, local people reacted with derisive comments. They took a stance against Darhad shamans in general or against particular shamans they knew and compared the magical deeds of legendary shamans with the capacities of contemporary ones. At the beginning of my fieldwork I was curious to hear what people had to say about shamans in their neighborhood; by-and-by I recognized the remarks as being stereotypical. The permanent gossip became boring and even bothersome, as it questioned my primary interlocutors and, in a way, also my own work. To my embarrassment I sometimes even found myself participating in gossip, transgressing anthropological expectations of abstention.

Finally, I started to integrate the subject into my analysis: I recognized gossip as constituting part of my fieldwork and, furthermore as a constitutive frame of shamans' economy of reputation. General disparaging remarks built an enabling framework to talk about individual shamans and to discuss their practices. By gossiping, people performed as experts on shamanic practice and enacted social control over the magical potentialities. People requested my evaluation of the capabilities of shamans or advised testing the shamans. Locals rated my authority and they discussed – from expert to expert – the shamans in their neighborhood. By interviewing shamans, attending their seances, and talking with local people about shamans I was located in the field of the shamans' economy of reputation, not as a distanced observer outside of it.

An overall disparagement however does not exclude that a person appreciates the capacities of a particular shaman. To show the ambiguities inherent in the local discourses, I will render as an example the remarks of a young woman who lives together with her children and her old parents I had heard that her father was shamanizing and was the descendant of renowned shaman ancestors, but he was not known as shaman beyond his relatives and closer neighborhood. Her father was at home when I visited the family in autumn 2003, and he agreed that he was shamanizing and also had time to talk, as a snowstorm arose outside. Nevertheless, I was not able to converse with the old man, who was almost deaf. Finally, I was talking with his wife and the daughter, who once in a while translated the communication to the shaman or submitted one of my questions to him. During the course of our conversation, the young woman mocked the present-day shamans; she accused contemporary shamans in general to be *hudlaa böö*, fake shamans. I was surprised by her disrespectful manner of talking, as her father, with whom she lived, was himself shamanizing: although her father shamanized with drum and armor he did so only in private for the sake of his family and not for clients. Did her mocking imply that she neither considered her father as a “real shaman”? However, I did not dare to ask such a confrontational question. Instead, I asked whose shamans' seances she had attended. Only Umban's, she replied. Again, she did not talk about her father, whose seances she had

attended for sure. Then I asked whether she considered Umban, who is a distant relative, as fake shaman, *hudlaa böö*. She refused: "No, Umban is *ünen*, a true shaman." She added that there might be two or three genuine shamans, *jinhene böö*, but the rest were all false, *hudlaa*. The following year I visited the family again and that time, too, the young woman started to mock shamans: as was common, she gossiped about particular shamans, about their bad behavior when drunk or about the incapability of a shaman on a particular occasion. Later I asked the young woman whether she herself was interested in becoming a shaman. At first she answered in the negative by saying that she was not able to shamanize. After a while she resumed the subject, this time in an ironical way: "I could take the armor and drum of my father, I would learn some poems, and then I would be a good *udgan*. The Halha do not understand anything, they do not see whether someone is a good shaman or not", she proclaimed.<sup>2</sup> How did she herself know if someone was a good shaman or not? "If I see someone shamanizing, I know it."

What motivated the young woman to belittle shamans in front of a foreign anthropologist who visited her father because he was a shaman? The difficulty in interpreting her statements is that she denigrated shamans without explicitly excluding her father and therefore her statements call for several readings. One could interpret her remarks as directed against her father, as a sign of jealousy. However, I doubt that she would have disclosed a difficult relationship with her father, with whom she lived, to anybody as unfamiliar as I was. My interpretation in contrast suggests that she rather identified with the position of her father and therefore did not mention him. I propose to interpret her attacks as targeted at those shamans desiring to be recognized as shamans, to collect clients and to build up a reputation as a shaman. I think that she excluded her father, who shamanized half-secretly for his family's matters solely, as questions of recognition or reputation did not concern him. The young woman presented herself as an expert and she presumed that in general today's ambitious shamans as liars. She hinted that potentially every Darhad could claim shamanship, or at least those with shamanic ancestors like herself and that she as a Darhad, understanding the shamans' chants, could assess the truthfulness of a seance in distinction to non-Darhad people from the south. Consequently, she claimed that she would be able to distinguish a "false" from a "real" shaman if she attended a shaman's seance. However, she had only seen the seances of her father and her relative Umban. Besides from Umban, she also considered Goostoi, a Tuva shaman living with reindeers in the taiga, to be a genuine shaman – although she had never attended one of his seances. To consider Goostoi as genuine, as a powerful or dangerous shaman is a widespread assessment in the Darhad area; although I doubt considerably that many people (with the exception of the people living in the taiga) have attended one of his seances. On the other hand, the young woman identified several shamans as being "fake"

<sup>2</sup> The Halha constitute the majority of Mongolia's population. In this statement by the young woman, the term refers to those people living outside the local area.

shamans – although she had never seen them shamanizing either. Her argumentation can be reduced to the claim that she “knew” how to distinguish “genuine” from “false” shamans despite never having attended a seance by a shaman she considered as “false”.

The statements of the young woman reflect the common circular and contradictory argumentation mixed up in the dominant denigration of present-day Darhad shamans. I chose her example, furthermore, to show how the dominant disparagement is related to and detached from the concrete experience of shamans’ seances. Despite her involvement in shamans’ practice, she participates in the dominant general disparaging discourse. At the same time, her assessment of particular shamans as not being “genuine” is detached from her concrete experience, as she has never seen a seance of a “not real” shaman. Many people in the Shishget area who poured out their predications about the weakness of present-day shamans, answered, upon explicitly being asked, that they had never attended a shaman’s seance even though they had neighbors who were shamans. Thus, the stereotyped depreciation of shamans is often accompanied by the lack of concrete experience of the practices of shamans. I assume that people often base their assessments on their experiences with shamans as ordinary neighbors. That it is quite common that locals in the area have never attended a shamanic seance is surprising, and questions the widespread, also scholarly, notion of the Darhad as “shamanists”.

Despite the general discourse of denigration of present-day shamans, despite people’s frequent claim that they do not believe in shamans, it might well be that in cases of inexplicable affliction, for example when several calamities of human suffering and livestock disease coincide, a family nevertheless looks for the support of a shaman to appease the inspirational source of misfortune. The experience of shamanic treatment in turn provokes further sources of doubts. After a seance, people will assess the capacities of a shaman by considering answers to the following questions: Was the performance impressive? Did the inspirational diagnosis make sense? Can the diagnosis be related to past experiences, feelings, and the character of a person? What exactly did the *ongod* say, and did they really reveal something new that the shaman could not have known before just by being an acquaintance? Did the shaman’s treatment help to overcome a state of suffering? The assessments of a shamanic treatment are framed by the overall disparaging discourse: Every positive assessment, of a particular treatment or of a particular shaman, is made within and against the general discourse of denigration. I even claim that the dominant deprecating discourse constitute a normative frame, which enables locals to ask for shamanic services.

### **Traveling south to the capital**

One main local critique of shamans focuses on the shamans' travels to the south to offer shamanic services to an urban public. During the period of my fieldwork, traveling south was common among the people living in the Darhad borderland. People paid for a seat in a jeep or van driving south and went to the provincial center Mörön, one of the biggest markets of the country outside the capital city, or they traveled further to the industrial city Erdenet or to Ulaanbaatar. Darhad people travel south to sell livestock products and to buy consumer goods for themselves or to trade back in their home area. Other reasons to travel are to seek work or better medical treatment than is available at home. Furthermore, people are just curious to visit the capital city. To bring back one's photograph taken in front of the government's palace seems to be as attractive as it was during socialism. Since the second half of the 1990s, the capital city has rapidly been changing its appearance: rural visitors enjoy the increasing supply of consumer goods, supermarkets, new buildings, bars and restaurants, and the colorful advertising throughout the city center, all of which were just not existent before. However, where for some visitors, particularly the young ones, these new developments are attractive, others, particularly middle-aged and old people, complain about the increasing noise, the insufferable air pollution, and the bulk of people rushing into town.

Shamans travel for the same reasons as their neighbors do. They travel to Ulaanbaatar for a cure in a hospital and in search of work and income opportunities. The town seems to attract the shamans magnetically even though shamans know that traveling provokes the critique of their neighbors. The majority of those shamans who shamanized for clients and whom I met in summer 2004 had visited the capital since the previous autumn. I even met shamans in town who condemned their fellow shamans' trip the previous year. Shamans usually travel with their drum and armor, they settle for some weeks at a relative's or with a friendly family in town; by word-of-mouth propaganda, friends of the family and their acquaintances drop in to request the services of the shaman from the rural borderlands.

Morten Pedersen (2006b: 88 f.), who did his PhD fieldwork in the Shishget area in the late 1990s, distinguished between the Darhad shamans oriented towards the taiga enjoying the status of being "genuine" shamans and those Darhad shamans who settled in town and therefore were denounced as "fake shamans". Doing my fieldwork only a few years later, I could not find a clear opposition between shamans in the Shishget area and Darhad shamans living in Ulaanbaatar. Rather, most of the shamans travel back and forth between the Shishget area and the urban centers; the distinction between a rural shaman staying away for months and an urban shaman staying the whole summer in the Shishget area is rather one of nuances than one of a blunt opposition, also in local perception. Furthermore, I did not perceive a divergent estimation of shamans living in the Shishget area versus the

Darhad shamans living in town. Of course, I heard not many favorable statements about the shamans living in town; but the general denigrating discourse affected potentially all shamans and did not differ between the Darhad shamans living mainly in the city and those living mainly in the Shishget area. Through their travels and the traveling stories about them, shamans contribute to establishing Darhad shamanism as a phenomenon going beyond the rural periphery and encompassing the urban center.

To start the discussion about the urban scene of shamans and the particular role of Darhad shamans in town, I first introduce those Darhad shamans I met in Ulaanbaatar and who had settled more or less permanently in the capital. I will briefly introduce the shamans Chuluunbaatar, Höörög, Batbayar, Baljir, and Moko and give a short glimpse of the particular conditions on their shamanship in town.

The male shaman Chuluunbaatar *zairan* is a fifty-year-old, decent man, living with his wife, a Hotgoit shaman, and their family in a *ger* far on the outskirts of town. Chuluunbaatar said on my first visit in November 2003 that he usually worked at home. To avoid disturbing the newborn baby, he often carried out his seances outside, somewhere in nature. The following autumn, Chuluunbaatar *zairan* received his clients in an office in the center of town. Chuluunbaatar originates from Ulaan Uul; he is the son of the renowned shaman Tsevegmed. Shortly before her death in 1997, he told, his mother taught him to shamanize by jaw harp. Later, he moved to Ulaanbaatar and acquired drum and armor.

The female shamans Höörög and Batbayar started to shamanize after they had settled in town. Höörög, or Zolzaya, is the daughter of the deceased shaman Bayar. The family moved from Tsagaan Nuur first to Mörön and then further to Ulaanbaatar during the second half of the 1990s. The young woman told me that she was taught by her mother to shamanize by jaw harp when she was thirteen, that she received armor and drum at nineteen and that she shamanized for some years together with her mother. She was twenty-two years old when her mother died in 2002 at the early age of forty-five. I experienced Höörög as a busy, young urban woman, always on the move and only contactable by cell phone. She was not only a performer of shamanic chants but also a singer in a rock band. She said that as a shaman she worked only at her family's home in the center of town, close to the train station. To work in an apartment in the center of town produces several inconveniences; neighbors might complain about the noise of drumming; the drum has to be dried on the electric or gas stove and a fire for offerings has to be lit on the balcony. In contrast, Batbayar *udgan* provided her shamanic treatment in an office at the eastern end of town. A list posted on a wall in the waiting room showed her prices for different services and the days of the week when she was divining or offering her treatment. Batbayar *udgan* was one of the best-known shamans in Ulaanbaatar when she died in car accident at the age of fifty-six in autumn 2003. Until 1993 she had lived in the village of Tsagaan Nuur, where she worked as a teacher.



The male shamans Baljir *zairan* from RENCHINHÜMBE and Moko from Tsagaan Nuur used to travel frequently to the capital. During the period of my fieldwork both settled in Ulaanbaatar, still visiting the countryside several times a year. Baljir settled first in an apartment in the neighborhood of Höörög, later he moved into a small house near the airport. He lived together with his second wife, who had become a shaman too and the couple was alternating shamanizing for attending clients. Baljir traveled several times a year to the Darhad area, to visit his children and first wife who maintained a herding household, to teach his disciples and to shamanize for relatives, clients and tourists. Moko installed himself with his wife and their three children at a friend's home close to the Gandan monastery; later he relocated into a house in the northern outskirts. He frequently traveled back to Tsagaan Nuur, where he spent longer periods. All of these Darhad shamans traveled at least once a year to their home area, usually in summer, to venerate their main *ongod* and to visit their relatives.

The Darhad shamans are by no means the only shamans who offer their services in Ulaanbaatar. Besides rural shamans, for example Buryat shamans from Dornod, who similarly to Darhad shamans, temporarily visit the capital city, numerous shamans live permanently in town. It is difficult to give a number of the shamans working in town, as shamans appear, settle for a shorter or longer period in a location, move to another place or just disappear and usually are not officially registered. I assume that the number of shamans in town may amount to several dozen practitioners.

Shamans adapt their practices to the urban environment: they professionalize their services by a move into offices with fixed working hours and with the assignation of prices for their rituals. Scholars as well as locals perceive price lists of urban shamans as one of the new inventions of postsocialist shamanism (Merli 2006). To set up prices, shamans have to delineate rituals with different labels; thus, the fixation of prices gives rise to a standardization of named rituals and cures. Although Darhad shamans living in the Shishget area use common terms to label their diagnosis, they do not cure spiritual afflictions with named rituals; they name what they do just to shamanize, *böölöh*. To shamanize in the Darhad area is usually not a profession but is integrated into ordinary rural life. Settled in town, some of the Darhad shamans become professionals working exclusively as shamans.

### **The institutionalization of the urban scene**

Shamans appearing in the midst of capital cities are an outstanding new feature of a resurgent postsocialist shamanism all over Siberia and Inner Asia.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of professional urban shamans is accompanied by the institutionalization of shamanism:

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<sup>3</sup> The phenomena was probably first discussed by Hoppál (1992b).

shamans now open shamanic centers and found their own associations; they organize public rituals, collaborate with scholars and participate in conferences on shamanism. The new institutions propagate shamanic practices as part of the indigenous religious and cultural tradition and their activities are located in the wider context of postsocialist national identity construction. These salient features of a new urban shamanism are discussed for different areas in Inner Asia and Siberia, for Buryatia (Humphrey 1999; Deusen 1999; Zhukovskaya 2000), for Tuyva (Stépanoff 2004), the Sakha Republic (Balzer 1993b; Vitebsky 1995), or the Altai Republic (Halemba 2003). Below I will give a summary of the developments of the urban scene of shamans in Ulaanbaatar; thereafter I will discuss the particular role Darhad shamans play on urban stages of shamanism.

The French anthropologist Laetitia Merli studied the urban scene of shamans in Ulaanbaatar between 1997 and 2002 (2004a; 2004b; 2006). In her dissertation, Merli (2004b) describes shamans at work in shamanic centers; she traces shamans' biographies and careers, and discusses the interactions of shamans' associations and shamans in the fields of postsocialist identity construction. Merli reports on the rivalries between shamans and on failures of shamanic careers. Her account starts with a portrait of the old shaman Tömör, a shaman she presents as a Darhad shaman from Ulaan Uul, who founded the shamanic center Golomt Töv ("Hearth center") together with the academic Sühbat in 1996. Merli tracks how over the years his disciples left the old shaman and tried to settle in their own centers; and she follows how the old shaman Tömör and the center's president, Sühbat, separated; how Tömör built a new center and joined ultra-nationalist organizations shortly before his death in 2002. Merli mentioned the early skirmish among those people who attempted to represent Mongolian shamanism, which led to a split of the "Mongolian shamanist association" after only a few years of existence. The association brought together shamans and promoters of shamanism; it included the afore-mentioned shamans Tömör and Batbayar and the equally well-known shaman Byambadorj; further, the academic Sühbat, the president of the mentioned shamanic center Golomt Töv, as well as the Mongolian scholars Ch. Dalai and S. Dulam of the National University. Merli reported that the conflict in the association became public on the "Fifth International Congress on Shamanism" in Ulaanbaatar in 1999. At this occasion, Dulam, a renowned scholar of Mongolian studies, honored only part of the shamans, among them Batbayar and Byambadorj, leaving unconsidered other shamans sitting in the audience, like the shaman Tömör and the Buryat shaman Tseren (Merli 2004b: 85).

When I started my fieldwork the promoters of shamanism had divided into two distinct associations: Sühbat had become president of the association "*Aziin böögiin tiv delhii holboo*", translated as "Asian Shamanist Continent and World Association" or as "World Asian Shamanism Union", which was founded in 2000.<sup>4</sup> The shamans Batbayar and

<sup>4</sup> Sühbat argued that his association is the Mongolian branch of an international association founded at

Byambadorj constituted together with the scholar S. Dulam the core of the other association, the “Asar Sudlalin Töv”, the “Asar Research Center”.<sup>5</sup> In 2003, Tseren böö, a famous Buryat shaman who was often in town and well visited by clients and scholars, celebrated the founding of his own association in the capital. It was said that over two hundred apprentices and scholars of shamanism participated in the founding ceremony.<sup>6</sup>

Besides Batbayar *udgan* and her apprentice Yura from Ulaan Uul (whom I portrayed in Chapter 4), who were members of the “Asar Research Center”, the majority of the Darhad shamans became members of Sühbat’s “World Asian Shamanism Association”. From 2002 onwards, one after the other traveled to the capital to become a member of the association, which the shaman usually called after the name of the related shamans’ center, Golomt Töv. When I visited the center in its new location in the third district in the autumns of 2003 and 2004, the president Sühbat was sitting behind a desk in one of the rooms, usually reading a journal and answering the several phones lying on his table. Sühbat introduced himself on the website of the association as researcher of shamanism, historian, folk medicine doctor and member of the “Chinggis Khaan’s World Academy”.<sup>7</sup> Our conversations were usually interrupted by clients who entered the room to request a shaman. Sometimes Sühbat started to discuss with the incoming people, asking about their problems, making a divination or handing them a little paper bag with *tan*, traditional medicine.

The goals of his association, said the president Sühbat, are to promote shamanism as a Mongolian religion and cultural tradition, to represent shamans and to support the individual shamans. The association partakes in the organization of conferences, in the staging of public shamanistic rituals on the mountains near the capital, and offers the center “Golomt Töv” as a place to work for shamans. “We try to help shamans, for example the Darhad shamans, who are poor”, said president Sühbat. Furthermore, the association attempts to distribute information on shamanism; the president recently published two books on shamanism (Sühbat 2002; 2003). Searching bookstores in the capital I found several further books and booklets portraying present-day shamans; for instance about the aforementioned shamans Batbayar *udgan* (Nüüdel 2004) and Byambadorj *zairan* (Byambadorj 2004). In the later case, the shaman Byambadorj himself appears as the author of the book. The cover shows his portrait, the shaman dressed in his armor and a

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the shamanism congress in Buryatia in 1996 and therefore carried the same name (Interview, 22.10. 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The term *asar* denotes the residences of shamans’ spirits, *ongod*, in the landscape (see Chapter 3).

<sup>6</sup> The association is named “*Mongol Böögiin ‘Tengeriin Sülde’ Holboo*”, a word creation which the association translated with “Association of ‘Majestic Heavens’ of Shamanism of Mongolia” and was founded in October 2003 with a two day long ceremony. The German anthropologist Amélie Schenk (2000) published a book about Tseren *zairan*. Tseren böö passed away in summer 2005 (Dulam and Oyuntungalag 2006: 149).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.owc.org.mn/tivdelhii/index.htm> (1.08. 2006)

shamanic headdress with fringes covering his face, smoking a pipe, in front of a blue sky, supplied with the title “*Tenger shütlegiin amin sudar*”, “Heaven worship’s vital lore”. The cover of the book on the Darhad shaman Batbayar *udgan* displays a colored montage showing the woman shaman in her shamanic armor (without fringes covering her face) and with a drum. Her image is mounted into a background picture showing the clouded sky over a camp with a reindeer and two tepees of the Tsaatan/Dukha reindeer herders in the Darhad taiga; its title is “*Tengeriin elch*”, “Heaven’s messenger”. Both publications evoke a relationship between the shaman and heaven, associating the shamans with the most powerful metaphor for worship known among the Mongols. The publications on shamanism usually include portraits of present-day shamans accompanied by explanations of terms and concepts, legends about powerful deceased shamans, and short citations of shamanic chants.



*Photograph 32: The shaman Batbayar during a public performance in a Tourist camp on Lake Hövsgöl (05.07. 2003).*

The associations not only achieve to inform a Mongolian public but also attempt to promote “Mongolian shamanism” for an international audience. In close cooperation with Mongolian scholars, the associations partake in the organizing of international conferences on shamanism in Ulaanbaatar, and send delegates to conferences abroad. Furthermore, the associations cooperate with overseas scholars, and they invite foreign researchers and

tourists to shamanic events organized on one of the mountains surrounding the capital or in other parts of Mongolia. Merli (2004b) reported on the collective performance following the conference on shamanism in August 1999; she describe the collective ritual as a festival of competing shamans, which transferred their inspirational competition into the arena of a tourist event:

Car en effet, cette cinquième Conférence internationale sur les recherches chamaniques, se terminait par un véritable festival de chamanes, au grand bonheur des chercheurs internationaux présents et de quelques touristes, armés de leur appareil photo et de leur caméra. Dans cette foire aux chamanes, les chamanes performant à quelques mètres les uns des autres, essayaient de retenir l'attention du public et des photographes, rivalisant dans la beauté de leurs chants, de leur jeu de tambour et de leur costume. Véritable compétition d'appel des esprits, dans laquelle chacun cherchait à démontrer sa force et son pouvoir. La confrontation entre chamanes qui existait en ville, généralement par presse interposée, avait pour une fois l'occasion de se dérouler sur le terrain" (Merli 2004b: 89).

Schlehe and Weber (2001) discussed a similar collective ritual to examine the relationship between shamanism and tourism. The authors reported on a summer solstice ritual, *naran tahl*, held in late June 1999, only some weeks earlier than the performance observed by Merli. The three-day event was staged at the same location in the Bogd Khan Uul National Park bordering the city. It was organized by Mongolian scholars and the shamanic associations in cooperation with tourist companies, with the deliberate intention to attract international tourists. Schlehe and Weber assessed tourist development in Mongolia during the 1990s as disappointing and identified in "exotic" shamanism a potential for tourist development well beyond esoteric "New Age" clientele. However, the ritual could not fulfill the hopes of attracting foreign tourists: the event, which is described as a combination of folkloristic shows, disco, and shamans performing their seances, was visited by around fifty Mongolians and a dozen foreigners, the majority of them living in Ulaanbaatar. The authors criticized the unprofessional promotion of the ritual, for example that the information on the internet was published too late to attract foreign tourists.

Furthermore, Schlehe and Weber discussed whether a shamanic performance staged for foreign tourists was still perceived as authentic. They posit that the organizers refused to have economic interests and denied that photographing tourists bothers the shamans' spirits, and presented the performances as authentic. Professor S. Dulam did not acknowledge the event to be a new invention but he emphasized the aim of reawakening traditional ritual and of revitalizing the relationship to nature (Schlehe und Weber 2001: 105). By contrast, Schlehe (2004) as well as Merli (2006) qualified the performance of public collective rituals in the vicinity of the capital city, bringing together shamans from different regions and traditions to one place to shamanize side by side to worship nature, rather as an "invention of tradition" than as a "revitalization of traditions". These invented

traditions conform well to the environmentalist discourse heavily shaping postsocialist Mongolia.

Public collective rituals in the Bogd Khan Mountains were also organized in the succeeding years. However, it seems that the intention of attracting foreign tourists could not be realized any more successfully. In early June 2004 I received a request by email from the female shaman Erdenchimeg, of whom I had never heard before. The shaman presented herself as a board member of Sühbat's association and as being responsible for foreign relations, and she asked me to help with the translation of an invitation to the summer solstice, which she intended to send to the USA – it was just two weeks before the event took place. Thus, the success of attracting an international audience to organized collective rituals near the capital has been rather limited. Tourists, as Merli (2004b: 353) wrote in her conclusion, imagine discovering shamans in remote rural sites in a Mongolian *ger* or a tepee, and not at organized events close to town.

Beyond the attempts to attract visitors to Mongolia, the promotion of “Mongolian shamanism” is also pursued abroad: Sühbat, the president of the “World Asian Association”, mentioned a shamanism center in the United States where also a Mongolian shaman performed regularly. In search of more information on this center, I came across a webpage of the “Siberian Mongolian Shamanism Center of North America” which was founded in 2002; however, the site delivers only little information and claims to have been “under redesign” for several years.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most active and successful promoters of “Mongolian shamanism” on international platforms was undoubtedly the American-Buryat scholar-shaman Julie Ann Stewart/Sarangerel, who presented herself as the “outreach officer of the Mongolian shaman's association” on her older internet site.<sup>9</sup> She was performing both as American scholar Julie Ann Stewart, participating in conferences on shamanism, as well as Buryat shaman Sarangerel, invoking shamanic roots from her mother's ancestors. With her web page constructed in 1997/98 and with the publication of a book on Mongolian-Buryat shamanism (Sarangerel 2000), her work produced an outstanding publicity for Mongolian shamanism; her book and her webpage are among the most cited sites on the web when searching for “shamanism”. Recently, Sarangerel put her work under the label “tengerism” to distinguish her representation from other popular information on shamanism, which she accused of being false and to stress the belief in spirits as opposed to the belief in shamans.<sup>10</sup> According to a note on her new webpage, she died in February 2006 at the early age of forty-three years. Of course, the promotion of a “Mongolian shamanism” for an

<sup>8</sup> <http://siberianshaman.com> (viewed 1.08. 2006)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.buryatmongol.com> (viewed 1.08. 2006).

<sup>10</sup> “Tenger” is the Mongolian term for sky, heaven. The address of the new website: <http://www.tengerism.org> (viewed 1.08. 2006)

international audience could not be imagined without having the large body of scholarly literature on Siberian and Inner Asian shamanism to build on.

### Authorizing shamans

By organizing rituals, staging international conferences and publishing books, associations and scholars provide an authenticating context for practicing shamans in town. Furthermore, the associations straightforwardly authorize shamans by awarding them with certificates proving their shamanship. The certificate of Sühbat's "World Asian Association" is a plasticized card displaying the association's name, the president's name, the name of the shaman, her or his ethnic denomination, and the membership number. I first saw the member card of Sühbat's association in summer 2002 hanging on the wall of Baljir's summer house in the Darhad area. During the period of my fieldwork, the majority of the Darhad shamans became members of Sühbat's association and acquired the certificate. Actually, the document seemed to be a main reason for Darhad shamans to travel to town.

In June 2003, shortly after he had traveled to Ulaanbaatar for the first time in his life, the shaman Umban recounted the procedure to acquire the certificate. With a gesture of revealing a mysterious experience, he conjured a two-day long examination during which he had to shamanize by jaw harp and by drum. Umban told of his performance in a hall where the *ongod* of several shamans were hanging on the wall and how he had to receive the foreign *ongod* during his seance while other shamans and further inspectors verified whether Umban was able to communicate also with these unknown *ongod*. Umban stressed that it was difficult for him to shamanize with unknown *ongod* and that he thereby provoked the anger of his own *ongod* due to his communication with competitors. Why did he apply for the certificate? Umban reminded me that sometimes tourists from a neighboring camp are brought to his home in Tengis to attend his seance. "How else should tourists know that I am a real shaman? How should tourists know who is a bad or a good shaman?" he asked rhetorically. How should Umban know that a certificate does not conform to the imagery of "archaic shamanism" and might rather subvert than confirm the authenticity of a shaman discovered in the taiga borderlands.<sup>11</sup> The shaman Moko from Tsagaan Nuur stressed that "today, a shaman needs a certificate. Without the certificate, one is not a real shaman, it is just *alban jos*, an official duty", the shaman said by employing an idiom related to the domain of the state. The certificates represent a formal recognition that shamans do not receive in their homelands.

The president Sühbat described the examination as a procedure including an interview and the demonstration of shamanizing before the president and some of the association's shamans. How does he judge the performance of a shaman? "I immediately see whether an

<sup>11</sup> See for example the photos of Sophie and Marc displayed on the internet about their travel to Hövsgöl, and the visit to Umban (<http://www.sophieandmarc.com>; accessed 18.09. 2006).

*ongod* is present or whether a shaman only pretends the presence of spirits. Besides, I know most of the important *ongod*”, Sühbat answered. How many aspirants had failed the examination of his association? “Oh, all passed the test. Somebody who is not a *jinhene böö*, a genuine shaman, would not apply for the certificate”.<sup>12</sup>

By awarding shamans with certificates, the association qualifies certified shamans as “genuine” shamans, thus implicitly partaking in the discourse distinguishing between “genuine” and “fake” shamans. I realized that the overarching discourse is also shaping the associations in town unintentionally by my awkward opening of the conversation with Sühbat: I introduced myself by saying that I am interested in the particularities of shamans’ practice in postsocialism, and mentioned as an example the relationship between shamans and the market economy. Even while I was talking, I realized that I had committed a faux-pas and, indeed, Sühbat reacted angrily. He reprehended that everywhere there were good and bad things and asked how it would be for me if in Mongolia only the bad sides of Switzerland were to be shown; he admonished that I should write only about the good things and the capacities of shamans. What was the unsaid thing that induced the president’s admonition? I think that Sühbat interpreted my remark about the relationship between market economy and shamans as a reference to “market economy shamans”. By declaring the discourse about “not genuine” shamans as a non-subject a foreign student should not talk about, and by admonishing me to write only about the good sides of shamanism, I received an impression of how pervasive the discourse about “market economy shamans” was. The discussion whether a shaman is powerful or weak, a genuine shaman or a mere actor, is not only a popular topic in the Shishget borderland, but likewise dominates the perception of shamans in the city. Similar to the rural borderland, the shamans’ reputations are primarily produced through personal communication; in distinction to the rural periphery, however, mass media take part in the promotion and criticism of shamans.

Merli (2004b) reported how shamans are portrayed in newspapers, how journalists qualify the capacities of shamans and how shamans attack each other openly by addressing shamans with their names in newspapers. She reported how the Darhad shaman Batbayar, whom she presented as a self-confident, intellectual woman and well-known shaman, was attacked in 1998 by a journalist portraying another shaman, who presumed her to belying about her shamanic ancestry, accused her of using black magic and for defrauding her clients by extorting hundreds of US dollars for curses. Despite these and other attacks, Batbayar could maintain her good reputation until she died in a car accident in 2003.

In contrast, public attacks in newspapers initiated the decline of the reputation of the woman shaman Baljmaa. The Buryat-Mongolian shaman was one of the first shamans to emerge in Ulaanbaatar after the end of socialism. She was, together with the scholar O.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Sühbat, 22.10. 2003.



Pürev, invited to a conference in Seoul in 1991; later, in the winter of 1997/1998, she was taken to Switzerland to participate in the “Psi-Tage” in Basel.<sup>13</sup> Baljmaa had long before stopped working in her lay occupation as an accountant and was working as a full-time shaman. She received her clients in her family’s apartment in the city center. I visited her regularly from 1998 onwards, and in beginning, her apartment was crowded with waiting visitors and with young female relatives cooking in the kitchen. I heard that clients apply not only all days of the week but also during the night, and that the family had to cut off the phone and to send away clients from the door to protect the overworked shaman. Then, Baljmaa was attacked in the public arenas of the press by other shamans. She was accused of cursing, of being a bad shaman and of having alcohol problems. Baljmaa complained bitterly about the attacks and that they made her ill. Indeed, she seriously got sick and thereafter stayed in hospital for longer periods. Her previously huge matronly figure shrank into a small, thin fragile frame. When I visited her for the last time in autumn 2003, her apartment gave the impression of being empty; there were no waiting clients, no young women preparing food in the kitchen; even the carpets on the wall and the TV set had disappeared. The changes pointed to her falling reputation and waning income. The following year, I heard from a mutual friend that Baljmaa had sold her apartment and moved to the more affordable outskirts of town. She was talking about her approaching death and thinking about her succession. In May 2006 Baljmaa passed away at the age of fifty years.

The examples of the two most renowned female shamans in Ulaanbaatar in the late 1990s show how fragile and volatile the reputation of shamans is; both women shared the fate of having gained a reputation of being a powerful shaman within a few years and then being attacked once they were well-known. While Batbayar withstood the attacks against herself until her death, Baljmaa had lost her reputation before. Merli (2004b) told further stories of the rise and fall of shamans’ reputations in Ulaanbaatar; the majority of stories about shamans’ careers ended sadly: shamans lost their clients, started drinking, they disappeared from town or died. It seems that the violent and deadly competition between shamans, which is well known from historical accounts as *haraal*, inspirational cursing, has found its resurgence in present-day urban practice. Today, shamans use the channels of modern mass media as powerful tools to represent themselves as well as to attack their disagreeable competitors.

In an overall context of mistrust and harsh competition between shamans in town, the associations attempt to secure the reputation of those shamans they support. Despite the

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<sup>13</sup> The “Basler Psi-Tage” is a public conference of parapsychology (or “paranormology” as the organizers call it), which includes the participation of healers and has been held in Basel annually since 1982 ([http://www.psi-tage.ch/psitage\\_index.html](http://www.psi-tage.ch/psitage_index.html), 17.08. 2006). Baljmaa was invited to Switzerland by a Swiss travel agent who organizes trips to visit shamans; she was reconnoitering in Mongolia with the help of a friend of mine, a Mongolian tour operator who introduced her to Baljmaa (<http://archipel-reisen.ch/de/ongods>; 17.08. 2006).

Darhad shamans' eagerness to acquire the certification and support of Sühbat's association, and despite their participation in collective rituals in town, they maintain a certain reserved attitude towards the association. In autumn 2003, Sühbat praised the shaman Moko as a young and promising Darhad shaman. Moko in turn showed himself enthusiastic about the association; he was talking about founding a section of the association in Hövsgöl, to open a shamanic center in Mörön with a hotel for tourists, and to combine the performance of shamanic seances with courses on medical plants in the taiga. When I met Moko the following year, he had not stopped developing ideas to attract tourists; however, he no longer mentioned planning it together with the association. After I had transmitted to him word by word what Sühbat had told me to deliver (that "his chief wants to see him") Moko snorted. He then complained about the lack of support from the association and the high rates shamans had to pay for shamanizing in the center Golomt Töv. The shaman Baljir complained that Sühbat had promised him attendance at a conference abroad, but in the end the association could not provide the traveling expenses, meaning that the shaman was not able to participate in the conference. Other shamans, too, seemed to have a rather distanced relationship to the association, although I only rarely heard open criticism. Usually, shamans evasively mentioned that due to conflicts they were not interested in shamanizing in the association's center. Merli (2004b) related conflicts between the shamans and the association to the duties the shamans have to render for performing in the association's center.

Once, an attempt was undertaken to build a section of the association in Mörön. The initiator, an authoritative older man, however stopped the initiative shortly after beginning: "We wanted to give the shamans a direction. We wanted them to stop bad things like *haraal*, curses. But soon conflicts arose with the shamans, and mainly, the shaman did not listen to us".<sup>14</sup> It seems that although the Darhad shamans seek the support of associations, they refuse to be organized and to be integrated into hierarchical structures.

In sum, the new urban scene of postsocialist shamanism has revolved around professionalized shamans providing their services in shamanic centers in town, participating in conferences and performing collective rituals close to the capital. A main characteristic is the institutionalization of shamans in associations, which authorize their members and promote shamanism as religion and as Mongolian tradition. The activities of the associations are directed both to a national, mainly urban public as well as to an international audience. Knowing well the enormous international scholarly and popular interest in shamanism, the associations try to establish themselves as representatives of Mongolian shamanism.

The institutionalization of shamanism is not a specifically Mongolian phenomenon. On the contrary, the growth of associations in Ulaanbaatar is probably rather late in

<sup>14</sup> Conversation with Hürelochir, 4. 09. 2004, in Mörön.

comparison with the development in the neighboring Republics Buryatia (Zhukovskaya 2000) and Tyva of the Russian Federation. Stépanoff (2004) shows that in Kyzyl, Tyva's capital, four associations compete with each other. The associations in Kyzyl maintain shamanic centers, perform public rituals and provide the shamans with membership cards. According to Stépanoff, the shamanic scene in Kyzyl is dominated by the scholar and shaman Kenin-Lopsan, who founded the first association in 1993 and thereafter could maintain a position of authority. Stépanoff attributes the dominant authority of Kenin-Lopsan to his ability to represent himself as intermediary between foreigners and shamans in Tyva as well as to the economic support Kenin-Lopsan could attract from abroad, mainly from Michael Harner's foundation (Stépanoff 2004: 172). In contrast to neighboring Tyva, the urban shamans' scene in Ulaanbaatar enjoys neither substantial economic support nor interest from abroad, nor is it dominated by a single person. I highlighted in the preceding account the person of Sühbat of the "World Asian Association" because the majority of Darhad shamans recently had become members of his association; however, I do not perceive him as dominating the whole scene of shamans. Rather, I view him as one of several leading actors in the promotion of Mongolian shamanism; besides renowned shamans, in particular Mongolian scholars play an important role, for example the Mongolist S. Dulam, related to the Asar Research Center, or the historian O. Pürev, who, as far as I know, is not related to any particular association.

### **Nationalizing shamanism**

The cooperation between shamans, scholars of shamanism, the national and local administration and tourist agencies is a striking feature of the new institutionalized urban shamanism. Interestingly, the borders between the different professional fields, particularly between shamans and scholars, are not clearly delineated. Scholars of shamanism I met eventually talked about their own personal relations to shamanism, for example about their own shaman ancestors. Shamans on the other hand are interested in acquiring scholarly titles, be that an honorary doctorate of the "Chinggis Khaan Academy" or even a regular university degree. When I interviewed Batbayar *udgan* in spring 2003, she told me about her membership in the "Asar" association, and that the association was a research center. My surprised reaction about her as shaman doing research on shamanism angered her: "What do you think", she scolded me, "a shaman cannot read or write?", and she pointed to her own publication on shamanism. Zhukovskaya (2000: 25) considers the "conflation of shamanism and shamanic studies, in other words, the arrival of shamans in science" as the most interesting phenomenon of the resurgent shamanism in Inner Asia. She focuses on the interest of shamans in participating in academic discussions, for example by achieving an academic degree or by participating in conferences on shamanism. Zhukovskaya discusses a conference in Yakutsk in 1992 where several shamans presented papers and

made it clear that they were not satisfied with the scholarly representations and, therefore, attempted to explain their activities themselves.

The cooperation between shamans, Mongolian scholars, and other actors can be interpreted as attempts to nationalize shamanism. I see two facets of this process: first, the attempts of national actors to partake in the international representation of shamanism; second, the attempts to make shamanism a national tradition. By their activities, Mongolian scholars and associations represent shamanism also towards an international audience; they participate in the discursive production of shamanism and do not leave the international representation entirely to numerous scholars and other visitors doing fieldwork and meeting shamans in Mongolia. Although foreign visitors – from missionaries and explorers to anthropologists and tourists – have dominated the representation of shamanism for centuries, the participation of “native” scholars in the discursive production of shamanism is not new. The publications of the Buryat scholars Banzarov in the mid-nineteenth century and Sanjeev in the early twentieth century were outstanding contributions to the studies of Mongol shamanism. During the twentieth century, access to the field was severely restricted for foreign anthropologists; since the collapse of the Soviet system however, scholars from all over the world, from Japan, China, South Korea, as well as the United States or Western Europe meet with shamans in Mongolia. Mongolian scholars and shamans themselves attempt to secure their authority in the newly emerging fields of academic production.

The joint efforts of associations and scholars to promote “Mongolian” shamanism are a second facet of the nationalizing of shamanism. Hobsbawm (1994) perceived invented traditions as particularly relevant for the historically recent innovation of nation-states. With Hobsbawm I see the “invented tradition” of collective rituals in an urban environment related to the very constitution of the nation-state. Assembling shamans of minority groups for the staging of collective urban rituals contributes to the building of a postsocialist national identity and, moreover, to the construction of the very idea of “Mongolian” shamanism. Humphrey (1992) and Aubin (1996) diagnosed that after the socialist meta-narratives had lost ground it became one of Mongolia’s major concerns to unearth the “deep past” seeking for resources to build a new national identity. In the fields of national identity production the promoters of shamanism are outsiders; they compete with the dominant celebration of Buddhism (Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik 2006), the veneration of Chinggis Khaan (Kaplonski 2004), or *tengerism* (worship of heaven, Bira 2003). Merli (2004a; 2004b) has described how some shamans actively try to connect themselves to the legacies of Chinggis Khaan and to his court shaman Tiv Tenger and how some shamans actively cooperate with xenophobic nationalists. Similarly, Bumochir Dulam and Oyuntungalag Ayushiin (2006) cite a letter they have received from the son of the Buryat shaman Tseren böö, which mentions that during one of his seances the shaman was entered

by the spirit of Chinggis Khaan proclaiming a message to the president of Mongolia. Beyond these actions of individual shamans, the promoters of shamanism attempt to enact shamanism as a uniquely national tradition. Shamanism is presented at the same time as both a tradition of distinct ethnic groups located inside Mongolia (of the Darhad, Buryat, Urianhai, and Hotgoid) as well as ancient Mongol/ian tradition. Thereby the term “*Mongol*” shamanism is used in ambiguous ways:<sup>15</sup> when referring to presocialist history, the term *Mongol* is used with a cultural/ethnic meaning including all cultural Mongols; when referring to the present, however, the term *Mongol* in fact refers only to the nation-state of present-day Mongolia. The notion of “Mongolian shamanism” thus relates only to those Mongol shamans in the confines of the nation-state, excluding shamans’ traditions of neighboring Mongol areas, for example of the Buryat in the neighboring Buryat Republic or the Daur in Chinese Inner Mongolia. In contrast, earlier concepts of *Mongol* shamanism, for example by Rintchen (1975) or Banzarov 1981 [1846]), bore an inclusive idea of cultural Mongolness and comprehended all traditions of Mongol shamanism.

The hypothesis of the contemporary nationalizing of shamanism is indebted to the work of Bulag (1998) and Kaplonski (2004). Bulag argued that the term *Mongol* in twentieth-century socialist Mongolia became confined to the nation-state and its citizen, while the Mongols of neighboring areas outside its borders were perceived as “less Mongol” than the people inside the state of Mongolia and were termed *erliiz*, hybrids. Kaplonski (2004: 175) compared the socialist and postsocialist perceptions of outstanding historical figures and the relationship to national identity; one of his conclusions is that “[t]he overarching categories for thinking about history are linked to the concept of an independent Mongolian nation-state”. The dominant perspective on the history of shamanism (for example Pürev 2002) follows Kaplonski’s general outline: shamanism is viewed as originating in prehistory, entering the Mongol empire of Chinggis Khaan, and finally leading into present-day Mongolia – by silently neglecting traditions of Mongol shamanism outside the nation-state. I argue that the term “*Mongol*” shamanism in present-day Mongolia is so self-evidently confined to the realms of the nation-state that this relationship is largely unconscious.<sup>16</sup> Shamanic practice was considered as suppressed and assimilated into Buddhism in the central Mongol lands since the seventeenth century (Heissig 1953a), and thereafter was recognized as a phenomenon of ethnic groups of the margins only. Now, the traditions of the borderlands are labeled as “Mongolian” shamanism and are discursively associated with the nation-state. The promoters of “Mongolian shamanism”, although they

<sup>15</sup> The terms used are *Mongol böö mörgöl* (Mongol/ian shaman worship) or *Mongol böögiin shashin* (Mongol/ian shaman’s religion). When I refer both to the Mongolian nation-state as to a wider cultural or historical notion of Mongol, I summarize it as “Mongol/ian.”

<sup>16</sup> E. g. on the homepage of Sühbat’s association, the term *Mongol*, translated as “Mongolian”, is related to the nation-state, not to a more inclusive cultural/ethnic idea of Mongolness (<http://www.owc.org.mn/tivdelhii/index.htm>; viewed 18.09. 2006).

are positioned somewhat marginally in the arenas of national identity production, attempt to institutionalize traditions of the borderlands in the center of the postsocialist state.

### **Darhad shamans as a foil to authenticate the urban scene**

Darhad shamans occupy a prominent position in the postsocialist attempts to nationalize shamanism. I claim that Darhad shamans are a primary foil for the celebration of shamans' practices as "national tradition". In the capital city Darhad shamans are perceived as the most powerful shamans of the most "pure" tradition of shamanism in Mongolia. According to Bulag (1998) and Kaplonski (2001) the idea of "purity" is related to present-day Mongolian nationalism. The reputation of Darhad shamans in town thereby authorizes "Mongolian" shamanism in general and the new urban scene of shamans in particular. Merli (2004b: 14) wrote in her dissertation that Mongolian scholars tried to convince her to abandon the study with "fake" urban shamans and to travel instead to Hövsgöl; that maybe some of the few surviving shamans would meet her. This preference of Mongolian scholars for Darhad shamans I have witnessed too. It is obvious in the most influential recent book on shamanism written by the historian O. Pürev (2002; first edition 1998), who is himself a Darhad. The book contextualizes shamanism in Mongol history and explains major concepts; it gains its extraordinary flavor through numerous legends about historical shamans and stories from shamans the author knew personally.<sup>17</sup> The bulk of these stories and legends are about Darhad shamans. This coalescence of a general account about Mongol/ian shamanism with stories about individual named Darhad shamans evokes the impression that Mongol/ian shamanism in effect centers on Darhad shamans. As if to support this hypothesis the author remembered in the foreword to the second edition his earliest field experiences in the 1960s, when he was visiting his home area and was talking with the *jinhēn*, the "genuine" shamans (Pürev 2002: 14). Thus, he locates the "genuine" shamans of Mongolia in the Darhad area of his youth during the height of socialism. Beyond the scholarly expertise, I repeatedly heard in conversations in Ulaanbaatar that the Darhad shamans were the "most powerful" and the "genuine" shamans of Mongolia.

In O. Pürev's report and in public perception alike, Darhad shamans are outstanding representatives of "black" shamanism. The designation "black shamans", (*harin böö*) includes ambiguous meanings connoting both reverence and fear. "Black" shamans are put in opposition to "yellow" shamans. As only the "yellow" shamans are perceived as influenced by Buddhism, the "black" shamans gain the flavor of being a more "genuine" and

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<sup>17</sup> The title of the book in Mongolian is "*Mongol böögiin shashin*" ("Mongol/ian shamans' religion") and is translated in the English edition (Pürev 2003) as "Mongolian shamanism". I assume that O. Pürev explicitly used the term "religion" in the title as one of his concerns is to propagate shamanism as an indigenous religion of Mongolia. His use of the term "*Mongol*" includes both a historical/cultural notion of Mongolness as it is related to 20<sup>th</sup> century Mongolia.

“pure” tradition of shamanism.<sup>18</sup> The attribution “black” is further used to express that shamans are in contact with black *tenger*, skies, signifying powerful angry inspirational powers, in contrast to white *tenger*, signifying benevolent powers. “Black” shamans are feared as being able to curse, (*haraal*), to do black magic (*har dom*) or to protect from cursing. Thus, to associate Darhad shamans with the attribute “black” includes both connotations of being the original, genuine or prototype shamans, as well as connotations of being powerful, dangerous and potentially able to use black magic.<sup>19</sup> The ambiguities and the potential peril involved in the assignation “black shamans” contribute to the mystification of Darhad shamans.

The reputation of Darhad shamans as genuine shamans suits the perception of Lake Hövsgöl and the neighboring Shishget depression, which are praised for their pristine nature. This imagery of a pristine landscape seems to provide the perfect environment for the imagination of Darhad shamans as descendants of an ancient and most “pure” tradition. The association of Darhad shamans with pristine nature is also a perfect foil for the veneration of nature in the newly invented urban collective rituals.

The reputation contemporary Darhad shamans enjoy in the capital city is less constituted by their own practices but precedes and surrounds them with almost mythical imageries of “Darhad shamanism”. Contributing to this mythical reputation are those old persons who were discovered as Darhad shamans in the early 1990s. The web page of the “World Asian Association” for example shows under the rubric “famous shamans” pictures of Baljir *udgan* from Bayanzürh, Nadmid *udgan* from Tsagaan Nuur, Tsevegmed *udgan* from Ulaan Uul, and Luvsdai *zairan* from RENCHINHÜMBE. All of them were Darhad shamans who lived in the rural periphery all their life and, with one exception, became known as shamans in the early 1990s. All of them have died in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Baljir *udgan* and Nadmid *udgan* were well known during the 1990s through documentaries and publications. Tsevegmed has acquired the reputation among scholars and shamans that she was the only shaman venerating the powerful and dangerous *ongod* Agarín Hairhan in the 1990s. Luvsdai *zairan* is the least well-known of these shamans, and I am rather surprised that the association included his picture in the list of famous shamans as he stopped to

<sup>18</sup> According to Shimamura (2004c), the term “yellow shamanism” was first used by S. Dulam (1992) and then promoted by O. Pürev (2002), who distinguished the “yellow” shamans from the “genuine” black Darhad shamans in his quest to represent Darhad shamans as the representatives of authentic Mongolian shamanism. However, the distinction between “black” and “yellow” shamanism was made much earlier, for example by Heissig (1966).

<sup>19</sup> To distinguish the two connotations, O. Pürev (2002: 62) named those shamans doing *haraal*, cursing, and black magic, as *hartai böö*. People in the Darhad area give a further explanation for the assignation “black”: A *har böö*, a black shaman is a shaman who goes to the *haranhii*, to the realm of the dark. Furthermore, Darhad women use to talk about their husbands as “*manai har hün*”, “our black man”. In this notion, the term “black” refers to a man who is not a monk. An old use of the term “black” related to people is the opposition between the noble elite, white *yastan*, versus the “black” commoners, *harts*.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.owc.org.mn/tivdelhii/eng/boo/udgan.htm> (18. 08. 2006). Tsevegmed *udgan* died in 1997, Nadmid in 2001, Baljir *udgan* in spring 2003 and Luvsdai *zairan* in summer 2003.

shamanize long ago and it seems that he was not well known as shaman even in the Darhad area.<sup>21</sup> I assume that the association's decision to present recently deceased Darhad shamans as famous Mongolian shamans on their home page is no coincidence. The pictures showing old persons from the countryside are perfectly suited to constitute the imagery of powerful shamans. Furthermore, the old female Darhad shamans are well remembered, also in the capital. To select living shamans instead would have provoked the resistance of competing shamans; but the display of dead shamans contributes to the legitimacy of all shamans. By showing these old respectable Darhad shamans, the association profits from the mythical reputation of Darhad shamans and, conversely, contributes to the veneration of Darhad shamans. Of course, present-day Darhad shamans and their practices are inextricably intertwined with this discursive context of celebration; the shamans and their practices are also affected by the imageries as contemporary Darhad shamans reciprocally fuel the discourses by their very existence.

What could be the reasons that, out of all shamans in Mongolia, the Darhad shamans are chosen to represent the most powerful and genuine shamans in Mongolia? The only alternative of a recognized and named ethnic tradition of shamanism in Mongolia that could figure to represent Mongolian shamanism is that of the Buryat shamans from Dornod. Buyandelgeriyn (2002) found a shaman in almost every family during her fieldwork in a Buryat *sum* in Dornod, and Shimamura (2004b) counted 120 Buryat shamans in four *sum* in Dornod. Thus, the Buryat shamans by far outnumber the Darhad shamans. I see the preference for the Darhad over the Buryat shamans to represent a "genuine Mongolian" shamanism as highly artificial. The Buryat and thus their shamans are conceptualized as "hybrids" and as such are not used to represent a "genuine Mongolian shamanism". The hybridity imputed on Buryat shamans includes two dimensions: Buryat shamans are called "yellow" shamans associated with Buddhism, and as such are conceived as hybrids in the religious field. Furthermore, the Buryat, living in the majority outside Mongolia in the neighboring Buryat Republic, are perceived as "ethnic hybrids" and "less Mongol" than Halha-dominated Mongolians (Bulag 1998).

I will show in Chapter 8 that the Darhad shamans were as exposed to Buddhist influence as Buryat shamans were. I will further show in Chapter 9 that the Darhad were part of Tannu-Urianhai until the early twentieth century and could also be perceived as "hybrids". Nevertheless, the Buryat shamans are discursively made into hybrids while the Darhad shamans were made into a foil to represent "genuine Mongolian shamanism". Probably, the Buryat are less suited than the Darhad to represent a tradition that is related to the imagery

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<sup>21</sup> I once shortly met the old man in the *ail* of his son at Lake Hövsgöl in June 2003. However, when the neighbors told me that I had met a shaman, I first suspected that they were joking. Coming back to the *ail* in July, Luvsdai *zairan* was dying. His son Batbaatar told me that his father had stopped shamanizing twenty to thirty years ago; yet, in the nights before his death he shamanized, without paraphernalia but laying on his bed and beating the imagined drum with his hand.



of “the ancient” and “the wild”. The image of the Buryat in Ulaanbaatar rather is one of being intellectuals, as an extraordinarily well-educated minority, in contrast to the Darhad who were recognized as an outstanding example of a backward minority during socialism (see Chapter 9). According to Bulag (1998: 83 ff.) and Baabar (1999: 326 ff.), the Buryat who fled Buryatia after the October Revolution held influential positions in the Mongolian capital before they were purged for their “rightist deviation” in the 1930s. According to Bulag, today many Buryat claim that the anti-Buryat atmosphere has increased again in postsocialism. It might be no coincidence that two anthropologists studying the Buryat shamans relate the resurgence of Buryat shamanism to a renewal of a particular Buryat ethnic identity and not to a national Mongol/ian identity construction (Buyandelgeriyn 2002; Shimamura 2004b). Besides, the discursive association of the Darhad with shamanism is not new but goes back to Badamhatan’s monograph (1965). As far as I know there is no comparable account on the shamanism of the Buryat on the territory of Mongolia during socialism. Diószegi (1961: 197) reported that he traced twelve shamans of the Aga Buryat in eastern Mongolia during his field trip in 1960, in contrast to around sixty shamanizing people in the Shishget borderland.

The discursive constitution of Darhad shamanism as the most “genuine” and “pure” tradition in Mongolia works as a foil to authenticate shamanism as a part of the Mongolian national heritage and to legitimize urban practitioners as representatives of this “genuine” Mongolian tradition. This authentication works in contradictory ways: the foil of “genuine” Darhad shamanism questions contemporary urban shamans as “not really real” shamans, but at the same time the reference to the “genuine” Darhad shamans from the frontier authenticates the efforts of the institutionalized scene in Ulaanbaatar and the practices of urban shamans. Even for Darhad shamans, the discursive production of “genuine” Darhad shamanism is somewhat ambivalent as the image is foremost related to the deceased shamans. Nevertheless, the present-day practitioners, who in their majority are in their forties and fifties and started to shamanize publicly towards the end of the 1990s, profit from their image as heirs of the “genuine” Darhad shamans. Present-day Darhad shamans are openly welcomed in the capital; the image of Darhad shamanism opens opportunities to attract clients and to accumulate a reputation as individual shamans. The reputation of Darhad shamans in the capital is reflected by numerous urban shamans who claim to be Darhad but whose Darhad origin is contested in the Shishget area. Even if a shaman from the Shishget area does not travel to Ulaanbaatar, the image of Darhad shamanism produced in urban discourses is a legitimizing resource. If shamans achieve the transfer of this symbolic capital into an economic one, by moving to town and performing their art for an urban clientele, they risk undermining their acceptance in local arenas.

### Shamans and money

As welcome as Darhad shamans are in the capital city, as criticized they are for their travels in their home areas. Neighbors presume that shamans travel to the cities in the south to make money only, that they are *mönhnii böö*, “money shamans” in search of economic success. The dominant argument, which shall support this presumption, is that “in earlier times, the drum did not leave the shaman’s home”. With this claim locals expect shamans to practice at home only in particular admonish them not to travel. Shamans adapt to this imperative: they justify their travels with the explicit permission of their *ongod*, they emphasize that they leave their drum at home and travel with jaw harp only. Furthermore they state that they carry the drum out not through the door, but through a sidewall of the *ger* or the roof of the house, which would be accepted by custom. Remarkably, the notion “in earlier times, the drum did not leave its home” bears an inverted connotation when related to the socialist past. When people today talk about shamans in the socialist past, they blame socialist repression for preventing shamans to work publicly and for restricting them to secret practice at home or hidden in the forest. Thus, when looking back, people regret that shamans were confined to private practice. When people switch to talking about contemporary shamans, they wish for exactly for the same restrictions: that shamans should practice at home only. What is considered as the consequence of socialist repression in the case of talking about past shamans is presented as a worthy tradition when talking about present-day shamans; what is criticized as repression is now reiterated as a means to confine shamans and to prevent them from performing for clients and attaining remunerations.

The fantasies about the shamans’ income proliferate in the periphery: I now and then heard rumors about rich clients from the capital visiting shamans in the taiga, bringing dozens of bottles of vodka and hundreds of thousands *tögrög* (hundreds of US dollars). In postsocialist Mongolia, doing business and making money is a dominant concern shaping all social fields and is broadly accepted as a daily need. Why should it not be acceptable for shamans? Despite the tales about the income shamans can generate with their practice, only a few of the Darhad shamans I know belong to the wealthier households in the area; the majority of the shamans are poor and lead an economically and socially marginalized life. In the northern borderlands, as in Mongolia in general, one has to have capital, for example livestock or a truck, to be able to accumulate wealth. Darhad shamans in contrast need to invest only limited capital to obtain the armor and the drum. Might it be that shamans should not change the social field and therefore be contained in an economically and socially marginalized position?

People in the Darhad periphery know about shamans in town offering their services for fixed tariffs and they largely condemn such price policy. Darhad shamans usually

emphasize that they do not demand standard rates for their practices like urban shamans do, but that they leave the height of the payment to the clients' discretion. Thus, shamans delegate the responsibility for the assessment of the value of the treatment to the client. Clients in town, but also in the Darhad area, often seem to be unsure about the amount of money that is appropriate for a divination or participation in a healing ceremony. Shamans, even though they entrust the responsibility to the clients, nevertheless may try to influence the amount paid. Once, I attended a Darhad shaman in town who was counseling a family while other clients were waiting in the same room. After the shaman had disclosed the diagnosis and had set the date for the seance on one of the following evenings, the family left by handing the shaman one thousand *tögrög* (around one US dollar). I often saw people giving such moderate remuneration for a shaman's initial divination. After the people had left, the shaman turned to the waiting clients and complained about the stingy payment in view of the heavy problems the family had. It is obvious that by this remark the shaman implicitly requested the waiting clients to be more generous.

The shaman's *ongod* sometimes intervene as "invisible hands" in the determination of the client's remuneration. In September 2003, when I stayed at the shaman Yura's in the village of Ulaan Uul, a middle-aged man came to visit her. The man was passing by car and stopped to inform Yura that the health of his daughter had improved after Yura had shamanized for her. The man promised the shaman a sheep to remunerate the successful healing. Yura was not pleased, saying that her mother-*ongod* would become angry about promises that might not be fulfilled. The man responded with a similar story he had heard about the deceased female shaman Baljir *udgan* from Bayanzürh: her *ongod* reacted angrily to people promising a sheep. To appease her *ongod*, the old shaman asked her clients to supply a wad of sheep wool to pretend to the spirits that a sheep present at the seance would be offered to them. The following week Yura discussed the matter with several clients she visited in Mörön and, following the old shaman's example, she asked her clients to bring a wad of sheep wool to the seance. The collusion between the shaman and her clients against her *ongod* showed that the height of the pay is negotiable. Primarily however, the shaman asserted by this collusion that not she but the spirits were demanding the remuneration.

Discussing new features of resurgent postsocialist shamanism in Mongolia, Schlehe (2004: 287) introduced the Darhad shaman Enhtuya, the shaman who settled at Lake Hövsgöl close to the tourist camps, and she concluded that the outstanding new feature of her practice would be that she practices "for money". Considering the locals denigrating their shamans as "money shamans", Schlehe's interpretation seems at first sight to be adequate and reflecting local concerns. However, if one remembers that both the eighteenth-century explorers and socialist propaganda accused shamans of exploiting their followers, the perception of financial rewards for shamans as a new phenomenon is hardly

supported by a historical examination but rather seems to be inspired by a romantic projection of an archaic shamanism. In contrast, I see financial remuneration for shamans as one of the fields in which the reputation of shamans is constituted and disputed. In the following, I will discuss the example of Enhtuya's economy of reputation in detail; I will not only discuss the outstanding financial remuneration but I will show how gender is a central part of her reputation.

### Gendered economy of reputation

In the overall national appreciation of Darhad shamans, female shamans enjoy an outstanding reputation. Badamhatan (1965: 231) had acknowledged the superior power of female shamans and had interpreted it in an evolutionist stance as matriarchal survival. Also today, women shamans dominate the perception and the veneration of Darhad shamans in the capital. The most powerful *ongod* of the Darhad, Agarín Hairhan, is identified with the former female shaman Baglaan *udgan*, and the venerated shamans of the early 1990s were all female. Within a decade, more and more male shamans appeared on the public stages, quickly outnumbering female ones. Among the Darhad shamans I met who had the ambition to acquire clients only one third were women; interestingly, half of these ambitious female shamans did not live in the Darhad area but in the towns of Mörön and Ulaanbaatar.<sup>22</sup>

A question that remains to be answered is why all the Darhad shamans who became famous in the early 1990s were female and why women shamans thereupon lost their numerical dominance in only a few years. I assume that men occupied the more favorable positions in late socialist modernity and that there were only some women left who maintained shamanizing as a private practice. Then, during the 1990s, when these old women were publicly celebrated, it again became attractive for men to engage in shamanizing. This hypothesis is also maintained by Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (2002: 326) in her study about Buryat shamans in postsocialist Mongolia: she argues that through the socialist prohibition of shamans, the practice became feminized; when shamanism in postsocialism became a “site for power and prestige, men took over its leading roles”. However, our hypothesis is difficult to verify as the majority of contemporary shamans situate in their biographical narratives the period of their shamanic illness and the initiation into shamanizing back in the socialist past. Although I can clearly see the aspect

<sup>22</sup> I included in my counting of female shamans from the Shishget area the shamans Enhtuya, Yura, Höhrii (the daughter of Umban) and, further, Tsend and Suyon living in the taiga; further Byenda, Jüree and Oyun, three Darhad shamans living in Mörön; as well as Batbayar *udgan*, and Höörög, the daughter of Bayar *udgan* living in Ulaanbaatar. I considered as male ambitious shamans: Baldandorj, Umban, Mönhöö, Nergüi, Dorj, Batsuur', Ölzii, Ganzorig, Goostoi, Baatar, Lhagvajav, Nyamsüren, Davaajav, Badrah, Tulgat, and Baljir, Moko, Chuluunbaatar (the last three live mainly or fully in Ulaanbaatar). If I were to include in the count those shamans preferring to be secret, working not for clients, as well as the disciples, the women would constitute around forty percent of the Darhad shamans.

of legitimation in these narratives, I do consider that also some men might have started to practice in late socialism. Another reason for the preeminence of female shamans' reputation in the first years of the 1990s might be that elderly women were the better foil to become discovered as representatives of an archaic tradition, and therefore only these female practitioners were highlighted. The increasing criticism directed against the contemporary shamans who followed the deceased celebrated old women, I claim, is even more targeted at women shamans than at men.

Buyandelgeriyn (2002) argues that despite the egalitarian ideas inherent in Buryat shamanism, of male and female shamans performing the same rituals with the same paraphernalia, women shamans' power is restricted by daily discriminations. The author discusses how Buryat women achieving shamanship were impeded by the lack of support of husbands and relatives, leaving the women contained in the domestic sphere occupied by housework, cutting them off from the social networks and resources needed to acquire the paraphernalia and clients. Even if a female shaman were recognized as powerful, she was at risk of falling into a downward spiral, missing the social support and sufficient economic resources needed to perform the expensive initiation ceremonies and to acquire piece by piece of the paraphernalia required to become a fully accomplished shaman. Without the paraphernalia as obvious materialization of spirits and proof of her domestication of spirits, a woman shaman loses her clients and, thereby, the monetary income and social networks to attract further clients. Buyandelgeriyn argues that Buryat husbands and fathers do not support wives and daughters in becoming shamans, as women leaving their father's patrilineage to join their husband's were perceived as a potential threat to the patrilineal succession of Buryat shamanship. Furthermore, the author shows how women shamans were blamed for aspiring to profit from shamanizing while, in contrast, successful male shamans could invest in symbolic capital by performing generous festivities, giving the impression of not being in an economic need to shamanize. Buyandelgeriyn (2002: 332) analyzes the expectations towards women in Mongolia in general as contradictory: women should perform as obedient wives staying at home, working without control over resources, serving their husbands without resisting openly against male domination; at the same time they are expected to demonstrate self-esteem and to be in charge of household and husband. The author shows Buryat women shamans as offending these ambivalent expectations and, as transgressors of gendered norms, as particularly vulnerable.

Although Darhad female shamans seem to be under less pressure – Darhad shamans show neither a preference for a patrilineal succession of shamanship nor do they perform repeated expensive initiation ceremonies – the principles of ambivalent expectations towards women and the processes of marginalization of female shamans are similar. To become a reputed Darhad shaman demands an aspiration to shamanize for clients which is not compatible with the expectation of women staying at home “between the two cooking

pots”, of processing milk and cooking tea, of caring for children and serving their husbands. To be a reputed shaman requires traveling when clients call and performing an authoritative role in meetings with them. Darhad women shamans enact themselves as extraordinary personalities: they are self-confident, wield a chiefly attitude, and enjoy the support of their husbands, who usually not only assist their ceremonies but also support them with doing housework. Darhad female shamans usually lead the conversations with visitors, control the resources of the household, and some of them are married to younger men, which Buyandelgeriyn (2002: 352) viewed as “consolidation of female shamanic power”. In short, female Darhad shamans perform in public the role of the household head, a task that dominant gender expectations assign to the husband. Of course, there are shamanizing women who do not aspire to this authoritative role but conform to conventional expectations of how to perform as a woman. However, these women solely shamanize at home, for the sake of their families, and do not seek to acquire a reputation as shaman.

Those ambitious women who signalize their aspirations by obtaining drum and armor are, similarly to those Buryat shamans Buyandelgeriyn described, more exposed to criticism and scorn than their male competitors. I will now discuss two examples of how the ambiguous gender expectations are involved in the economy of reputation of female Darhad shamans. With the first example, I show how the death of the female shaman Batbayar was used to question her magical capabilities. Thereafter I will discuss in detail how gender is part of the outstanding success as well as local repudiation of the shaman Enhtuya.

Batbayar *udgan*, whom I have introduced above, the most renowned of the Darhad shamans in Ulaanbaatar, died at the age of fifty-six in a car accident in October 2003, on the return journey from a client. Six months later, the male shaman Nyamsüren, who lived in Ulaan Uul, died at the age of fifty-one after a seance he had held in Ulaanbaatar. The two shamans were of a similar age and both died immediately after a seance. An obvious difference was that Batbayar *udgan* was a nation-wide renowned shaman, while Nyamsüren was a new shaman unknown outside his immediate neighborhood. In the Darhad area the reputation of both shamans was contested; Batbayar was questioned to have genuine shamanic ancestors and Nyamsüren was blamed for his former theatrical performances as shaman. The deaths and the causes were commented in distinct ways by competing shamans and other local people. The few people I heard talking about the death of Nyamsüren said that he died from a stroke, and a second explanation related his death to too much drinking; thus, people explained his death with “natural” causes.

The death of Batbayar *udgan* however, who probably died due to her drunken driver causing an accident, was explained by several people with spiritual infliction. One of her disciples, the female shaman Yura, explained that during her seance Batbayar had sent a bad spirit away who later awaited her vengefully on the road. Several explanations related

death to her impotence in carrying out the worship ritual of a powerful *ongod* appropriately; yet people disagreed about the particular *ongod*. Some viewed her death as a consequence of her failing to conduct the ritual for Dayan Deerh, others saw her failing related to the ritual of the *ongod* Hosin *aav*, and again others claimed that she had unsuccessfully attempted to worship the *ongod* Agarín Hairhan.<sup>23</sup> Although usually shamans deny that the power of the shamans or *ongod* is gendered, some men, who related her death to the male *ongod* of Dayan Deerh or Hosin *aav*, claimed that she as a woman should not venerate a male *ongod*. In contrast, others argued that she was not skilled enough to venerate the most powerful *ongod* of the Darhad, Agarín Hairhan – who is associated with the former female shaman Baglaan *udgan*.

The gendered distinction in the arguments explaining the death of the two shamans is obvious; while the death of the male shaman was explained with “natural” causes, the death of the female shaman Batbayar was explained with spiritual revenge. By questioning her inspirational power, people in her home area blamed the female shaman, who died as one of the most reputed shamans in Ulaanbaatar, for being too ambitious and too successful in the capital Ulaanbaatar.

The economy of reputation of the female shaman Enhtuya is outstanding: she is as ambitious and successful as she is the primary target of the assaults against shamans in the area.<sup>24</sup> Enhtuya is probably the internationally best-known Darhad shaman, eternalized on thousands of photos taken by visitors and in several documentaries (for example Merli 2005), discussed in scholarly publications (Schlehe 2004), mentioned in travel guides (Kohn 2005) and portrayed as shaman teacher by her French disciple (Sombrun 2004). Locally, Enhtuya is the most disputed of all Darhad and Tuva shamans.

Enhtuya lives with her husband Dūjii and her children and their families on the shores of Lake Hövsgöl. Like many other herding families, they stay in the vicinity of the numerous tourist camps that have been built there recently, in the hope of making a living from tourism. Enhtuya's family pursues a unique strategy to attract tourists and to profit from them: during the summer months the family lives in a tepee, (*urts*) first set up by the lake's shore and later moved to the nearby mountain meadows, and is engaged in herding their reindeer nearby. Performing as Tsaatan reindeer herders, the family receives daily visits from numerous groups of foreign and Mongolian tourists staying in one of the tourist camps or camping individually at the lake.<sup>25</sup> On a few extraordinarily successful days in a

<sup>23</sup> Dayan Deerh is a cave located to the east of Lake Hövsgöl in the *sum* Tsagaan Üür. According to some legends, the place had once been the residence of a powerful black shaman. Later, a monastery was built near the cave and the place became an important site for “yellow” shamanism (Pürev 2002).

<sup>24</sup> This account about Enhtuya is based on several sojourns at Lake Hövsgöl, when I stayed with the family of Enhtuya as well as in the neighborhood; I stayed three weeks in summer 2002, made a short visit in February 2003, stayed a month in summer 2003 and finally a week in summer 2004.

<sup>25</sup> There is a considerable disagreement whether the reindeer herding families in the taiga should be termed “Tsaatan” or “Dukha” or “Tuva” (see Chapter 9). As this discussion does not affect Enhtuya's

season, the family is visited by well over one hundred tourists. The visitors are welcome to enter the tepee, to chat with Enhtuya, to watch and pet the reindeer. If tourists want to take pictures of the scene they have to pay a fee.



*Photograph 33: Enhtuya is interviewed in her tepee by Lake Hövsgöl (23.07. 2003).*

Enhtuya grew up as a child of a single mother in Ulaan Uul. The mother gave away a younger sister of hers and stayed with Enhtuya until her death in summer 2003. Enhtuya gave birth to four children before she married the considerably younger Dūjii, with whom she has two more children. In the early 1990s the family lived as poor reindeer herders in the Western Taiga, to the west of Tsagaan Nuur. In 1996 they were asked by one of the bigger tourist camps to move the 200 km to the southern shore of Lake Hövsgöl, close to the tourist camp, and to live there with the reindeer during the summer. The family was paid a small monthly salary for receiving tourists as their guests. Enhtuya soon realized the advantages of opening up her own business and she started to collect a fee for taking pictures from the visitors. She set the fee at 3000 *tögrög* per camera (around three US dollars) for foreign tourists, and at 1000 *tögrög* for Mongolian tourists, which was adjusted to the level of the foreign tourists in 2004. To film with a private video camera cost 5000 *tögrög* and professional film teams had to negotiate the price, usually at least around fifty dollars. The family makes further income with guided horse trips, the selling of souvenirs and Enhtuya's divining and shamanizing. Within a few years, the family accumulated a comparatively numerous herd of livestock (in addition to the few reindeer) and acquired the means to buy a car. In the early years, they moved back to the other reindeer herders in the Western Taiga in autumn; since 2002, Enhtuya and her family have stayed at the lake all year round. In summer 2004, a younger brother of Dūjii joined them for the first time with his family and set up a second *urts*, tepee.

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family, which is called "Tsaatan" only, I will also use this term here.



During my visit in summer 2002, Enhtuya and her family stayed for two weeks on a larger meadow at a beautiful spot on the lake. Day by day, more visitors, Mongolian and foreign tourists alike, moved to the place and erected their tents in the neighborhood. People came to spend their holidays, and held parties all night long, others waited for the shaman's seance. During these two busy and noisy weeks Enhtuya held her seance every other night, on the uneven days of the lunar calendar. On my visits in the following two summers, Enhtuya did not shamanize as often.



Photograph 34: Mongolian tourists visiting Enhtuya (05.07. 2004).

In her *urts*, Enhtuya held audience and answered patiently the numerous questions about the reindeer and Tsaatan life asked by successive groups of visitors entering. She seemingly enjoyed the visits, chatting and joking with the tourists and performing as a native reindeer herder. To entertain not only her guests but also herself, she adapted her stories to the expectations of her visitors, acting out her identity in manifold ways. To foreign tourists, she spoke about her life close to nature with the reindeers in the far taiga mountains; in interactions with Mongolian visitors from the capital she emphasized the economic hardship of the family's life, pointing to the small herd of reindeers and that the family's engagement in tourism as the only way to make a living. To visitors from within the province Hövsgöl she talked about herself being an *erliiz*, a "hybrid" between Darhad and Tsaatan; and in conversations with anthropologists she reported on her long years of suffering and the journeys she undertook after she was told that she had to become a shaman as a teenager. Enhtuya never volunteered the information that she is a shaman. Only on request, usually by Mongolian visitors, Enhtuya took out her stones to make a divination and determined the night of the inspirational treatment. During her seances, the tepee was usually crowded with clients and with Mongolian and some foreign spectators; fifty people or more sat close to each other on the ground attending her ceremony. Enhtuya's success in gathering clients was reflected in her armor, to which every client

asking for her shamanic service had to add a stripe of material or a ritual scarf, as symbolic snakes or bird's feathers, augmenting the shape and the impressiveness of the shaman's figure with each seance.

Enhtuya's interaction with foreign tourists usually evolved around the life as reindeer herding family, and only when visitors addressed her shamanship, she talked about her inspirational practice. Foreigners, who are informed that she is a shaman, sometimes showed interest in her practice and asked curious questions. Nevertheless, only a few foreign visitors requested her for a divination or returned in the night to attend her seance. It seems that the majority of foreign visitors enjoyed meeting with a shaman as part of an exotic experience but kept their distance to her shamanizing, perceiving it as a cultural performance rather than considering it as a potential support for their own lives.

While in her tepee Enhtuya enacted her authority and enjoyed the respectful gestures of her visitors, gossip was raised among the tourist guides only a few meters outside of the tepee. The gossip was echoed in the neighborhood, in the offices of the National Park's administration, by people in the wider area and was heard even in Ulaanbaatar: Enhtuya was called into question as "genuine" shaman and was denied to be a "real" Tsaatan woman. People maintained that Enhtuya was a Darhad and presumed that she did not have shamanic ancestors but blamed her for starting to shamanize when arriving at the lake and only for tourists. Of course, as the daughter of a single Darhad mother, Enhtuya inherited her mother's identity and is thus a Darhad irrespective of her genitor, who, as Enhtuya claims, was a Tsaatan from the taiga.<sup>26</sup> By identifying Enhtuya as Darhad, people undermine the legitimacy of her whole family as being Tsaatan. This is a rather irritating implication as Enhtuya's husband Dūjii is recognized as a Tsaatan who was raised in the taiga – in spite of his mother being a Darhad. By pointing to Enhtuya's identity and neglecting that of her husband, people turn dominant norms of gender and succession on their head; they consider Enhtuya to be the head of the household and classify the whole family according to her ethnicity. The argument reflects and denounces the public performance of the couple – Enhtuya is dominating as shaman with her husband Dūjii as her assistant. Moreover, to point to her being a Darhad is a strategic argument to attack Enhtuya's success: instead of bluntly begrudging Enhtuya's prosperity, people undermine her legitimacy. The family's economic success from performing as a Tsaatan family for tourists shapes the perception of Enhtuya's shamanship: her inspirational practice is suspected as part of her doing business with tourists. In local arenas of gossip, Enhtuya is even used as the main reference to support the general disparagement of shamans as "money" or "market economy" shamans. To support the attack, people purport that Enhtuya does not have shamanic ancestors; people claim this even though most of them do not know her relatives living far away in Ulaan Uul, let alone her genitor and ancestors.

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<sup>26</sup> It is common that the child of single mother uses her name and not the genitor's name as "surname".

Furthermore, her shamanizing is denounced as not “real” even by people who have never attended her seance or who have never attended a shaman’s seance at all.

Enhtuya is a successful businesswoman who accomplished her income almost without capital investment. Moreover, she is one of the very few locals who achieved to profit substantially from tourism to the area, which is one of the primary tourist destinations of the country. The relative wealth Enhtuya’s family achieved contrasts with the poor families living by the lake who strive to make an income from tourism by working in a camp or as horse guides and who usually remain as poor as before at the end of the season. It seems to be obvious that the widespread criticism reflects the jealousy of Enhtuya’s economic success. I assume that people are particularly jealous because Enhtuya achieved her success from a poor and marginalized position, without having capital to invest but with a clever idea only. Moreover, the family is not from Hatgal but moved in from the even poorer Tsagaan Nuur.

The family’s success is based on intriguing insights into the demands of tourism and the exploitation of tourism’s vulnerabilities: performing as objects of tourism, the family serves imageries of “the authentic” and “the archaic” in a breathtaking landscape, but is nevertheless easy to reach by car from the nearby tourist camps. The tourists are free to experience the family site, however the family charges for photographing, recognizing well that taking pictures is one of the indispensable characteristics of tourism. By demanding money, the family authorizes photographing and thus retains control over the potentially appropriating practice of taking pictures. Visitors arriving in groups, Mongolians as well as guided groups of foreigners, usually do not, at least not openly, oppose paying for taking pictures. It seems that the majority of them enjoy the possibility to see the reindeer and to sit in the tepee. Usually, the visitors know well that the Tsaatan actually live quite far away in the mountainous taiga in the north, but they are content not to have to make the exhausting several day trip by jeep and horse to the taiga. Thus, rather than to presume that foreign group tourists believe naïvely in the “authenticity” of the Tsaatan family, I see their visit as a complicit agreement in the staging of an “as if authentic” experience they have purchased as part of an organized tour. Visiting the family nevertheless allows them to enjoy sitting in a “real” *urts*, tepee and petting “real” reindeer amidst of a beautiful landscape.

Some of the foreign tourists, despite visiting Enhtuya, criticize the fees and blame the family of not being a “genuine” Tsaatan family but to stay at the lake for tourists only. During my stays it happened regularly that visitors, usually backpackers visiting the place individually or with a horse guide without translator were enraged about the demanded fee. These tourists usually requested a right to take pictures without remuneration, claiming that they never had to pay for pictures before. I interpret their anger over the demanded fee as a request to control the relationship. It seems furthermore that those visitors felt cheated

in their attempt to discover the “authentic”; instead, they were unmasked as tourists buying a commodified experience. The angry travelers were not able to recognize that the family indeed offered them the opportunity to step into their “real” life as a Tsaatan tourist family.



*Photograph 35: Enhtuya’s camp on Lake Hövsgöl during the summer tourist season (01.07. 2004).*

I have never dared to talk with Enhtuya about her doubtful reputation in the local neighborhood, and how she managed to interact with neighbors who disdain her behind her back – but I assume that she knows exactly what people say about her. I think that she responds to the criticism by adapting her strategies and performances. For example, she openly admitted to visitors that the family stayed at the lake in order to profit from tourism. Furthermore, she was, like other shamans, actively engaged in producing discourses about “genuine” and “fake” shamans: when I visited her for the first time, she taught me that there were only three genuine Darhad shamans: the two old female shamans Baljir *udgan* and Nadmid *udgan* along with herself. The next time I visited her in winter 2003, she again taught me about “genuine” and “not real” shamans, this time including some more people and recommended which of them I should visit and whom I should not.

A further strategy of Enhtuya to counter the allegation of being a “market economy” shaman is her refusal of some of the potential clients and audiences to attend her seances. I saw her several times refusing foreigners to attend her seance. I did not find out how she selected those people she excluded, but I learnt that she had a good intuition in judging even people with whom she could not communicate verbally. Once, during my first stay with the family in summer 2002, Enhtuya reacted upset when she saw how a group of foreign visitors entered the tepee shortly before her seance. She walked nervously up and down lamenting that she had not given permission to the two women to be present. I was surprised about her intense reaction and her stress, as I had seen numerous foreign visitors

present at her seance whom I had not seen asking her permission before. In the end Enhtuya did not send away the women but started her seance. Shortly after, I watched the two women become uncomfortable and try to leave, however they were not able to move through the crowd and stayed. One of them turned her body and awaited the end of the seance with her back to the performing shaman for the whole hour of the performance. I was impressed how Enhtuya had known before that the two women would not appreciate her seance.

In summer 2004, I saw for the first time how she rejected Mongolians who asked her for a consultation. It was the third summer that I saw numerous Mongolian tourists spending their holidays at the lake, thereby visiting the Tsaatan family and, on occasion, consulting Enhtuya as a shaman. I had the impression that only few people went the long way for Enhtuya's shamanic treatment only. Therefore, I was surprised to hear how she harshly admonished a group of Mongolian visitors: "I do not work for people who are just coming by, spending their holidays hearing about the shaman, who visit me like they consulted a lama before and will ask another shaman thereafter. I only want to treat those people who travel to this place because they are in search of my help. And then you should come back every year and only visit me and you should not consult other shamans." Her sermon worked well, the people seemed to be intimidated and the group left the place, with the exception of two teenagers who succeeded in calming down the shaman and finally receiving her advice nevertheless.

On the two preceding visits I had not noticed that she refused clients straightforwardly, however I had experienced how her *ongod* now and then rejected an *örgöl*, a gift to the spirits in form of a small pine tree with tied stripes of material. In the discussion with the concerned clients after the seance Enhtuya reprehended the clients that they had done something wrong. Then Enhtuya inspected the offering for the *ongod*, and every time, she found a piece of material that was dirty or had been used before and she argued that this was the reason for the *ongod*'s resentment. Refusing clients, either by her *ongod* or by Enhtuya herself, is a demonstration of the shaman's independence and power. To refuse clients signals that the shaman is not reliant on clients, that she does not care about the loss of income and that, thus, she is not a "market economy shaman". The refusal is at the same time a conjuration – to attach the clients to herself only. That shamans request clients to repeat the treatment to secure the protection against the spiritual infliction is a common strategy to tie clients to a shaman's services; the connection with a menacing gesture however is exceptional.

Enhtuya's interaction with Mongolian tourists is her primary field to enact her shamanship. She receives clients living by the lake or in Hatgal now and then, despite the malicious gossip in local arenas. However, foreign and Mongolian visitors, being curious about her shamanship or asking her for a divination and attending her seances, are the

main audiences that attest her shamanism. She also shamanizes only during the tourist summer season. She explained that she stopped shamanizing from autumn to spring because the spirits rest when the earth is frozen. Enhtuya adopts tourist guides, translators and anthropologists like myself to authorize her as a shaman. During my stays with the family I often translated her conversations with foreign tourists. Thereby, she instructed me to transmit what she had taught me; she delegated to me the task to explain the unexplainable, while she was sitting nearby in a posture of authority, drinking tea and smoking. She requested me as a foreign anthropologist not only to authorize her practice towards foreign visitors but also towards a Mongolian audience. For example, she let me sit next to her during her divination, and sometimes asked me about my interpretation of the grid of stones lying in front of her. Or, to recall an anecdote I described in Chapter 2, on my first stay she tested immediately after her seances and in the presence of the whole audience whether I could recognize the *ongod* that were visiting her seance. At that time I did not yet know that *ongod* can be recognized by the text of the chant and, indeed, I did not understand anything of her chants, but just guessed animals as *ongod* by interpreting the movements of the shaman and the cries. Enhtuya's examination of the "knowledge" of a foreign student of shamanism proved to an inexperienced Mongolian audience the very existence of the spirits. Her examination of my knowledge thereby was contributing to authorizing her as a shaman.

To accentuate the shape of her ambiguous reputation, I briefly contrast the reputation of the male shaman Badrah, who is perceived as a wealthy shaman, too. I introduced Badrah in the last chapter as teacher of several disciples. Badrah is an old quiet man living with his wife in a camp together with the families of some of their adult children. Badrah has an outstandingly good reputation in the Darhad area and I never heard disparaging remarks about him. Often I heard people say that his diagnoses were *ünen*, true, and his services were well in high demand by local people. Almost every time I passed by his small house he was sitting on his bed and was divining for clients. Despite the small house he lives in, Badrah is said to be a wealthy herder, owning the biggest herd of camels in the Darhad area and also a car. It is striking how people differentially related Badrah's and Enhtuya's wealth to their shamanism: people argued that because Badrah was rich he was not in need to shamanize for economical reasons; his wealth made him trustworthy as a shaman. In contrast, the fact that Enhtuya had been poor and became wealthy in just a few years questioned her trustworthiness as a shaman. People presumed that she became a shaman to make money only. Both Badrah and Enhtuya were questioned as shamans, but from distinct perspectives: while Enhtuya was alleged to be not a "real" shaman but a "fake" one, Badrah was sometimes not perceived as shaman. Some people viewed him as a diviner, and once someone described him as "something similar but better than a shaman".

Enhtuya is, at least during summer, extraordinarily successful in attracting clients from all over Mongolia and she is outstanding in the criticism she attracts in local arenas. With this contradictory constitution of her reputation Enhtuya is the most outstanding example of the ambiguous economy of reputation of Darhad shamans in general. In Enhtuya's economy of reputation, gender is interwoven as ambiguous expectations, sanctions and transgressions. Although Enhtuya's example is extraordinary in many respects, I claim that, like her, all female shamans are confronted with ambiguous gendered expectations.

At first glance, shamans are surrounded with egalitarian ideas; women shamans perform the same tasks as men do. Moreover, women shamans are perceived to be potentially as powerful as men are, similarly to female *ongod* who are assessed as equally powerful as male spirits. One might even argue that females are perceived as potentially more powerful than males, as the highly venerated shamans of the early 1990s were all women and the most powerful *ongod* of the Darhad is said to be female. However, ideas of equal power are accompanied by less overt and contradictory expectations, constraining female ambitions to power. I will show in detail in the next chapter, how magical power of female *ongod* is related to suffering and powerlessness in the former lives of the female shamans. Following Buyandelgeriyn (2002), I see the ambiguous expectations towards female shamans as reflecting contradictory gendered expectations towards women in general. Socialist policies of gender equality, postsocialist gender mainstreaming, and the perception of Mongolian women as self-confident are contradicted and undermined by a predominant veneration of women as mothers, the assignation of particularly rural women to domestic work and the *ger*, and the subordination of women to the authority of husbands as head of the household (see Benwell 2006). Earlier traveler's accounts also pointed to ambiguous gender roles, stressing the high workload of women compared to the lazy lives of men while depicting women as independent and authorities of their households (for example Korostovetz 1926: 93; Pewzow 1953 [1883]: 90).

Among the minority of Darhad women shamans, both Batbayar in Ulaanbaatar, who died in autumn 2003 and Enhtuya living by Lake Hövsgöl had/have outstanding success. I experienced both women not only as successful in attracting clients but also as good businesswomen with several income sources besides shamanizing. They do expose themselves as shamans, but they further expose themselves by transgressing dominant gender roles: to be a shaman working for clients means leaving the domestic sphere, traveling and appearing as an authority in consultations and in the public; women shamans perform thereby as head of their households with their husbands standing behind and supporting them. Both Enhtuya and Batbayar were exposed to heavy attacks not only diffused in gossip but also publicly in newspapers. Male shamans, who had been poor and attempt to increase their living standard, are also targets of severe criticism. However, I

claim that female shamans who are as ambitious as male ones are even more exposed to denouncing gossip and attacks.

### **Performance of chiefly power**

Between the urban celebration of Darhad shamans and the mockery of shamans in the Shishget periphery, people invoke the image of “powerful shamans”. This invocation is situationally used to belittle the power of particular shamans. In the capital, the power of Darhad shamans is invoked to expose urban shamans as weak. However, in the Shishget area, the power of historical shamans is invoked to call the magical power of contemporary Darhad shamans into question. Thus, the notion of “powerful shamans” is used to constitute as well as to dispute the power of shamans. The notion acts upon both the magical and the social power of shamans. In contrast, scholarly and popular representations of Siberian shamanism tend to show shamans as leaders of traditional communities. To undermine this idea of shamans as leaders and to outline their restricted social power, I adapt the local narrative strategy and detail a contrasting example of social power. I show the performance of a chiefly authority, which is, similarly to some of the shamans, renowned in both the periphery and the urban center. The comparison is a first attempt to position shamans in a general prestige economy. My approach relies on Humphrey’s (1995) distinction between shamans and chiefs. Humphrey defined the relationship between the power of chiefs and those of shamans as asymmetrical, as chiefs historically have been striving for rule and supreme power in society while shamans’ power was limited to the oral face-to-face interaction of their practice. According to Humphrey, chiefs either aimed to suppress shamans or to exploit shamans for the legitimization of their own rule; shamans could only achieve power when chiefly rule was weak.

To put the shaman’s power into perspective, I trace the enactments of the national politician Gündalai, who originated from the Darhad area. Gündalai was born in Hatgal in 1963 and studied medicine and political science in Germany. Back in Mongolia in the early 1990s he soon became the director of two enterprises; in 2000, he was elected on the list of the Democrats to the national parliament.<sup>27</sup> The first time that I heard of Gündalai during my fieldwork was in early summer 2003. My guide Chinbat and I were waiting at the local post office in Tsagaan Nuur to make a phone call and thereby we met an ophthalmologist from Ulaanbaatar. The doctor told us that he was staying in the village for a few days together with further specialists to treat local patients free of charge and that the service was provided by Gündalai. Traveling further to the village of Renchinlümbe, we heard that many patients were waiting in the local hospital to be treated by the specialists sent by Gündalai. Some days later, en route on our horses, two common Russian vans passed by

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<sup>27</sup> See Gündalai’s personal webpage (<http://www.gundalai.mn>; accessed 30.8. 2006).



and my guide Chinbat, recognizing the license plate, commented that Gündalai was passing.

In the following weeks I noticed in one or the other home a poster showing Gündalai advertising himself for election and I realized that people often talked about Gündalai, discussing his visit or disseminating the rumor that Gündalai planned to finance a river power station in the area. People praised Gündalai for doing good deeds for the population, for raising their living standard and for engaging in the development of the country. The manner of talking about him was respectful and adoring, he was perceived as a big man from the capital and as donor in his home area.

Later that summer, in early August 2003, I saw a completely different image of Gündalai' power on TV. The mobile cinema man from Tsagaan Nuur visited the place of the shaman Baljir and showed a newscast dating two weeks back from July 24.<sup>28</sup> The news showed the violent arrest of Gündalai, the scandal which dominated the capital during that summer. The member of the national parliament was hauled out of a plane at the national airport and subsequently arrested. The people present in Baljir's home were intently watching the pictures showing a *mêlée* in the party headquarters of the Democrats; the spectators saw Gündalai being knocked about, dragged across the ground, and a car dashing away, while his bodyguard was left behind lying motionless on the ground. With the detention, the commentator said, Gündalai was to be prevented from leaving the country without permission. Ironically, Gündalai was said to have intended to leave the country for a conference on democracy and human rights in Singapore. The commentator further mentioned that it was unclear who had ordered the detention or whether it was a even legal action, as Gündalai's parliamentary immunity had not been lifted. The TV news obviously puzzled the spectators in Baljir's home: the following discussion was calm and rather short, people raised questions to which they could not find answers and in particular, they did not make jokes about the incidence. Such a brawl might be the usual end of a festivity in the countryside after too much drinking; but people were shocked to see such a fray in the capital, which is perceived as more "civilized". They were shocked to see their adored chief as a victim. By being knocked down, Gündalai turned from a powerful representative of the state into a powerless outcast.

I could not follow all the details of the TV commentary and especially I did not grasp the context leading to the detention. I asked the people present but did not receive an answer that would shed light on the incidence. Only some months later, when back in the capital

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<sup>28</sup> The small village of Tsagaan Nuur has a cinema left over from socialist days. The earlier cinema operator Bayarhüü now organizes screenings in the old cinema and during fieldwork I met him now and then in the wider surroundings, TV and video unit loaded on the horse cart to show films and documentaries to the local herders against a small remuneration. Beyond this mobile cinema, numerous herders bought a television together with a solar battery and a satellite dish during the period of my fieldwork, allowing widespread access to television.

and reading newspapers, I found out that Gündalai, at that time vice-chairperson of the oppositional Democrats, was involved in a national intelligence affair. Gündalai had accused the minister of Justice and Internal Affairs from the ruling socialist party (MPRP) of espionage. In return, Gündalai was accused of disclosing secret information; the detention was later justified with the assumption that Gündalai had intended to flee the country.<sup>29</sup>

Returning to the field the following year, immediately after the election of the national parliament at the end of June 2004, Gündalai was back in his position of power. As expected, Gündalai had won the election in the Darhad districts with the vast majority of the votes and thus defended his seat in the national parliament.<sup>30</sup> Upon my arrival, the traces of Gündalai's election tour was one of the first things which caught my eye, and again the traces reflected him as powerful leader. During the jeep drive to Lake Hövsgöl, we stopped in Alag Erden; the family served up a big bowl, as commonly used for serving bread or as a dish for the household head. The bowl was an advertising gift from Gündalai: it showed the picture of Chinggis Khaan at the bottom, surrounded with good wishes to the family and signed with Gündalai's full name. Since the early 1990s, Chinggis Khaan has no longer been represented in socialist rhetoric as a backward despotic leader but is venerated as spiritual founder of the nation (Kaplonski 2004). To wish the families good luck and health, the politician invoked the eternal heaven, the mountains and the water, which shall watch over the well-being and good fortune of the family and their descendants.<sup>31</sup> Our hosts told how Gündalai visited the place and invited the inhabitants of the village to a Mongolian barbecue, *horhog*, for which eight sheep were slaughtered. Gündalai offered a bowl filled with meat to every household, handed over with a blue ritual scarf, *hadag*, and accompanied by a tea brick, a bottle of beer, and a card game. The whole summer I encountered Gündalai's bowls in households, together with the playing cards bearing on the

<sup>29</sup> The successor of the former communists, the Mongolian People's Revolution Party, (MPRP) ruled Mongolia until 1996, when the opposing Democrats won the election. In the next round in 2000, the Democrats were again displaced by the MPRP.

<sup>30</sup> The electoral area for Gündalai consists of the districts of Hatgal, Hanh, Alag-Erden, Renchinlhumbe, Tsagaan Nuur and Bayanzürh in the Darhad area in Hövsgöl. The 2004 elections were a neck-and-neck race between the two dominating camps resulting in a grand coalition, which lasted for only around a year. In January 2006, the MPRP quit the government to force the end of the coalition and subsequently again took over the government. After being confirmed as a parliamentarian, Gündalai first became leader of the Democrats. When the Democrats were forced out of the government in January 2006, Gündalai left the party, founded his own one and he became Health Minister. Later, the opposition of Democrats and other small parties demanded the demission of the government. The protest was directed against some members of the government, e.g. against Health Minister Gündalai who was criticized for releasing the heads of the hospitals in order to replace them with his own relatives and friends. In December 2006, Gündalai retreated as Health Minister after he was criticized by hospital's staff. <http://www.mongolei.de/news/2006oct3.htm>; accessed 07.09. 2006); (<http://www.mongolei.de/22.02.2007>).

<sup>31</sup> The exact formulation of the inscription: "*Tani gal golomt tsog hiimor' tan' badarch, erüül enh, az jargaltai baih boltugai, mönh tenger, uul us tani ger бүл, үр hүүhdiig үргелj harj, tetgej baihin ölzitei yerüüliig devshüül'e*".

reverse side the Democrats' election promise, to provide a monthly child allowance of 10'000 *tögrög*. The leftovers of Gündalai's promotion tour and, with them the symbolic imagery, permeated into daily life. Associating himself with the inspirational founder of the Mongol state, allocating gifts and promising a monthly child benefit, Gündalai performed as powerful leader representing a paternalistic state.

What do these eclectic reflections and vestiges of a national politician in his home area tell about the power of shamans? I told the story first to relativize the idea of shamans having powerful positions in social domains. The traces of Gündalai were one of the rare moments during my fieldwork when I experienced a glimpse of how "real" power is performed in the Darhad periphery. A further interpretation of the story is that social power, even in the distant borderland, is related to the state. Morten Pedersen (2006b) similarly contrasts the power of Darhad shamans with the power of chiefs. Pedersen assigns inspirational practitioners with marginal prominence in contrast to chiefly leaders holding "centered powers". The author confines the fields of power to the Darhad area; he identifies chiefs in a range of formal and informal leaders operating in the Darhad periphery, from elders to administrators, from professional specialists like doctors and teachers to business people. In contrast to Pedersen, I widen the scope and claim that the field of chiefly power cannot be restricted to the Darhad periphery solely but has to include the relationship to centers in the south. I question a view of peripheral communities with social structures restricted to themselves, detached from ruling centers. Instead, I see the periphery as integrated and constituted by relations to political centers and I argue to integrate these relations into our analysis. The chiefs Pedersen discusses have (and have had) relationships to centers, for example by their education, by the (lack of) public resources from the provincial or the state budget, which enable or restrict their fields of power, or by business relations to Mörön and Ulaanbaatar. I further claim that also in local perception, chieftainship is associated with relationships to the centers and access to resources from the center. Moreover, the local perception of chiefs integrates an official mandate with business success.

Gündalai is the outstanding representation of chiefly power in the Darhad area of today. He is the outstanding example of political and economic power: he relates the periphery to national politics and unites a political mandate with economic success. Although the stages of Gündalai's daily life and success lie in the capital, he is in many respects related to the Darhad area: he is dependent on his home area for being elected and in return he yields resources from the center to the Darhad periphery. Gündalai is venerated by people in the Darhad area for being economically successful and politically powerful in the capital. He is expected to invest his political weight and economic power into symbolic capital in his rural homeland and to allot the resources from the center to the periphery. Gündalai is expected

to enact both the power of a successful businessman and promoter of the market economy as well as to embody a paternalistic state, similar to the past socialist state.

Shamans, too, strive to relate themselves to the urban center in the search for inspirational power, reputation and economic success. In distinction to a chief like Gündalai they are, however, restricted in their attempts to gain power. Even though Darhad shamans are highly venerated in the capital city, even though some of them can accumulate a rather moderate wealth, they cannot transfer the reputation in the capital into social power in their homeland. Local people actively pursue the restriction of the shamans' attempt to power. They do so by questioning contemporary shamans' magical capabilities, by disdaining their economic interests and by undermining their legitimacy. Shamans are attacked for their relationship to the center in order to constrict their social power.

The distinction between the power of chiefs and shamans as competing ideologies concerning the social reproduction of society is not a blunt opposition, as Humphrey (1995) has also argued: dependent on the historical context, shamans may engage in the chiefly mode of power just like chiefs may engage in the shamans' mode. The example of the detention of Gündalai in summer 2003, which reminded the arbitrary purges against political leaders during socialism (Baabar 1999), suggests that a respected chief in Ulaanbaatar still may be bounced out of his powerful position into the role of an outcast. As I will show in the next chapter, the role of the outcast is reserved in the local imagination for shamans. In view of the porous boundary between respected high authority and the risk of becoming an outcast, a chief like Gündalai has constantly to reassert his chiefly authority. Shamans in contrast can be related to chiefly power, for example by shamans performing rituals to legitimize chiefly rulers with inspirational and heavenly power. Humphrey (1996a) showed shamans serving the imperial Mongol rulers as well as the Manchu rulers as a patriarchal kind of shamans in a client relation to a political patron.

Byambadorj *zairan*, a shaman originating from western Mongolia and living in Ulaanbaatar, is probably the only contemporary shaman who can associate himself with political power in Mongolia. It is Byambadorj *zairan* who carries out rituals for the government on the mountain Burhan Haldun, which is venerated as Chinggis Khaan's birthplace and where the government symbolically enacts its power. Byambadorj *zairan* participates as the only shaman in the opening ceremony of the official celebration of the *Naadam*, the national holiday in summer. I once attended a ceremony held by Byambadorj *zairan* on a Mongolian new year's ceremony on the Bogd Khan Mountains close to Ulaanbaatar.<sup>32</sup> The ceremony was held on a Sunday at noon and was attended by hundreds of people. The shaman wore a beautiful armor adorned with gold and fur, and he carried out parts of the ceremony around an *ovoo*, a ritual cairn, on the top of the mountain, which only men are allowed to climb. Although Byambadorj was easily recognizable as shaman

<sup>32</sup> The ceremony was held on 16.02. 2003.

with his armor, and although he was drumming during his performance, he carried out a ceremonial ritual rather than a shaman's seance; it seemed that he was praising the mountains but that he did not receive spirits entering his body and talking to the audience.



*Photograph 36: The shaman Byambadorj during the New Year ceremony on the mountain Bogd Uul (16.02. 2003).*

The performance in the midst of the day, the place of the main ceremony on the mountain-top altar excluding the presence of women, and the absence of the embodiment of spirits all point to his engagement in what Humphrey (1995) calls “chiefly ritual”, evoking verticality and eternal patrilineal succession as images of a religious order for political leaders. In contrast, Darhad shamans do not carry out chiefly rituals but transformative trance seances. The Darhad shaman Chuluunbaatar once talked about a forthcoming governmental ceremony on the mountain Burhan Haldun and that Byambadorj *zairan* would carry out a ritual as the only shaman. Chuluunbaatar *zairan* complained that the shaman Byambadorj would be for the upper, the big people, and shamans like him were just for ordinary people.<sup>33</sup>

In his discussion about Daur shamans with Caroline Humphrey, Urgunge Onon was qualifying the social power of shamans he remembered from his childhood in early twentieth-century Daur society:

“You are looking from a European point of view [said Urgunge]. Here in the West there are priests, and they have too much influence. But it is most important that we point out in our book how much influence the shaman had in the Daur's life. In my opinion, not much at all. The shaman is just like your GP [general practitioner, family doctor]. You go to him if you are ill, especially mentally ill or depressed, if you can't cure yourself. Otherwise what can he do for us? Nothing. This is good, you see. It means that the shamanists have a much better religion, a religion without dogma. They are free, each person rules their own life” (Humphrey 1996b: 49).

<sup>33</sup> Conversation with the shaman Chuluunbaatar, 13.09. 2004, in his office in Ulaanbaatar.

Urgunge Onon restricted the power of shamans to their exchange with clients and the treatment of disorders. What Onon remembered for the Daur shamans of the early twentieth century holds also for contemporary Darhad shamans: their power is largely restricted to the interaction with clients. Shamans are the authorities in the interaction; clients usually meet them with respect and obedience, they might be frightened by the seance and they might thank the shaman's deed with a bountiful remuneration, and they might follow the recommendations of the shaman. However, the inspirational power produced in the seance cannot be transferred one-to-one into the reputation of being a powerful shaman. Shamans striving for authority and power outside the consultation of clients are restricted by devaluating discourses of their neighbors.

### **Marginalization of shamans**

Pedersen (2006b) relates the "marginal prominence" of Darhad inspirational practitioners to their social and spatial marginality and maintains that their spatial trajectories relate the shamans intimately to the taiga environment. I follow Pedersen's interpretation of shamans' social position as marginal. However, I perceive the spatial marginality associated with shamans as imagination produced both in the capital as well as in the Darhad periphery, and I will analyze this imaginative marginality as social processes of marginalization. My main argument is that marginalization is a substantial aspect in the constitution of shamans' reputation. Processes of marginalization are interwoven both in the venerating discourses assigning power to shamans as well as in the disparaging discourses aiming to confine their power. In the urban center, the veneration of Darhad shamans is obviously related to the imagination of the shamans' spatial marginality: As I have mentioned above, Darhad shamans are imagined as survivals of the most "pure" and powerful tradition of shamanism in Mongolia, living in the most remote and wildest borderland of the country. That spatial marginality is associated with power was long ago recognized by Mary Douglas, who wrote in *Purity and Danger* (1966: 97): "To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power." Through the veneration in the capital, Darhad shamans are discursively displaced to the spatial margins, to the wild borderlands, to the untamed, the uncivilized. Moreover, they are contained in the imagery of survival of an ancient tradition, thus discursively displaced into the past. The imagination of spatial marginality neglects that the Darhad periphery was integrated into socialist modernization and that it is now part of the postsocialist transformations taking place. The imagination of marginality neglects that Darhad shamans intensively interact with the urban center and excludes shamans from agency in the present.

The social marginalization of shamans is inherent in the denigrating discourses traveling between neighbors in the Darhad area. Also in local arenas, the marginalization has a

spatial dimension. Pedersen argues that shamans are oriented towards the taiga. I agree with him that shamans are oriented towards the taiga borders where the *ongod's asar* are located. However, I see the orientation towards the taiga not as a particular characteristic of shamans alone. Other people as well are oriented towards the taiga: they cross the taiga forest mountains on their annual migration routes, they visit the taiga in autumn for collecting berries, nuts and medicinal plants, they hunt in the taiga and they spend the winter in taiga mountain valleys. The term "taiga" in local use is related to the forested mountain areas surround the Shishget depression. Although the taiga is part of all people's lives, nevertheless, local people associate the power of shamans with the wilderness of the taiga. Whereas in Ulaanbaatar, the Darhad area as a whole is seen as a symbol of the wild, in the Darhad area a center-periphery or civilized-wild opposition is constructed in which the taiga stands for The Wild. Particularly the places called "Western Taiga" and "Eastern Taiga", together with the reindeer herders living there, are associated with this imaginative space of the wild and are perceived as less "civilized". This imagination is particularly held by those people who have never visited the reindeer herders in the taiga. The wilderness attributed to the taiga and its inhabitants is associated with the imagination of the Tuva/Tsaatan shamans living in the taiga as being more powerful than the Darhad shamans – notwithstanding the joint ancestry and heritage of the Tuva and Darhad shamans (see Chapter 9).

Similar to the discourse on Darhad shamans in the capital, in the Darhad area itself the powerful shamans are somewhere else: not in the river valleys inhabited by pastoralists but in the spaces of the "wild" in the taiga, thereby displacing the closer and more easily accessible shamans. Particularly the male shaman Goostoi, who for the long winter months is known to live far away from the other reindeer herders in the least accessible place of the taiga, is perceived as a powerful shaman. It is quite common that people are afraid of him, both as a person and because of his magical skills. The imagination of the shaman Goostoi as shaman from the "wild taiga" neglects that Goostoi, too, had started to travel to town and that Goostoi was working for many years in the capital when he was young. That the social marginalization of shamans is expressed in spatial terms is obvious also in the attacks against shamans traveling to town.

The imaginative spatial marginalization is a constituting feature of the discourses on powerful shamans both in the capital and in the Darhad area itself. The association of the shamans with the wild is a means of social control over their power. The veneration of Darhad shamans in the capital and the denigrating discourse about Darhad shamans in the local neighborhood together produce the social marginalization of Darhad shamans. As social marginals, as inspirational transgressors and communicators with the souls of the dead and the forces of the landscape, shamans are assigned magical power. Shamans acquire their power from the margins and from transgressions, and they are held at bay at

the social margins. If they achieve the transgression of this marginality and try to accumulate a reputation and clients, they are attacked by their neighbors. The connection of marginalization and magical power brings to mind the analysis that Michael Taussig (1987: 221) has made for shamans in the Colombian Amazon: “I am also intrigued by the generality of this attribution of wildness to what one could call colonizable species, with wildness imputed on the other, objectified, then taken back as a magical substance”.

The veneration and the denigration which together produce the marginalization of shamans can be related to a concept that shamans themselves use in their diagnosis: *har hel am* and *tsagaan hel am*, “black” and “white talk” (*hel* literally means “tongue”; *am* means “mouth”). For a long time I was troubled to understand the concept of *hel am*, which now and then appeared as a general notion in the diagnosis of the shaman or the *ongod* during the seance. “Black talk”, a notion which shamans explained as “quarrel”, was reasonably intelligible. However, I had considerable problems to understand the expression “white talk”. When explicitly asked, shamans explained it as “overt acclamation”. Generally, the color white is associated with something good, desirable or benevolent; why then should “white talk” cause harm that has to be treated by the shaman? In the context of the shaman’s own economy of reputation, the concepts of *tsagaan* and *har hel am* make new insights accessible. “White” and “black talk” are related to the balancing of the social making of the person.<sup>34</sup> While “white talk” aims at enhancing the social power of a person under discussion, “black talk” aims at destroying the social power of the person; both are viewed as harming the person. The contradicting “white” and “black talk” taken together call for a concept of personhood of social equality. Shamans, with their relations to magical powers of ancestors and the environment, are provided with the potential to acquire powerful social positions. The “black” and “white talk” holds the shamans socially at bay – while their inspirational power can be used when one is in need.

In the next chapter, I will deepen the analysis of the shamans’ economy of reputation by opening a historical perspective; I will discuss legends about historical shamans and trace the imaginations of power, of state authority as well as of gendered power of shamans. To conclude this chapter, I return to the question of belief which I addressed at the beginning. I started the discussion about the economy of shamans’ reputation with a remark by Vanchii, who refused to become a shaman despite his shamanic ancestors and his mother who wanted him to become a shaman. Although he showed no confidence in present-day shamans, he liked to tell me stories about earlier shamans and to teach me chants and traditions. On one occasion during that stay in August 2003, Vanchii showed me the rotten remnants of an old *asar*, an *ongod*’s residence in the forest, with some rusty bells of his ancestor’s armor and the wooden ring of the drum still recognizable. His mother, Vanchii

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<sup>34</sup>I thank Giovanni da Col, MIASU, for providing me with this interpretation (08. 12. 2006, personal communication, Workshop Re-Assessing Religion in Siberia and Neighboring Regions, MPI Halle).



told me, ordered him not to make veneration ceremonies for the *ongod*, as it could harm him if he were not a shaman and, further, she told him that he could not enliven her as *ongod*. On the ride back to his home, I asked him whether he believed. He answered, *bi hün shütdeggüi, bi baigal uul shütdeg*, “I don’t believe in humans, I believe in nature, in the mountains”. After a small break he added, *bi ezentei shütdeg* (“I believe in the master/s”) For the rest of our way we were silent and I was thinking about what Vanchii had answered. Particularly I was puzzled about what he meant with the last sentence, however I did not ask about and therefore did not find out. What did Vanchii mean with the term *ezen*? His father? Or the ancestor shaman we had just visited who was said to be a powerful shaman? Or did he refer to a mountain as master? Consulting Bawden’s dictionary (1997) revealed another dimension of the question of belief: The verb *shüteh* is not only translated with “to believe”, “to worship”, “to reverence”, but also with: “to rely on”, “to depend on”. As a pastoralist, Vanchii is obviously dependent on the surrounding nature, on the climate, the quality of pastures and also on the ancestors from whom he had inherited livestock and seasonal camps. It is this dependence that the shamans approach: they strive to be the mediators translating between the forces out there in the landscape, the ancestors in the past, and the humans in the present.



## Imaginations of powerful historical shamans

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*This chapter digs into legends about shamans from the past. These stories told by locals and Mongolian scholars present shamans as challenging Manchu dominance, competing with Buddhist monks and resisting socialist oppression. Local people narrate legends evoking the resistance of earlier shamans against state rule to contrast the contemporary practitioners as powerless. In contrast, scholars recount legends invoking the competition between shamans and Buddhist monks to support the very identification of the Darhad with shamanism. Scholars portray monks as representatives of a foreign hostile Buddhism which only by force and against the resistance of shamans was able to penetrate the Shishget area. By telling these legends locals and scholars discursively transform the persecution of shamans into their magical power.*

The widespread denigration of shamans by local people in the Shishget area is commonly accompanied by the claim that in “olden times, shamans were more powerful”. This “olden times” (*deer üyed*) can be related to an unspecified remote past, to the early twentieth century, or even to the 1960s. The invocations of powerful earlier shamans do not distinguish between shamans living during socialism and presocialist shamans. These stories about powerful shamans from the past challenge the dominant view of a long history of persecutions of shamans in Mongolia. In the following analysis I am interested in the inherent notions of gender, power, and the imaginations of state rule and Buddhist authority these legends bear and how they are related to the context in which they are told. Local people usually tell legends about powerful earlier shamans to disqualify the capacities of their contemporaries. The narration of these legends in scholarly accounts has different implications. Scholars use legends about the power of earlier shamans to support their very association of the Darhad with “shamanism”. I will focus on how scholars integrate legends about powerful shamans in a view on history that qualifies the influence of Buddhism on the Darhad. By comparing the discussion about religious practice in scholarly accounts of the 1930s and the 1960s, I will show that the assignation of the Darhad with shamanism only started after the persecution of Buddhist monks and the destruction of the monasteries in the area.

During fieldwork I heard the celebration of earlier shamans most often in a formulaic statement: people said that a particular shaman was so powerful that s/he was able to cause snow-covered juniper from the taiga (that is used as incense) to fall through the *toono*, the hole in roof, into the *ger*. If the earlier shaman lived not very long ago and the teller was an elder, s/he often added having witnessed the miracle with her or his own eyes. It is obvious how this formula is used to devaluate the capacities of present-day shamans: if a shaman is not able to perform such a miracle, s/he must be less powerful than shamans were in the

past. Only once, a contemporary shaman, the young nascent shaman Tulgat, was assigned to be able to cause juniper from the taiga to appear in the *ger* (see Chapter 6). Besides this uniform statement, I now and then heard elaborate legends praising the magical deeds of earlier shamans. It could well happen that after I was briefed with the usual disdain over contemporary shamans, one of the people in the gathering, often an elderly man, started to tell stories about a shaman who lived long ago. The people present attentively followed the accounts, impressed and amused by the stories. The better-known legends arose around the well-reputed earlier shamans/*ongod*, Mend *zairan*/Hosin Aav, Baglaan *udgan* with her children Arild and Amajii (who together constitute the *ongod* Agarín Hairhan), and Noyo Zönög. These stories are also retold in the literature, for example by Badamhatan (1965), Dulam (1992), Dulam and Even (1994), Humphrey (1996b), Pegg (2001), and Pürev (2002).

### The male shamans Mend and Zönög as heroic outcasts

Legends about the shaman Delden Mend *zairan* are the most popular ones in the Shishget area. As *ongod* Hosin Aav he is frequently summoned in the seances of the present-day Darhad shamans. Hosin Aav is often characterized as *sahius*, the shamans' guardian spirit, or as *gal golomtni ongod*, the *ongod* of the shamans' hearth fire, as the protector of the family and successors. The legends imagine the shaman Mend *zairan* as a heroic highwayman who stole livestock from the Manchu officials and other rich people to give it to the poor.<sup>1</sup> When the Manchu guards attempted to arrest Mend *zairan*, the shaman transformed himself into a tree when being in a forest or into high grass when standing amidst high grass. In one story, Manchu guards caught Mend *zairan* when he was loading the meat of a stolen cow onto his horse. Yet when the officials approached so as to arrest him they suddenly faced no longer the shaman alone but three identical men: one just mounted the horse, another one supported him, and a third stayed nearby. The officials chose to arrest the man sitting on the horse and brought him to their headquarters where they beat him up until the *ger* was drenched with blood. The chief told his subordinates to take a break until the blood was dry. When the guards again came into the *ger*, the shaman's body had disappeared and instead bark chips lay on the ground; the guards realized that they had beaten up wood. Mend *zairan* entered the *ger* behind them and offered them boiled meat off the stolen cow. Impressed by the shaman's magic, the chief allowed Mend to leave with the admonition that he should not rob poor people.<sup>2</sup>

The stories about Mend *zairan* imagine the shaman as outcast, as thief taking from the rich and giving to the poor, and as resistance fighter challenging the Manchu authorities,

<sup>1</sup> According to Pürev (2002: 170) Mend *zairan* lived from 1757 until 1826.

<sup>2</sup> The story was told by Ölzii, the younger brother of the shaman Badrah, in August 2004. Ölzii used the term *tsagdaa* (police) to name the officials or guards of the Manchu administration.

escaping their rule and scorning them. The Manchu officials represent the authority of the state that is shown as a foreign power suppressing and exploiting the people at the periphery. Mend *zairan* is invoked as so *id shidtei*, magically powerful, that the authorities cannot touch him. I conclude that the magical power of the *ongod* Hosin Aav derives from the shaman Mend's resistance against the state. I have never heard a story about Mend *zairan* that was concerned with healing. As the stories about Mend *zairan* are outstandingly popular and their message straightforward, I use these legends as reference for interpreting other legends which contain similar themes, although they are more ambiguous and show the shaman heroes sometimes rather as powerless than as powerful.

Only once I heard legends about the shaman Noyo Zönög Hairhan. The shaman/*ongod* Noyo Zönög is depicted in the literature as one of the earliest ancestors of the Tsagaan Huular shamans.<sup>3</sup> The power assigned to this shaman/*ongod* is indicated by the title "Hairhan": literally meaning "gracious" or "benevolent", people use the term *hairhan* to respectfully address exceptionally powerful *ongod*. The title is a euphemistic assignation unto powerful forces that people venerate but also fear and it is as well used in reference to mountains. The stories about Zönög Hairhan were told by the hunter Renchindavaa from Höndii *bag*, whom we visited as he was recommended to us as being not only a descendant of the reputed Tsagaan Huular shaman Baljinnyam but also to be knowledgeable about shamans' traditions and a talented storyteller. At our first visit, my guide Davaanyam, my partner and I arrived after a long riding day on a cold autumn evening in October 2003. The family received us warmly and after a delicious meal with wild boar meat and cow liver sausage and a single round of vodka only, Renchindavaa entertained us and some of the neighbors, who in the meantime had joined us, with mysterious stories about Noyo Zönög's life.

Zönög, said Renchindavaa, had a bad reputation and was feared. He lived without a wife but together with his flying horse as companion and helper in Tengis.<sup>4</sup> Once, nine *chötgör* (a term translated as "devil", "ghost", or "spook") arrived from the north, "from Russia" said Renchindavaa, and settled with Zönög. The bodies of these *chötgör* were half human, half animal, and the last of them was a child who lived by drinking blood. One day, Zönög visited his future parents-in-law where his wife-to-be gave milk to the child to drink. Thereupon, the child died. Angry at the death of the child, Zönög refrained from marrying his supposed future wife. In revenge, the woman cut the wings of Zönög's horse so that the flying horse died. From then on, Zönög refused to ride horses but went on foot.

Renchindavaa continued with another story about Zönög, which resembles the stories about Mend *zairan* mentioned above. In the recounted episode, Zönög received again

<sup>3</sup> See Badamhatan (1965), Diószegi 1963, Pürev 2002, Figure 4, and the discussion in Chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> The topic of a flying horse, *niisdeg mor'*, whose wings were cut by a by a jealous woman, is also part of the Mongolian legends about the origin of the horse-head fiddle, *morin huur*.

visitors from the north, “from Russia”. Rebellious soldiers from the north fled into the Shishget area and encountered Zönög in Tengis. They attempted to kill the shaman but they were not able to do so. The soldiers could kill him neither by sword nor by guns: after they shot him, Zönög removed his gown and shed the bullets. Thereafter, the soldiers collected sixty ox loads worth of dry wood to burn him at the stake but Zönög descended alive from the coals. Because they could not kill him the soldiers fraternized with the shaman and took him to the “Horolmoi war”, where they, thanks to the magical power of Noyo Zönög, successfully lived off banditry. The term Horolmoi, which is usually mentioned in stories about Zönög Hairhan to name a war, was identified by Badamhatan (1965: 75-6) as the name of a local military leader of Tannu-Urianhai in the eighteenth century who was raiding into Halha territories south of the Manchu border posts and was combating Büüvei, leader of the Hotgoid (part of the Halha).<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Ewing (1981: 181) wrote that Horolmoi was forced by Büüvei to submit to Qing rule and that Horolmoi fled twice from supervision and was finally executed. In the legend told by Renchindavaa, Noyo Zönög is invoked as fraternizing with Urianhai rebels raiding against Manchu suzerainty. Similarly to the legends about Hosin Aav, Noyo Zönög is shown as opposing Manchu authority.



*Photograph 37: Renchindavaa near his home, before going on a hunt (06.10. 2003).*

As a third episode, Renchindavaa called to mind the end of the shaman’s life: Zönög was not able to die a natural death and grew to be very old, which is mirrored in his name “Zönög” which means “senile”.<sup>6</sup> Zönög desired to become a *nüisdeg böö*, a flying shaman, a notion that today is used as a title for outstanding earlier shamans. However, Zönög could only fly up to the *toono*, the wooden roof-ring of the *ger*; his metal tailbone did not allow

<sup>5</sup> See the overview of the history of the area in Chapter 9.

<sup>6</sup> According to Pürev (2002), Zönög’s father Jotog lived at the turn to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Zönög lived from the 1660s until the 1790s.

him to leave. The *toono* of the *ger* marks the gateway between the living and the divine (Atwood 2004: 615). Angry about his incapability to fly, Zönög decided to die. Unable to die at natural death he instructed his companions how they were able to kill him: they had to bind the intestinal fat of a yellow dog around his head, then to knock him with the pants of a young woman who had not yet given birth to a child. Three years after Zönög's death, everything from his corpse had decayed, with the exception of his bronze tailbone, which, as Renchindavaa assured, was seen in the *asar* of Zönög in Harmai until the 1950s.<sup>7</sup>

In all three episodes on Zönög the praising of the powerful shaman is accompanied and contradicted by powerlessness. The first story imagined Zönög Hairhan as related to extraordinary forces, represented by a flying horse and disgusting monsters. However, the extraordinary beings are shown as easily vanquished; the small devil dies after drinking milk and the horse cannot avoid the woman cutting his wings. One of the episodes relates the shaman Zönög to lay power. Similarly to Mend *zairan*, Noyo Zönög is envisaged as being immune to lethal weapons; neither the guns of the soldiers nor the stake can kill him. The shaman finally fraternizes with the offending soldiers and joins them in their war. As these soldiers do not represent state power but are rather perceived as raiding bandits affronting official rule, the shaman is associated with outcasts challenging the supreme authority. In the last episode, the shaman Zönög is too weak to ascend to the power and reputation of a flying shaman; at the same time, he is too powerful to be killed by weapons. Humphrey (1996b: 38, 71) comments that this legend about Zönög shows that the shaman could only be killed by means perceived as impure and revolting but which in general are not viewed as causing a human to die. Thus, all episodes about Zönög juxtapose magical power with powerlessness; the shaman is ambiguously imagined as potentially powerful but not able to really enact his potential.

### **Agarin Hairhan as powerless resistance fighter**

Agarin Hairhan is venerated as the most powerful *ongod* among the local population throughout the area, even though the *ongod* resides in the southwestern-most edge of the Darhad area in Bayanzürh. Again, the legends about Agarin Hairhan frame the shamans' resistance against Manchu authorities. And again, the stories about Agarin Hairhan ambiguously join the power of the *ongod*/earlier shamans with the shaman's powerlessness during lifetime. The female shaman Baglaan *udgan*, who is primarily identified with Agarin Hairhan, is remembered as a troublemaker against the Manchu during the eighteenth century (Pürev 2003: 17).<sup>8</sup> Her son, a thief stealing from the rich to give to the poor, was a shaman who transformed himself into an eagle when shamanizing, and therefore his name

<sup>7</sup> The expression "yellow dog" might be a euphemism for a wolf. The scholarly sources and local people disagree whether the *asar* of Zönög Hairhan lies in Harmai to the southwest of the village of Tsagaan Nuur or in Tengis to the northwest of the village.

<sup>8</sup> Often, people associate only the female shaman Baglaan with the title Agarin Hairhan.

was Arild *bürged*, Arild eagle. The son is part of the legends, as being caught and executed by the Manchu officials. The *tamlaga* of Agarin Hairhan expresses the sadness of the mother and her vengeful thoughts against the Manchu authorities.<sup>9</sup>

The variants of the legend differ in whether the mother Baglaan could powerfully revenge her son or whether her anger lastly turned against herself. The stories that I heard from locals show the mother as powerless against the supreme power of the state; moreover, they even depict her as involved in the arrest of her son. The officials of the Dööregch Van banner, not able to capture the shaman Aril Bürged flying with other birds in the sky, forced his mother Baglaan to betray her son. By smoking, she brought her son down to earth and transformed him into a human so that the Manchu could arrest and execute him. This story traces the power of the *ongod* Agarin Hairhan not to the shaman Baglaan's power during lifetime, but to the betrayal of her son. Powerless to protect her son (and, as I will discuss later, her daughter too), her bitterness and suffering about the betrayal and the son's death are transformed into her power as a vengeful *ongod*. Whereas the male shaman Mend and Zönög are at least partially shown as powerful during their lifetimes, Baglaan *udgan* is presented as powerless only.

The emphasis on the shamans' resistance against the authority of the state is attenuated in the variants of the legends told by the historian O. Pürev (2002: 170-176). In his accounts the shamans are unambiguously subordinated to state rule. According to Pürev, the son Arild demanded from his mother Baglaan to remove her protection in order that he could be subordinated to the law of the state and be executed. Thereafter, the enraged mother sent an *ongod* to Uliastai to kill the Manchu *amban*, the Qing high official, to revenge the execution of her son; however, the *ongod* returned unsuccessful and harmed the shaman herself. Also Pürev's account about Noyo Zönög differs from the stories I heard in the field. According to Pürev, Noyo Zönög was to be executed by Manchu officials. In distinction to local stories, the shaman was detained not by "rebels from the north" but by the Manchu officials who decided to punish him because he had killed some of Horolmoi's rebels without authorization. Instead of acknowledging the shaman's attack against Manchu enemies, Noyo Zönög was to be punished for his offence of the state's power monopoly. However, when the official attempted to execute the shaman, two cuckoos took off from the shaman's shoulder. Scared by this omen, the official refrained from the execution. After the Manchu had left, the shaman sarcastically commented that the state was very powerful: as his guardian *ongod* had vanished and his body was left without a master, he could have been easily executed.

O. Pürev's account also shows the shaman Mend as less powerful than the local stories do. Although he praises him as powerful and talks about his thefts from the rich, in his

<sup>9</sup> S. Dulam (1992) cites the *tamlaga* in Mongolian, Dulam and Even (1994) and Humphrey (1996b: 61-62) show translated versions.



version of the story the shaman was not able to challenge the authorities in the direct confrontation. For instance, Mend did not succeed in killing a malicious and aggressive official because the shaman was unable to offend anybody wearing a uniform. O. Pürev argues that even the very powerful shamans like Tiv Tenger, the court shaman of Chinggis Khaan, were powerless against the state and he emphasized that shamans respected the supreme authority of the state.

The local variants represent the state as a foreign oppressive power and the shamans as outcasts at the margins of the state. By invoking legendary shamans as heroic outcasts the legends transmit messages directed to the contemporary shamans: they are reprehended to abstain from enriching themselves but instead to employ their magical potential to support the poor and combat exploitation. Moreover, the legends portray the shamans as occupying a socially marginal position. The shamans' power is contrasted with the power of chiefs representing the state at the periphery. The invocation of legendary shamans as marginal outcasts admonishes present-day shamans to not aspire to a better social position and to not relate to the economic and political center.

### **Traces of the Buddhist past**

Local stories about the magical deeds of shamans “of olden times” include allusions to the competition between shamans and Buddhist monks. Similarly, scholars retell the same legends to show the shamans' fierce resistance against Buddhism. Although the legends show the shamans and the Buddhist monks as interacting in the same magical fields, the newer scholarly accounts produce a competition between “Buddhism” and “shamanism” as two distinct belief systems. Since the 1960s, these legends are integrated into a scholarly discourse that systematically downplays the presence and influence of Buddhism in the Darhad past. The Darhad are today associated with their shamans and identified as “shamanists”, although the Darhad were for more than two centuries subjected to Buddhist authority and the very name Darhad is related to this subjugation (see Chapter 9), and although almost a fourth of the Darhad population were considered monks before the destruction of the monasteries in the 1930s. Before I analyze the scholarly discourses in detail, I recount two legends which highlight the competition between shamans and monks.

Both legends focus on female shamans and the suffering inflicted upon them by Buddhist monks. The first story envisages the shaman Amaajii, the daughter of Baglaan *udgan*. Amaajii *udgan* was invited by the monk Badarj into a competition (*temtseen*) to match their magical powers. Sitting opposed to each other on the ground, the monk took out his tongue and displayed it on the palm of his hand before putting it back into his mouth. Amaajii *udgan*, trying to outplay him, cut off her belly, took out her innards with her hand, placed them on the ground, put them back into her stomach and stitched it up.

Amaajii *udgan* did not realize that the monk cheated her twice: first, he had not cut out his tongue but presented her a piece of meat as his tongue, and later, he threw a handful of earth into her open stomach. The legend ends with the death of Amaajii *udgan*, who died as a consequence of the infection caused by the monk.<sup>10</sup> This legend shows the relationship between a shaman and a monk as a severe competition. The female shaman is praised as magically powerful but the legend shows her as defeated by the representative of a superior power. Nevertheless, storyteller and listener identify with the losing shaman; the winning monk however evokes an imagery of Buddhism that only by fraud and deception could overcome the powers of earlier shamans.

Well known is the legend about the shaman Sunchig *udgan*, a female shaman who lived, according to Pürev (2003: 160-161), between 1836 and 1861. Sunchig gave birth to a son, Sharav, who was the fruit of an affair with a monk. When her son Sharav was five years old, the father made him into a Buddhist disciple. Out of anger and grievance about her son becoming a monk, Sunchig *udgan* committed suicide. Her son later became a famous Buddhist painter (Pürev 2002: 55). Sunchig *udgan* is venerated as angry *ongod* Tsahirin Eej; her *tamlaga* expresses her anger against Buddhist monks and their doctrine. The following chant is one of two *tamlaga* of Tsahirin Eej cited by Badamhatan (1965: 227):

<i>Nom gegchiig medehgüi bi</i>	I don't know the so-called book [doctrine]
<i>Tsoohor tsaas l baidag</i>	It's only spotted paper
<i>Lam gegchiig medehgüi bi</i>	I don't know the so-called lama [Buddhist teacher]
<i>Tairmal tolgoitai</i>	They are close-cropped
<i>Tangaraa buruu har herүүлч нар</i>	False oath making black quarrelsome
<i>Dalai lamd mörgöh jum bol</i>	If I had to bow before the Dalai lama
<i>Dalan gurav tsavchuulna bi</i>	I would let myself be chopped seventy-three times
<i>Bogd lamd mörgöh yum bol</i>	If I had to bow before the Bogd lama
<i>Borvi süüjee tas tsavchuulna bi</i>	I would let my heel and hip be chopped
<i>Achit lam bagsh min' gej</i>	If my teacher's name were Achit lama
<i>Alga zuuzai havsrah yum bol</i>	If I had to devoutly fold my hands
<i>Aldin tödiihen biyee</i>	My body no longer than a fathom <sup>11</sup>
<i>Arvan gurav tas tsavchuulna bi</i>	I would let myself be chopped thirteen times
<i>Burhand chin' mörgöh yum bol</i>	If I had to bow before your Buddha
<i>Bulchingaa suga tatuulna bi</i>	I would let my muscles be torn out

<sup>10</sup> Story told by Chuluunbaatar *zairan* in September 2004 in Ulaanbaatar.

<sup>11</sup> *Ald*: fathom, the distance between the tips of the fingers of the two hands extended to either side (Bawden 1997).

<i>Shashind chin' süsegleh yum bol</i>	If I had to worship your religion
<i>Shandsaa hovh tatuulna bi</i>	I would let my tendons be torn out
<i>Hürdiig chin' ergüüleh yum bol</i>	If I had to turn your prayer wheel
<i>Hüzüügee tas tsavchuulna gejee</i>	Then I would let my neck be chopped off

Badamhatan (1965) and the Hungarian scholar Diószegi (1961) cited this chant to illustrate the fierce resistance of the shamans against the influx of Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> However, I perceive the evocation of the story and the chant as more ambiguous: the chant conjures how the shaman, being enraged in her ire against the authority of Buddhist teachers, cannot vent her anger directly to her counterpart but remains alone with it, self-destructively turning her aggression against herself. Again, the legend shows a female shaman as powerless, similarly to the legends about Baglaan *udgan* and her daughter Amajii *udgan*. The suffering of the female shamans during their lifetimes transforms only after their death into the vengeful power of the *ongod*. Although the female shamans are shown as losing the competition and as powerless in the end, nevertheless the legends are told to praise the power of the former shamans.

Not all of the stories conjuring the competition between shamans and monks show the shamans as losing. Some legends, for example the ones told by Pürev (2002), depict female shamans as rough down-to-earth women who provoke obedient monks with carnal seductions. Whether the shamans are imagined as losing the rivalry or as joking about Buddhist monks, the stories recall the past presence of Buddhism and the interactions between shamans and monks and show them as engaged in similar magical practices. The legends reflect Kollmar-Paulenz's (forthcoming) analysis of monks and shamans competing in the same religious fields (see Chapter 3).

Today, one can find hardly any traces of the earlier dominance of the Buddhist administration, the high number of Buddhist monks, or the big monastery that once stood in the depression where now the village of Renchinlümbe is located. Visiting numerous private homes, I rarely encountered Buddhist shrines and images of the Dalai Lama, which are widespread elsewhere in Mongolia. I found Buddhist images sometimes in the homes of people who venerated also their ancestor *ongod* or themselves shamanize. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, Buddhist concepts are integrated into the Darhad shamans' practices and invocations. Nevertheless, the majority of shamans see themselves as not influenced by Buddhism, choosing to forget that they use Tibetan Buddhist terms in their invocations, like *lus savdag* (to refer to the spiritual masters of the water and earth) or *burhan*, Buddha (to address their *ongod*). A few shamans show Buddhist images in their

<sup>12</sup> However, Diószegi did not relate the chant to the story about Sunchig *udgan* (who hung herself).

homes, and only one shaman I met, the old female shaman Byenda, said that she was a “yellow” shaman, thus also a believing Buddhist. Although the majority of shamans consider themselves as non-Buddhists, they show a relaxed attitude towards Buddhism. No longer, it seems, do present-day shamans focus on competition and rivalry or fear Buddhist harassment but they present themselves as partners of Buddhism in the context of the new appreciation of religious practice. Despite the obvious absence of Buddhist insignia in Darhad homes, people may seek the support of Buddhist monks on particular occasions. Usually, when somebody passes away the descendants travel to the provincial capital Mörön to ask the Buddhist astrologer (*zurhaich*) for advice on the burial. People also may seek the inspirational support of Buddhist monk-astrologers in case of infliction or before they start a risky business. Thus, people request the services of Buddhist monks for similar ends as those of shamans.

Nevertheless, there seems to be almost no attempt to reinvigorate Buddhist practices in the Darhad area. In Renchinlhümbe, only a small temple commemorates the destroyed monastery Zöölön Hüree. In August 2003, I met the only monk of the village for a short interview. Demberel, born in 1916, became a monk at the monastery of Zöölön at the age of eight, and he stayed in the monastery until its destruction in the late 1930s. Thereafter, the young man became a herder. Around a hundred monks were arrested, Demberel remembered.<sup>13</sup> He mentioned that his *ah*, his elder brother or another paternal relative, was hauled off and never returned. The old monk described the former Zöölön Hüree as the biggest monastery of the area encompassing twenty temples and containing numerous books and carpets sent by the Bogd Khan from Tibet.<sup>14</sup> The monks, Demberel recalled, lived in the monastery and did not work; the monastery owned only small herds of livestock and mainly, the monks lived on contributions of the people.<sup>15</sup> Some of the valuables from the once important and famous monastery Zöölön might still be hidden in the mountains of the area. Once, Davaanyam and I encountered a man who reported on monastic valuables that were found in the mountains with metal detectors. When I asked him whether the valuables were returned to monasteries, the man laughed and said that the items were all sold to China.

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<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Pedersen (2006a) was told by elder Darhad informants that in 1937 more than ninety persons (high lamas and middle-ranking monks and a small number of shamans) were “taken away by the red soldiers”.

<sup>14</sup> The Darhad were the lay subjects of the Javzandamba Hutagt, a Tibetan and the highest Buddhist authority in Outer Mongolia, who became the Bogd Khan, the head of the state, when Mongolia proclaimed its autonomy from China in 1911 (see Chapter 9).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with the 87-year-old monk Demberel from Renchinlhümbe, 29.08. 2003.

### Scholarly perceptions of the Buddhist past

The scholarly accounts from the early 1930s and the 1960s show striking discrepancies as well as continuities in the depiction of religion in the Darhad history. Sanjeev (1930) and Zhamtsarano (publishing under the name Tseveen, 1997 [1934]) rendered descriptions of the big monastery Zöölön as well as reporting on shamans' practices. Their accounts indicate that at that time around 1600 men out of a population of nearly 7000 people (consisting a forth of the population) were monks.<sup>16</sup> A few years later, the Mongolian government, compelled by Stalin, ordered the destruction of the monasteries; also the monastery Zöölön was demolished in 1938 (Trapp 2007; Badamhatan 1965). The next ethnographic reports on the Darhad date from the early 1960s; they associate the Darhad with "shamanism" and downplay the influence of Buddhism in Darhad history.

Sanjeev (1930) and Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]), who wrote the reports from the early 1930, belonged to those Buryat intellectuals who influenced not only academic life but equally political ideas in Mongolia between 1900 and 1930 (Rupen 1956b). Sanjeev (1930) visited the Darhad area in 1927 for a short period only.<sup>17</sup> He described the monastery Zöölön as situated in a picturesque landscape surrounded by snow covered mountains and as constituting the most populous settlement in the Darhad area. From far away, he wrote, the monastery gave the impression of a very beautiful small town but when coming close the picture was impaired by the mean-looking *ger* of the poor herders surrounding the monastery. Monks had informed him that the monastery was built at the end of the eighteenth century. Sanjeev considered the temple as an ordinary building of Tibetan architecture, encircled by the dwellings of some dozens of monks and the courts of rich Darhad. In the courtyard of a wealthy administrative chief, Sanjeev saw four small sheds and chests with big American [!] locks enclosing furs and silk blankets. Concerning the number of monks he wrote that besides those thousand monks living in the monastery a further 600 monks stayed together with their families and only their shaved heads and their impressive consumption of alcohol distinguished them as monks who visited the monastery for the important ceremonies only (Sanjeev 1930: 22-26).

Sanjeev pointed to the influence of Buddhism on shamans' practice, arguing that Buddhism entered the Darhad area a long time ago and that it "mutilated the shamanistic belief of the Darhad beyond recognition" (1930: 41). He detected Buddhist influence in the ideas of sin, guilt, and justice surrounding shamans' practice. Despite emphasizing Buddhist influence, he assessed the shamanism of the Darhad as the only one in Mongolia

<sup>16</sup> Sanjeev rendered the numbers of monks; Zhamtsarano included the number of persons in 1930 and further indicated a similar proportion of monks for the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1861: 1390 monks out of a total of 7015 people; 1901: 1120 monks out of a total of 5120 persons). The author interpreted the massive drop in the population size as a consequence of famine and cattle plague.

<sup>17</sup> I thank Rudolf Trapp for translating the content of Sanjeev's Russian account.

that still played a certain role. Sanjeev emphasized the connections of monks and shamans: he mentioned that monks were engaged in the propagation and transmission of shamans' practices and gave people the advice to become shamans, and he discussed the case of a monk who himself became a shaman. Nevertheless, Sanjeev's account focused on the shamans. He depicted shamans' biographies, their practices, discussed the shamans' *ongod*, the shamans' paraphernalia and compared the Darhad shamans' practices with the practices of the neighboring Buryat shamans; however, he did not attend a single seance.<sup>18</sup>

Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) mainly wrote about the significance of the Buddhist administration in the area.<sup>19</sup> The author mentioned that the Darhad had embraced Buddhism and built a wealthy monastery with more than one thousand monks. He criticized that the monks did not stay in the monastery but that they mixed and nomadized with lay people and even caught fish. He mentioned with a short remark only that the old *böö mörgöl*, shamanic practice, was widespread. Zhamtsarano's depiction of the Buddhist monks in the Darhad area exactly mirrors the political approach towards Buddhism and Buddhist monks in the second half of the 1920s: at that period the Mongolian political discussions focused on the failings of the monks' practice and on the reform of Buddhism. The party attempted to ally with "progressive" monks and did not yet plan the destruction of Buddhism altogether (Trapp 2007; Rupen 1966: 28).

For the following three decades, scholars were not allowed to visit the Darhad depression in the frontier area and the next reports, those of Badamhatan and Diószegi, are based on fieldwork in the early 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Badamhatan's (1965) account is written in the idiom of the dominant political ideology against Buddhism. He focused on the administrative organization and the taxes collected by the monasteries, assessing it as "feudal exploitation".

Badamhatan wrote almost nothing about the Buddhist doctrine, the religious practice of the monks, or the relationship between shamans and monks. He opened the chapter about belief (*süseg bishrel*; lit. "piety") with a few sentences on Buddhism (*sharin shashin*; lit. "yellow religion"), thereby echoing socialist anti-religious propaganda: until the early century, he wrote, the "yellow religion" was, together with shamanism, *böö mörgöl*, widespread in the area and constituted a "drawback for the development of productive work, livestock husbandry, and population size" (1965: 207). He accused the monastery Zöölön of "exploiting gifts" from the population to cover the expenses for books and the

<sup>18</sup> Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1927; 1928) had extensively discussed the practices of Alar Buryat shamans to the northwest of Lake Baikal.

<sup>19</sup> The account of Zhamtsarano does not indicate whether the author really visited the area himself. However, according to Y. Rintchen (Rinčen 1958), Zhamtsarano visited northern Hövsgöl. I will return to Zhamtsarano and the importance of his account in the nascent nation-state in Chapter 9.

<sup>20</sup> The area was closed not only to foreign researchers but also to Mongolian scholars; personal communication from R. Hamayon, 07.12. 2006.

personal expenses for the middle and high lamas and the living cost of the low monks. Badamhatan ended the short tract with the phrase “the contaminating ideology of the yellow faith spread over the Darhad area and teaching from birth to death made the people’s minds’ dull and put pressure on them to stay in their backwardness”. After this ideological stance, the author referred to the numerous publications about Buddhism and started his account on shamans’ practice.

In the chapter about Darhad history, Badamhatan depicted census data from the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, showing that monks accounted for almost a fourth of the whole population. This means that around half of the male population were considered monks at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, the ratio of monks in the Shishget area corresponded to the average in Outer Mongolia.<sup>21</sup> Badamhatan mentioned the number of 1500 monks (out of a total population of around 7000 people) before the destruction of the monastery. He wrote that the monastery was “closed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1938” and that “the poor lower monks” were integrated into “productive labor” in joineries and cloth or alimentation craft cooperatives (1965: 38).<sup>22</sup> That Badamhatan trivialized the destruction of the monastery as “closure” and that he wrote about “the poor lower” monks integrated into “productive labor”, indicates that he played down the persecution and execution of monks. Moreover, his remark implicitly distinguishes classes of monks, presenting the “poor lower” monks as part of the proletariat while silencing the fate of higher ranks.<sup>23</sup> By his short remarks on the sudden end of Buddhist practice in the area, Badamhatan silently justified the former purges.

### **The production of “Darhad shamanism”**

Remarkable is less the socialist rhetoric Badamhatan disposed to denounce Buddhism as “feudal” exploiter but rather his neglect of the religious practices of a considerable part of the population until two decades before his fieldwork. In contrast, he wrote one of the major chapters of his monograph about shamans and their practices. This means that the author followed socialist antireligious policy when writing about Buddhism but he did not where he wrote about shamans. Moreover, his perspective reflects the general preference for “shamanism” over Buddhism which shapes British and German Mongol Studies (Kollmar Paulenz 2003; see Chapter 3). Badamhatan implicitly discussed the tension derived from his display of numbers indicating the dominance of Buddhist monks until the early twentieth century and his own focus on the shamans with a few sentences at the end

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<sup>21</sup> The 1918 census counted 115’000 monks out of a total population of 540’000 persons in Outer Mongolia; only 40’000 monks lived full time in monasteries (Majskij 1959 [1920]: 43, 247, 302).

<sup>22</sup> The textile and furniture factories built in Renchinlhümbe were transferred to Hatgal in 1959 (Badamhatan 1965: 38; Tatár 1991: 59).

<sup>23</sup> Baabar (1999: 369) contradicts this view and claims that the majority of the more than 20’000 monks murdered in the late 1930s were “low level” monks.

of his book. He argued that the isolated Darhad borderland was confronted with Buddhism at a relatively late date. The author estimated that the first monastery was built in the Shishget area in the early eighteenth century, having a century's "delay" on the second spread of Buddhism over Outer Mongolia.

Badamhatan wrote that the confrontation with Buddhism provoked a coarse competition between shamans and monks. He purported that the Darhad shamans were very strong and Buddhism could not sweep away the shamans straight away. Only by a subtle strategy of assimilation, he wrote, with shamans becoming adepts of monks and integrating Buddhist terms into the shamans' *tamlaga*, could Buddhism succeed at the end of the nineteenth century; it "dominated, weakened, and annihilated" shamanism (Badamhatan 1965: 227). This view again echoes the dominant scholarly perspective on Buddhism plastering shamanism in Mongolia (Atwood 1996; Kollmar-Paulenz 2003b). It is remarkable how his notion of "Buddhism annihilating shamanism" contorted what Badamhatan had actually encountered in the field. As I will later show in this chapter he obviously met with shamans; whether he also met with monks is not indicated in the text.

The Hungarian scholar Diószegi (1961) visited the area (probably together with Badamhatan) in 1960.<sup>24</sup> During three months, he traveled to different peripheral areas of Mongolia to study the ethnic distinctions of different traditions of shamans. Diószegi related the state of shamans' practices he encountered in the different areas to the expansion of "Lamaism". He emphasized the fierce resistance of the shamans in northern Hövsgöl, of the Darhad and Urianhai to the west and east of Lake Hövsgöl, to "Lamaism". Diószegi assumed the shamans as so powerful as to be able to enforce several relocations of the major monastery. Diószegi (ibid.: 202) saw thereafter, "with the passage of time", an increasing number of people converting into monkhood and the relationship between monks and shamans becoming less hateful. Shamans and monks even cooperated, monks advised people to become shamans and acted as teachers for future shamans. Thereby, shamans' ideology absorbed Buddhist influences and the whole "*Weltanschauung*" of shamans became Buddhist. In the following sentence, however, Diószegi (ibid.: 203) contradictorily wrote that "Lamaism has left practically no trace in the north", among the Darhad, in contrast to eastern Mongolia where Buddhism had "completely extinguished Shamanism". Although Diószegi discussed the relationship between shamans and monks more than Badamhatan did, he similarly showed Buddhism as a foreign hostile ideology that infiltrated the Darhad.

The emphasis on the shamans accompanied by the disregard of the Buddhist past is even more obvious in the account of the Mongolian historian O. Pürev (Pürev 2002; Pürev 2004). He argues that the monastery Zöölön had to move five times because of the attacks

<sup>24</sup> Badamhatan (1965: 235, footnote 18) mentioned that he had accompanied Diószegi on his visit to the areas to the east of Lake Hövsgöl.



of shamans. Shamans cursed the monks, manipulated the monks to contravene their rules and to slaughter animals, to steal, or to go hunting (Pürev 2002: 56 ff.). Pürev presents the Darhad shamans as least influenced by Buddhism and closest to the earliest form of Mongolian shamanism (ibid.: 61). Although he locates the center of “lamaized” shamanism in Dayan Deerh, a cave to the east of Lake Hövsgöl and thus not that far away, he claims that the Darhad and Urianhai shamans were not subordinated to Buddhist rule. When I asked him in an interview how the shamans could maintain their practices in an area dominated by a large Buddhist monastery, O. Pürev answered that the shamans were more powerful than the lamas.<sup>25</sup> Giving this answer, Pürev started to tell stories about the fights of shamans against the monks and he was seemingly amused to detail how shamans tried to seduce the monks to sexual intercourse or to befoul the reputation of monks.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Pürev emphasizes straightforwardly the superior power of shamans against monks, while he subordinates the shamans to the state power.

Noticeably, neither Badamhatan nor O. Pürev have used the historical administrative division of the area under Manchu rule, delineating the western taiga area and its people as subjects subordinated to lay rule from the steppe depression belonging to the Buddhist estate as an argument to support their view. Badamhatan (1965: 25) mentioned the administrative division where he derived the term Darhad to the transition of earlier Urianhai people into Buddhist lay subjects and he mentioned conflicts over territories between the taiga Urianhai people and the Darhad. O. Pürev confirmed this division in an interview and he strengthened my impression that the historical shamans are largely associated with the taiga borderlands. He emphasized that the majority of the shamans had belonged to the Urianhai.<sup>27</sup> To emphasize the administrative division and to associate the shamans not with the Buddhist estate but with the neighboring lay administration would support the refutation of Buddhist influence on shamans. However, this argument would question the association of the shamans with the name “Darhad” altogether.

To summarize the changes and continuities in the representations since the 1930s, I see subtle shifts from the view of two distinct but related inspirational specialists to two opposed systems and to the identification of the Darhad with shamanism. Zhamtsarano is the only author who did not focus on shamans’ practice but mentioned it with one sentence only. The two reports written before the socialist persecution of Buddhist monks however both discussed the importance of the monastery. Although Sanjeev (1930) had favored the

<sup>25</sup> Interview 07.09. 2004, in his home in Ulaanbaatar.

<sup>26</sup> In the second half of the 1920, when Mongolian politicians debated the improvement of Buddhism, the monks were criticized for sexual intercourse and for immoral behavior (personal communication with Rudolf Trapp, December 2006).

<sup>27</sup> O. Pürev told that the Urianhai belonged to the neighboring *Zasagt Han aimgün Erdene Diiüregch Vangin hoshuuni Ar Shirhten otog* (interview 07.09. 2004). Also Badamhatan wrote about the Urianhai of Diiüregch Van. I will discuss the administrative divisions and the implications of the delineations between Tuva/Urianhai and Darhad in Chapter 9.

view on shamans, he nevertheless has described Buddhist practices as well as he mentioned the relationship of monks and shamans. Thirty years later, Badamhatan and Diószegi, who probably met no monks but interviewed shamans, focused on shamans' practice. They did not discuss the earlier practice of Buddhist monks but only briefly mentioned the infiltration of Buddhism to the area and in particular they emphasized the shamans' resistance against Buddhism. O. Pürev, who published the insights he collected during decades in postsocialism only, highlighted the supremacy of shamans over monks and largely rejected an influence of Buddhism on shamans' practice. O. Pürev has accelerated the perspective of the 1960s and he unambiguously equates the Darhad with shamanism; claiming even that "Darhad shamanism" is almost not influenced by Buddhism and thus the only "pure shamanism" in Mongolia. Interestingly, the changes between the 1930s and 1960s, thus, within the socialist period, were as substantial as the shifts between the 1960s and the 1990s. Thus, I see the notion "Darhad shamanism" as produced in the 1960s and reinforced during the new celebration during the 1990s. Ironically, Shirokogoroff (1935: 282) had earlier suspected that shamanism among the Darhad might be considered as "not 'pure'". He had read Sanjeev's account about the Darhad and used the descriptions of monks interacting with shamans as an example to support his hypothesis that Buddhism may stimulate and maintain shamanism.

The emphasis on shamanism together with the disregard of the Buddhist past dominates recent international scholarly perceptions of the Darhad. Even general overviews state that the Mongolians are Buddhist with the exception of the Darhad, who could maintain their shamanism. The French scholar Marie-Dominique Even, who has translated Badamhatan's monograph about the Darhad (Badamxatan 1986), is an outstanding well-informed author who identifies the Darhad with shamanism. The following quotation is taken from the introduction to her discussion of Darhad shamans' chants collected by Badamhatan and Rintchen:

[G]éographiquement et administrativement isolée du reste du pays, les Darxad ont conservé un chamanisme particulièrement vivace jusqu'à une époque récente. Quoique maîtresse de ces marches lointaines et forte d'un important clergé recruté localement, l'Église lamaïque ne put en effet venir à bout des croyances indigènes. Celles-ci étaient favorisées par le maintien, au sein de la population darxad, des anciennes structures claniques et par l'influence, sur ses frontières comme dans ses rangs, de groupes demeurés chamanistes, les Urianxaj de Tuva d'une part, les Bouriates cisbaïkaliens d'autre part (Even 1992: 101).

Even emphasizes the "retention of shamanism" and qualifies the influence of Buddhism: in spite of the authority of the Buddhist church over the peripheral Darhad area, Buddhism could not master the indigenous belief of the Darhad who favored their shamanism due to their maintenance of ancient clan structures and the influence of neighboring shamanists. Even follows Badamhatan in the view of Buddhism as a foreign doctrine intruding into the Darhad area. More than Badamhatan however, her remark surrounds the practices of

shamans with the belief of a community of shamanists. In contrast to Even, Badamhatan mainly focused on shamans and their practices and traditions, leaving the relationship of the shamans' concepts to the population's belief in general undiscussed. In contrast to the term "shamanism", the Mongolian term *böö mörgöl* that Badamhatan used, relates an activity, "to bow", and "to butt", to shamans; the notion can be translated as "worship in shamans" as well as "worship of shamans".

The general subliminal preference for "shamanism" in Mongol Studies (Kollmar-Paulenz 2003b) shapes the lopsided perception of the Darhad as "shamanists". In turn, the presence of shamans among the Darhad makes the Darhad into a primary reference for the discussion of Mongolian indigenous religion; the shamans of the Darhad support the general perception of the religion of the Mongols as essentially shamanistic. The Mongolian and international scholarly accounts accompany the popular view in Ulaanbaatar imagining the Darhad shamans as the most powerful and most traditional shamans in Mongolia. Furthermore, the shamans' practices constituted a welcome characteristic for Badamhatan to distinguish the Darhad from other Mongols and to use them as ethnographic example of a "backward nationality" (see Chapter 9).

How much I was myself prejudiced by the identification of the Darhad with their shamans I have only by and by realized. This was so although I recognized early during my fieldwork that the people in the Darhad area could not be called "shamanists" as many of them consider themselves as atheists or refuse to acknowledge the shamans among them. When I became aware that in the early twentieth century considerable parts of the population were monks and that the monastery of Zöölön was probably one of the larger monasteries in Outer Mongolia, the contradiction between these traces of Buddhism with the general association of the Darhad as shamanists started to deeply irritate me. First, I traced the perspectives on the influence of Buddhism on the shamans' practices in the scholarly accounts. Finally, I comprehended that it is more fruitful to invert the perspective and to ask how it came that the Darhad were associated with "shamanism". Only then did I understand that the identification of the Darhad with their shamans started in the 1960s only.

### **Glorification of shamans who practiced during socialism**

It took me long to be surprised that the major reports on "Darhad shamanism" date from socialist times. The scholarly accounts of Diószegi and Badamhatan producing the label "Darhad shamanism" – written in the midst of socialist days, challenge the dominant view of the socialist persecution of shamans. Invocations of powerful shamans during socialism by local people in the Darhad equally confront dominant views of socialist rule pushing shamans into secret practice or bringing them to halt their practice altogether. To trace the

ambiguities of socialist repression of shamans, I first summarize the present-day reviews on shamans' practices during socialism, then I scrutinize the relationship of the scholarly accounts of the 1960s to practicing shamans and, finally, I will recall the present-day legends about "socialist shamans".

Contemporary shamans usually say that their mother, father, or grandmother became a shaman at early age and later stopped to shamanize because s/he feared for his own and her family's life. Contemporary shamans assert that earlier shamans were murdered just like Buddhist monks were in the 1930s and that the repression of shamans was not confined to the 1930s but continued during the whole period of socialism. Furthermore, shamans mention that their parents abandoned shamanizing due to the repression and later resumed their inspirational practice when they were in need of inspirational support or when the spirits forced them. Some people say that even as a child of a shaman they did not know about the parent's secret practice.

Other people, yet seldom shamans, qualify the view that shamans were firmly persecuted. Rather, they argue that although shamanic practice was officially forbidden, the repression of practicing shamans was not persistently strong during the whole period of socialism. The one view locates the period of the hardest repression in the 1930s, when also the Buddhist monasteries were razed; the other view points to the late 1950s and the installation of the socialist organization of husbandry, implying that the collective farms brought more state control to the area. These views emphasize the shadow realms of shamans' practice: although it was officially not allowed and people did not talk publicly about shamans, one knew who was shamanizing, and people, even party members, did in some cases consult a shaman.

Also O. Pürev qualified the socialist purges, claiming that not many shamans were killed in the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> The scholar named several shamans who were arrested and later released. "After the competing monks were murdered in the 1930s, the shamans got really powerful", Pürev argued. He claimed that party members were afraid of shamans and let the shamans shamanize at home for their family needs but urged them not to shamanize for clients. During fieldwork in the Shishget area, I collected the names of four shamans who disappeared during the 1930s.<sup>29</sup>

I do not question that shamans were repressed during socialist days. However, the reading of the socialist scholarly accounts and the memories and stories I collected in the Darhad area call for a more differentiated view on the repression against shamans' practices. Rudolf Trapp (2007) documented in detail the policies and administrative

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with O. Pürev, 05.11. 2003, and 07.09. 2004.

<sup>29</sup> I collected the names of Tüseg *zairan* (the paternal grandfather of the diviner Pürevjav from Ived), of Sonom *zairan* (the father of Baljinnyam *bagsh* living in the village of Renchinlhümbe), of Tömör *zairan* (the maternal grandfather of the shaman Davaajav from Hogrogo), and of Sandag *zairan* from Ived.

sanctions against the Buddhist monks and the monasteries in Mongolia before the monasteries were destroyed and around twenty thousand monks were executed mainly in the two years 1937/38 (see also Baabar 1999: 369). The preceding administrative measures included the collection of census data, the study of the monastic life, anti-Buddhist propaganda in monasteries, or outstanding high taxations of the Buddhist monks. According to his research in the central party archives, there were no similar political acts and administrative procedures concerning shamans in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>30</sup> It is remarkable that shamans were not even mentioned by the socialist religious law, implemented in 1934 and in force until 1990. Shamans were also not included in the list of those people (like “feudal exploiters”) who were excluded from voting rights in the constitutions of 1924 and 1944.<sup>31</sup> It might be that shamans were not targeted as “religious practitioners” or that shamans were just too marginal a phenomenon to constitute a subject considered in antireligious politics.<sup>32</sup> Another view is suggested by Anna Reid (2002: 107) who argues that shamans in Soviet-dominated Tyva were not accused under anti-religious law but charged for extortion and charlatanism under the ordinary criminal law. Reid cited a census indicating the number of 725 shamans for the year 1931, and asserted that at the end of the decade, shamans had disappeared from the public stage.

I could not find census data or scholarly accounts indicating the presence or disappearance of shamans during the 1930s beyond my very limited own collections of the memories and the mentioned opinion of O. Pürev. I however assume that around 1960, shamans were practicing relatively openly. My claim is based on the reading of the accounts of Badamhatan (1965), Diószegi (1961; 1963), and the collection of shamans’ chants by Rintchen (1975).

Badamhatan (1965: 11) visited the area four times between 1959 and 1962 and stayed altogether fourteen months, Rintchen joined him in 1962 (Badamhatan 1965: 258); Diószegi visited the area once for four weeks in 1960 (Diószegi 1963: 56). Badamhatan started his chapter on shamanism with the remark that shamans (and Buddhism) were widespread in the area at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. By this introduction and his silence about shamans’ practices during his visit, he evoked a perception of shamans as part of history. The following detailed description of paraphernalia, with its symbols and meanings, and the accounts on the shamans’ *ongod* and their chants are however mostly rendered in the present tense. The references to his meetings with shamans are found in the footnotes only: there, he listed the names of

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<sup>30</sup> Personal communication, 30.05. 2007.

<sup>31</sup> However, they were mentioned in the 1940 revision, which was abolished four years later; personal communication with Rudolf Trapp, 03.11. 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (2007) similarly argues that shamans might have been too marginal to constitute a category against which persecution was organized. Nevertheless, Buryat shamans suffered, because the Buryat in general belonged to the main victims of state terror.

primary informants, presenting them as “former” shamans. Furthermore, he mentioned that he had collected numerous invocation chants “while Darhad shamans were shamanizing”. He made this remark to justify why he included only four *tamlaga* in his account; he argued that the invocations were all similar. (Badamhatan 1965: 233, footnote 2; 238, footnote 39).

Diószegi (1961) gave a detailed report in English in the Hungarian journal “Acta Ethnographica” about his three-month expedition to peripheral areas in Mongolia in the search of shamanic practitioners. The author mentioned the institutional support of Mongolian officials to carry out the study; in particular, he mentioned the Deputy Prime Minister in his article. Diószegi reported in which area, among which ethnic group the study team found how many shamans. In footnotes, he mentioned that he met twenty-six shamans of the Darhad, eight of them he cited with their names; furthermore, he mentioned twenty-seven shamans of the “Urianhai” in the neighboring taiga areas by name (Diószegi 1961: 197; footnotes 15, 17). Diószegi’s enumeration indicates that in 1960 shamans were as numerous as they are today. That he found such a high number of shamans in the huge area in his short four-week-stay suggests that shamans were officially accessible and that he was supported to meet with them. In an article published two years later, Diószegi (1963) transferred the reports into the past tense and he wrote about “former shamans”. In this later article, Diószegi displayed photos showing pieces of shamanic gowns and headgears; he noted the museum to which the collection belonged, thereby contributing to the imagery to write about historical customs. People today claim that “the Hungarian” did not speak Mongolian and was accompanied by party members who facilitated his meetings with shamans. People often remembered the visits of the “Hungarian” in our conversations; although people did not remember the name, they undoubtedly talked about Diószegi.

Departing from Scott’s (1990) term “hidden transcripts” as “art of resistance”, Caroline Humphrey (1994) proposes the term “evocative transcript” to refer to heterodox public expression in Soviet-dominated socialist Mongolia. The author focuses on texts in focus that evoke oppositional meaning beyond the surface meaning – which one can detect but also neglect. In contrast to Scott’s “hidden transcripts”, Humphrey claims that evocative transcripts in socialist Mongolia worked openly, through duality and equivocation. Kaplonski (2004: 11) confirms this view, stating that evocative transcripts “were found in official, approved narratives, that helped propagate and preserve unofficial histories”.

The account of Badamhatan is an example of such evocative transcripts. Badamhatan shows shamans as part of history; if one reads the footnotes and interprets the character of his account, one can recognize that Badamhatan wrote about practicing shamans he encountered. The citation of shamans’ names by Badamhatan (mentioned as “former” shamans) and more openly by Diószegi in a context of political pressure against shamans is

nevertheless puzzling; did they not consider it necessary to protect their informants or did they just not care?

Before I did my own fieldwork I was so permeated with the discourse on socialist suppression of shamans' practices that I did not see the evocative transcripts, even not the demonstrative ones like Diószegi's enumerating of shamans' names. Actually, I did not scrutinize the relationship between ethnographic texts about "shamanism" and shamans' practices in socialist days. It was only due to my own fieldwork that I became suspicious enough to read socialist accounts on shamanism as depiction of historical practice; I began to doubt that the meticulous descriptions of shamanic paraphernalia, sometimes including photos, or the citations of shamans' chants had been possible without contact to practicing shamans. Only my own fieldwork made me realize that suits of armor and drums would be hardly in a condition to study and to photograph if they had been lying in the forest for decades.

Humphrey (1994) ended her discussion about socialist evocative transcripts with the supposition that they will be swept away in postsocialism. However, legends about Darhad shamans practicing in socialist days, told in local arenas, the capital city, in private discourses as well as in scholarly publications, still can be read as evocative transcripts: these legends conjuring the magical potential of "socialist" shamans contradict the dominant assumption that socialist repression urged shamans into insignificance. The legends transform the socialist marginalization of shamans into their magical power. Shamans being under socialist surveillance now resurge as powerful shamans "of earlier times" relegating contemporary shamans.

### The "white" shaman Chagdar

Chagdar *zairan* is a popular protagonist of local legends conjuring the power of "socialist" shamans. He was mentioned by Diószegi (1963: 73) as Tsagaan Huular shaman and probably also by Badamhatan as an informant.<sup>33</sup> Chagdar was the extramarital son of Günge *zairan*; he was born in the first years of the twentieth century, grew up at the river Hög and died in Harmai in the mid seventies. Today, people remember him best under his nickname Tsagaan *zairan*, "white shaman", an euphemism to indicate that he was a "black shaman" associated with *haraal*, cursing, and *jatag*, black magic. He was a wonderful, extraordinary shaman, praised the scholar O. Pürev.<sup>34</sup> People, he said, feared his curses and offered him gifts, for example a cow annually, in the hope of securing themselves against his powerful magic.

<sup>33</sup> This shaman's name is usually spelled as "Chagdar" but sometimes as "Shagdar"; however there is another well-known historical shaman whose name was "Shagdar". This confusion in local as well as scholarly accounts makes it difficult to trace the particular person (see also Even 1992). Chagdar is included in Figure 5.

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication, 07.09. 2004

The stories I heard from local people show Chagdar *zairan* as a weird personality rather than as a straightforward powerful man. Local people remember the shaman as a quirky old man who did not look at the people he talked with, who often talked with *chötgör*, ghosts, and who looked from a distance as if he were accompanied by two *chötgör* walking on both his sides. One story I heard reports how Chagdar was brought to the administration in the village of Tsagaan Nuur where the police questioned the shaman. During the interrogation, the shaman was sitting on his chair without reacting to those talking to him. After a while, the shaman took out a knife and started to shave his face. With this story, the teller described how the shaman performed himself as a madman to escape socialist repression. I only heard one longer story that evokes the shaman's magic as powerful: a man visited Chagdar after he was released from prison after fifteen years. He was arrested because he had killed his wife after she had left him for a rival. When the man left prison, he wanted to take a new wife from another man. He therefore consulted the shaman and gave him a knife with which the shaman should magically kill his new rival. Chagdar however refused the request and broke the knife into three pieces. Angrily, the man left, and three months later he died. The storyteller concluded that Chagdar had just reversed the demand and had returned the *jatag*, black magic, to the man himself instead of sending it to the rival.<sup>35</sup>



Photograph 38: The ongod of the shaman Chagdar *zairan*, at his daughter Tseren's home (27.06. 2003).

Chagdar *zairan*'s daughter Tseren, a likeable fifty-year-old woman living with her four children and her husband, the shaman Nergüi, in Harmai close to the village of Tsagaan Nuur, knows well what people say about her father. Once, when I asked her about her father, she refused to know more about Chagdar than other people: "What shall I tell you about my father? He was just an ordinary father."<sup>36</sup> What does she think about the stories

<sup>35</sup> Story told by Dūjii, the ferryman of the river Sharga, in August 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Conversation with Tseren, 18.08. 2004, at her home in Harmai.



people tell about her father as engaged in *haraal*, cursing? “How should I know that?” she answered, “*haraal* was a secret practice. I don’t know if my father was *id shidtei*, capable of powerful magic, but I know that people were afraid.” After this opening, Tseren nevertheless started to recall some memories of her father: Tseren was adopted as a baby by the shaman when he was around fifty years old. She said that her parents had no close relationship to the shaman but they handed him the baby because they feared him. She remembered how her adoptive father was often reading *tarin*, small booklets with interpretations of signs in nature and with instructions how to do *zasal*, inspirational treatments.<sup>37</sup> Once, she said, her father had cut the palm of his hand, according to the description of a *tarin*: the father’s palm became white; it did not bleed at all. “At that time”, she said, “I really got an impression of his capabilities. And I learnt that when my father was shamanizing for somebody who was very ill and he shamanized *tsusaar*, with blood, it meant that the ill person will die”. Was her father not afraid of being arrested? Tseren remembered that her father was arrested when she was a small child. “He then was told not to shamanize for others but he was allowed to shamanize at home.”

The stories about Chagdar *zairan* evoke an image of a shaman who accomplished the daring feat of impressing people in the neighborhood with his magical capabilities whilst convincing the authorities of being an innocuous, weird old man. According to his daughter Tseren, the shaman was under surveillance by the authorities yet, nevertheless, was free to practice. Similar to the legends conjuring the power of presocialist shamans I retold in the opening of the chapter, also the power of Chagdar *zairan* is related to the authority of the state. Again, the shaman is shown as being able to resist the supreme authority; in his case, it is a passive resistance in that the shaman acted as a mentally impaired person who was not perceived as a challenge by the authorities. The shaman’s daughter Tseren identifies her father’s passive resistance furthermore in his meetings with scholars. Tseren remembered the visits of the Mongolian scholars Badamhatan and Rintchen and further of “the Hungarian” in the family’s home during her childhood. The Hungarian, she remembered, could not talk Mongolian and had ordered her father to his hotel to shamanize. Her father fell into unconsciousness but was not able to shamanize properly and to contact his spirits, said Tseren. Furthermore, she recalled that the scholars often took pictures of her father; that however no image appeared when they developed the pictures, that the paper just remained white.

Now and then, descendants of earlier shamans or contemporary shamans mentioned that the scholars Badamhatan, Rintchen, and “the Hungarian” visited their home during their childhood in the 1960s. Primarily, the memories of the scholarly visits today are used

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<sup>37</sup> The word *tarin* is probably a local variant of the term *tarni*, which Bawden (1997) translates as “spell” or “incantation” and relates it to the Sanskrit term *dharani*. I only seldom heard people talking about this *tarin*, and only once I did see such a small booklet showing classic Mongolian script. Usually, shamanism is portrayed as being only orally transmitted and not relying on written instructions.

to support one's claim to have shaman ancestors and thus to be a legitimate shaman him/herself. The memories of Tseren about the scholarly visits reach beyond the assertion that her father Chagdar was a shaman. Her story evokes the ethnographers as agents of state surveillance.

Illuminating is also the following story of Dūjii *salchin*, the ferryman of the river Sharga. My guide Davaanyam and I met Dūjii in August 2004 when we crossed the river to the north of Renchinlhümbe to proceed to Hogrogo. Dūjii's appearance leaves a lasting mark as his face is scarred from an attack by a bear he had hunted long ago. After a tedious procedure to set our horses over the low running river the ferryman invited us for tea. In his small house with *ongod* hanging on the wall, Dūjii entertained us with stories about shamans "from the old times"; including the following story about Tsagaan *zairan* and "the Hungarian":

In 1961, when I was eleven years old, my father Damdin gave the shamanic suits of armor of the brothers Tsagaan *zairan* and Süren *zairan* to the Hungarian. My father went to the shamans' homes and demanded their clothes from them; then he gave it to the Hungarian and received 100 *tögrög* [at that time around the price of a small rind]. Tsagaan *zairan* had warned my father to take the armor from him and suggested that the Hungarian shall seek the armor himself. However, my father did not listen and gave the two gowns away. Shortly after, a thunderstorm came up, which was the opening of a period with heavy storms. Later, our family lost many head of livestock. And then my sister passed away. Shortly after, also my father died, at the early age of fifty-nine years. When I grew older, Tsagaan *zairan* once told me that the *ongod* provoked the storms and the death of my sister and my father. They punished my father for selling the suits of armor of the shamans to the Hungarian (Dūjii *salchin*, 07. 08. 2004).<sup>38</sup>

This story conjures the *ongod's* revenge for the giving away of the shamans' suits of armor with deadly consequences. The delivery of the gowns to the Hungarian scholar for the collection of the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest is configured as a betrayal of the storyteller's father. The scholar is evoked as representative of a supreme authority expropriating the sacred paraphernalia of the shamans. The association of the scholar with state authority is supported by the claim of older people that "the Hungarian" was accompanied by party officials who introduced him to shamans. Once more, Dūjii's story evokes the resistance of an *ongod*/shaman against a representative of a foreign exploitative power – which is again shown as ineffective; the *ongod's* revenge only reaches the local collaborator. Similarly to the stories about Baglaan *udgan*, who fought against the Manchu authorities, or the chant about Sunchig *udgan*, who opposed the authority of Buddhism, the *ongod's* revenge remains a destitute rage. The story contradicts Diószegi's (1961: 197) report written forty years ago: the scholar sincerely thanked the shamans who "made it possible for us to collect highly satisfactory ethnographic material, and we owe gratitude to them for having admitted us to their confidence and allowed us to gain insight into the

<sup>38</sup> Diószegi indeed collected shamans' gowns in the Darhad area, which he pictured in his report (1963) as exhibits of the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest.

mysteries of Mongolian shamanism". Diószegi (1968 [1960]: 209) had shown his ambivalent position between fascination with shamanism and its condemnation as a backward superstition more openly in the account about his research journeys to Southern Siberia in 1957 and 1958, where he wrote:

"I am obsessed with the feeling of having come too late. The great popular movement of the Soyots, which called into being the Folk Republic of Tuva in 1921, directed a campaign against superstition and shamanism as well. Cultural centres, hospitals, the radio and the newsmedia all enlisted in this work of enlightening against backwardness, the old faith and ancient customs. This is how it really should be. It is important that shamanism should disappear as soon as possible, but it is just as important this should not happen without records".

Diószegi welcomed modernization and at the same time he longed for the archaic mystery surrounding the shamans. Hutton (2001:42) assigned Diószegi a central role in the spread of twentieth-century shamanism studies: as a Hungarian, Diószegi was allowed to visit field sites in Siberia; with his English publications and the organization of conferences he presented not only his own but also the work of many Soviet authors to a Western scholarly audience.

Düjii's story about the giving away of a shamanic armor has a postsocialist counterpart: the suits of armor of the two female Darhad shamans Nadmid *udgan* and Bayar *udgan*, who both deceased in 2001, were stolen from the *ongod*'s residences, *asar*, in spring 2003. After the theft, people often discussed the incidence, judging it as an unbelievable impertinence and suspecting a local person, who knows the locations of the *asar* in the mountains, to be responsible. Returning the following year, I heard that the thieves had been arrested after they had boasted when drunk about the enormous profit they had realized by the sale of the gowns. The rumors asserted that the gowns had been sold to China, which people had already guessed the previous year. Shortly after, new rumors spread that the descendants of the deceased shamans had asked a high amount of compensation from court. The two stories about the disposal of shamans' gowns show parallels; in both stories, locals are involved in the sale. In the socialist story, the compensation seems to be a corollary; when I asked Düjii about the value of the compensation, he was undecided whether to see it as compensation for his services or rather as price for the suits of armor. The postsocialist variant of the story focuses on the economic interest, of both the thieves and the shamans' descendants. Local people are well aware of the national and international reputation of their shamans and assume that with the costume of a famous shaman one can make good money.

In this chapter I have discussed in detail the conjuration of earlier shamans and their magical power and related it to the present-day local and scholarly discourses. The legends invoke earlier shamans opposing Manchu officials, competing with Buddhist monks and encountering socialist ethnographers. Locals tell these legends about powerful shamans

“from olden times” to contrast the present-day shamans as powerless “market economy shamans”. Interestingly, the stories I heard about the power of shamans “in olden days” only seldom focus on healing. Legendary shamans are represented as outcasts offending state and Buddhist authorities, both of which are depicted as foreign supreme powers exploiting the periphery. The invocation of earlier shamans as resistance fighters provides a good foil to identify with them and to contrast present-day shamans as powerless. The legends therefore render a diachronic dimension to the contemporary shamans’ economy of reputation. Present-day shamans are blamed for collaborating with the center instead of being rebellious and challenging the central supreme authority.

The legends imagine the power of earlier shamans as gendered. In contrast to male shamans, who are remembered as heroic outcasts, female shamans are remembered as powerless. The stories about the female shamans Baglaan *udgan*, Amaajii *udgan*, and Sunchig *udgan* focus primarily on the shamans’ sufferings during lifetime: Baglaan *udgan* had to sacrifice her son and she lost her daughter Amaajii *udgan* due to a competition with a monk; Sunchig *udgan* lost her son to Buddhism and thereafter she committed suicide. It is the suffering and the powerlessness which is transformed into the vengeful power of the *ongod*. The reputation of female *ongod* as outstandingly powerful and the legends about female shamans of the past open opportunities for Darhad women to become accepted and powerful shamans. At the same time, the celebration of historical female shamans admonishes women shamans to accept powerlessness and subordination during lifetime.

Retold in scholarly accounts, the legends invoking the fierce competition between shamans and Buddhist monks contribute to the perception of Darhad as shamanists and to play down the Buddhist influence from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Since the 1960s, scholars have been depicting Buddhism as a hostile and repressive foreign supreme power and have neglected the local involvement in Buddhist practice. With this focus they have been contributing to the association of the Darhad with shamanism and the perception of the Darhad shamans as the primary reference of “genuine” shamans in Mongolia.

In the last chapter I showed how present-day shamans are marginalized by local disparagement and the celebration in the capital. I showed how the “genuine” shamans are imagined unto the periphery of the wild. Through legends about shamans “of olden times”, the “genuine” shamans are transferred into the past. Thus, the legends endorse the discursive marginalization of present-day shamans. Moreover, the legends transform the age-long persecution of shamans by lay and Buddhist authorities into the shamans’ magical power. Or, to formulate it vice versa, the shamans’ power derives from their social marginalization.

## The Darhad, the Dukha, and the nation-state

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*Throughout the preceding chapters I have focused on the practices of Darhad shamans while sometimes including the neighboring Tsaatan/Dukha shamans in my account. This chapter focuses on those very distinctions between the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha. I will trace the distinction back to the Qing administration over Outer Mongolia and the later rise of nation-states in the early twentieth century which delineated the area surrounding Lake Hövsgöl from Tannu-Urianhai to which it had belonged. Moreover, I will discuss how anthropologists have contributed to consolidating the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha as distinct groups. I will show how the Darhad became the model of a backward yastan, nationality, in socialist Mongolia and how recently the few reindeer herders in the taiga have attracted international attention as a “vanishing people”.*

Today, two divergent perspectives on the Shishget area compete with each other: in Mongolia, the area and the people are associated with the term “Darhad”. In the perception of an international audience, however, the area has recently become famous for the reindeer herders, called “Tsaatan” or “Dukha”. The name Tsaatan is a Mongolian term and literally means “those with reindeer”. The term was first mentioned in 1935 in the Mongolian state newspaper *Ünen* (“Truth”; Badamhatan 1962: 3). The name was propagated by Badamhatan (1962) in his monograph about the reindeer herder and found at the same time its way to Europe in a Danish travel account (Bitsch 1963). Thereafter, the term Tsaatan became the standard name in the literature to refer to the reindeer herders of the Mongolian taiga. During the opening of Mongolia for international tourism in the 1990s, the reindeer herders became as Tsaatan a highlight in tourism advertisement. At the same time, foreign anthropologists propagated the term “Dukha” as the indigenous self-denomination.

In summer 2004, thirty-five families lived as reindeer herders in the taiga areas of Tsagaan Nuur. The families cared for around six hundred reindeer, which makes a meager average of seventeen heads per family.<sup>1</sup> The reindeer herders live in two distinct areas, the “Western Taiga group” to the south-west of the village of Tsagaan Nuur and the “Eastern Taiga group” to the north of the village. During the period of my fieldwork four shamans lived among the reindeer herders: the old woman Suyon, her daughter Tsend, and the brothers Goostoi and Ganzorig.<sup>2</sup> Usually, scholars distinguish the shamanism of the

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<sup>1</sup> The number of 600 reindeer reflects the official census data from December 2002 and December 2003. In summer 2004, additional 170 *yanzag*, reindeer-calves, were herded (the information was provided by the rural *bag* chief Buyantogtoh in August 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Suyon was said to be ninety-nine years old when I first met her in 2003 and when she had already stopped to shamanize. Her daughter Tsend lived in the Eastern Taiga. As people mentioned on my visit in summer 2007, both the mother and the daughter passed away in 2006.

Tsaatan/Dukha from the shamanism of the Darhad. However, already Badamhatan (1962) had pointed to the similarities of the paraphernalia and the practice of the Darhad and Tsaatan shamans. I attended each a seance of the Ganzorig and Goostoi; the obvious distinction between the seances of the two Tuva shamans and those of Darhad shamans is language as the two taiga men shamanized in a dialect of Tuvan, whereas Darhad shamans chant usually in Mongolian (although sometimes an *ongod* may speak in Tuvan too). Despite further minor distinctions, the observable course of the Tsaatan/Dukha shamans' seances is similar to those of the Darhad shamans.<sup>3</sup>

My concern in this chapter is less with the distinctions between the practices of Darhad and Tuva shamans but the very distinction of the two groups. Rather than to view the two groups as essentially distinct, I approach the distinction constituted in historical processes and administrative changes. I trace the distinction back to the Qing administration of Outer Mongolia and Tannu-Urianhai and to the later consequences of the implementation of nation-states and nationality politics. A primary concern is to discuss the contribution of socialist and postsocialist anthropology to the assignation of people as Darhad or as Tsaatan/Dukha and to locate the discourses in the respective political contexts.

I start my account with a rough historical overview of the administrative changes to the people living in the Shishget area from the subjugation under Manchu Qing rule to the integration into socialist Mongolia in the early twentieth century. The aim of this historical overview is to search for the relations between the present-day "ethnic" distinctions and the former administrative organization. The Mongolian socialist perception of the people and the area was shaped by the accounts of Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) and Badamhatan (1962; 1965). I will relate their accounts to socialist nationality politics and I will argue that through Badamhatan's representation the Darhad became a model of a "backward nationality". As such, the Darhad were a primary foil for socialist national evolution. In the second part of the chapter I will turn to the present and the international attention for the reindeer herders in the taiga. The few families living in tepees in a stunning landscape are reminiscent of imageries of Native Americans in a deep past. I will locate the attention and the support for the reindeer herders in the context of the global discourses about indigenous peoples and I will discuss the ambiguous relationship to tourism. After discussing outside perspectives at length, I will end the chapter with a few ideas about local strategies of boundary making. Throughout the chapter, I will discuss the practices of naming as markers of a changing approach to the described people.

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<sup>3</sup> I cannot assess the distinctions of the kind of chants as I do not understand Tuvan and I did not discuss the structure and content of the seances of Ganzorig and Goostoi. The brothers as well as Moko and Enhtuya, who call themselves Tuva shamans, ended their seances by the *töörög*, a divination including all attendants in succession. The shaman drums and throws the stick in the lap of the kneeling client. Darhad shamans include this kind of divination now and then in their seances; however, they use it for individual treatments and do not end the seance with a collective *töörög*.

### Northern Hövsgöl as part of Tannu-Urianhai during Qing rule

The distinction between Darhad and Tsaatan/Dukha goes back to the former Manchu Qing administration and the administrative divisions of Tannu-Urianhai as the northern belt of Outer Mongolia. Before Qing administration the Mongols had called the people living in the forests at the northwestern borders of the steppe “Urianhai”. During the seventeenth century, the people living in the surroundings of Lake Hövsgöl had probably been the subjects of Hotgoid (Halha) princes (Ewing 1981).<sup>4</sup> The emergence of a group called Darhad is commonly related to the late seventeenth century in the context of the feud between the Eastern and Western Mongols and the submission of the Eastern Mongols to Qing rule. Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) and later Badamhatan (1965) traced the origin of the Darhad to a Hotgoid prince who subjected himself and his subjects to the Javzandamba Hutagt, the highest Buddhist authority of the Eastern Mongols residing in Urga (present-day Ulaanbaatar).<sup>5</sup> According to Badamhatan, the “gift” was made at the conference of Hüren Bilchir in 1686 when the Eastern Mongols after their defeat by the Oirat (Western Mongols) submitted to the Manchu.<sup>6</sup> The people from northern Hövsgöl were the first subjects constituting the Hutagt’s lay estate.

Subsequently, the area surrounding Lake Hövsgöl including the Buddhist estate *ih shav’* was integrated into Tannu-Urianhai, as the northwestern belt of Outer Mongolia ruled by the Qing dynasty (Atwood 2004: 556). The Qing stationed their border posts in the south of Tannu-Urianhai (in the Tannu-Ola range) whereas, according to the border treaty of Kiakhta in 1727, the official border between Qing China and Russia lay to the north of Urianhai in the Sayan range (Forsyth 1992: 226; Paine 1996 [1957]: 328; Ewing 1981: 189).<sup>7</sup> With this

<sup>4</sup> The Turkic tribes living in the upper Yenisei areas were subjected by the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. With the fall of the Yuan dynasty in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the area came under control of the Western Mongols (Oirat). According to Potapov (1964 [1956] b: 384), Oirat rule constituted a “period of feuding and wars” during which the “Turkic-speaking tribes and clans of the Sayano-Altay Plateau split up, separated, intermingled and interbred”. With the defeat of the Oirat the first of the Altyn Khans of the Hotgoid, Sholoi Ubashi, rose to power and brought the Urianhai under his control in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ewing 1981). The eastern boundary of the Altyn Khans’ estates were “Lake Sangin-Dalai [Lake Hövsgöl?] and the river Delger Mörön (Potapov 1964 [1956] b: 383). According to Atwood (2004: 556), the area of northern Hövsgöl came under the control of the Zungars (Western Mongols) between 1660 and 1775, when the former Urianhai tributaries were finally submitted to Qing rule and were organized into the Tannu-Urianhai *aimag*. Potapov (1964 [1956] a: 112) and Forsyth (1992: 95) mentioned that the Russians intruded into the area to the East of Lake Hövsgöl (“Khasut Tuvans”; Potapov) in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and requested tribute from them.

<sup>5</sup> Hutagt is a title granted to high-reincarnated lamas; the Javzandamba Hutagt (a Mongolian “living Buddha”) was also honored as “Öndör Geegen”, “Lofty Brilliance” (transl. Bawden 1997). The first Javzandamba Hutagt, Zanabazar (1635-1723), was the son of the Tüsheets Khan Gombodorj of the Eastern Mongols. Today, he is both viewed as a symbol of the surrendering of the Mongols to Manchu Qing rule at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well as being venerated as an artist and as a religious leader as the integrating figure for the Mongols (Kaplonski 2004).

<sup>6</sup> According to Badamhatan (1965), the subjects belonged before to the noble Deleg, the nephew of Genden of the Zasagt Han *aimag*; the later was made the ruler of the Hotgoid at the conference of Hüren Bilchir. Badamhatan stated the year of the making of the Buddhist lay subjects, *shav’*, once with 1686 and once with 1688.

<sup>7</sup> The large distance between the Russian and Chinese border posts to the north and to the south of

border practice the areas surrounding Lake Hövsgöl, the Buddhist estate and the neighboring Urianhai territories, were separated from Outer Mongolia. According to Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) and Badamhatan (1965), the subjects of the Buddhist estates were only allowed a restricted entry to Outer Mongolia to offer their tribute to the Javzandamba Hutagt in Urga.

Tannu-Urianhai was administratively organized following the example of Outer Mongolia into *sumon* (on the basis of the existing social organization) and the *sumon* were successively combined into larger *hoshuun*. Ewing (1981) argued that Tannu-Urianhai was as an “outer dependency” one of the least affected areas by Qing rule and enjoyed political and cultural autonomy.<sup>8</sup> He assessed that the Qing governance evolved neither coherently nor rationally and that the Qing hardly even reacted to Russian penetration. Ewing stated that in the early nineteenth century half of the *sumon* were integrated into five *hoshuun*, which were ruled by local leaders and subjected to the Manchu military governor general in Uliastai; the other half of the *sumon* were subjected to Mongol nobles and the estates of Buddhist leaders.<sup>9</sup> The administrative division of the territories surrounding Lake Hövsgöl is not discussed in detail in the literature. A map included in Lattimore and Isono (1982), which is based on a socialist map showing “Mongolia during the period of Manchu oppression”, renders the most detailed image of the administrative division of northern Hövsgöl during Qing rule. The area is denominated as “Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai region” and is divided into four administrative units: the region to the west of Lake Hövsgöl is dominated by the Javzandamba Hutagt’s estate *ih shav’* including the Shishget depression and the Sayan range to the east. The bordering western taiga regions (from the Ulaan Taiga

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Tannu-Urianhai have been irritating commentators since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some authors argued that the Chinese and Russians just did not know that a large tract of land lay between their border posts. Russian authors later used the actual Chinese border practice to support Russian claims over Tannu-Urianhai (see. e.g. Korostovetz 1926; Mänchen-Helfen 1931; Cleinow 1928; Leimbach 1936). Forsyth’s (1992) formulation that the Qing “segregated Tannu-Urianhai from Outer Mongolia” suggests a deliberate border practice of the Qing targeted rather towards the Mongols than towards the Russians. There remains some insecurity whether the Manchu border posts segregated the whole range of Tannu-Urianhai from Outer Mongolia or only its eastern areas. Usually, authors talked about Urianhai in general (for example Paine 1996 [1957]); Forsyth 1992; Ewing 1981; or Korostovetz 1926), while a map included in Lattimore and Isono (1982) shows the Manchu border posts demarcating only the eastern territories of Tannu-Urianhai from Outer Mongolia.

<sup>8</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Urianhai leaders offended Manchu Qing rule; the uprisings were put down by joint Mongol and Qing armies (Ewing 1981; Bawden 1968).

<sup>9</sup> According to Ewing (1981), the Chinese and the Russian sources presented the administrative organization of Tannu-Urianhai differently. Ewing reproduced the Chinese sources and mentioned the names of the five *hoshuun* of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as follows: Oyunnar, (also called Tannu and Tesingol), Khemčik (Daa or Gun), Salčak, Todža, and Hövsgöl Nuur (Khasut). Vainshtein (1980 [1972]: 255; footnote 2) listed the number of nine *hoshuun* for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He related three *hoshuun* to the eastern part of Tannu-Urianhai: Khaazut (“included people [...] whose migrations were concentrated mainly in the region of Lake Khövsögöl [...] and in the vicinity of the river Shishkit to the west”); the Todjin *hoshuun* (basin of the Bii-Khem river), and the Salchak *hoshuun* (Kaa-Khem river basin, Lake Tere-Khol’). As further *hoshuun*, Vainshtein listed the Oyunar, Da-van, Beisi, Khemchik, Shalyk, and Nibazy *hoshuun*. Neither Vainshtein nor Ewing mentioned the name “Darhad” to refer to the subjects of the Buddhist estate *ih shav’* to the west of Lake Hövsgöl.



in the south to the river Tengis in the north) are distinguished as area of the Ar Shirhten Urianhai. The area to the east of Lake Hövsgöl is denominated as the Hövsgöl Nuur Urianhai region bordering in the south to the area of the Övör Shirhten Urianhai.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the map shows a borderline between northern Hövsgöl and the rest of Tannu-Urianhai, projecting the contemporary national border back to the Qing period.

In the early twentieth century, the former Tannu-Urianhai was divided: the greater part of the area became an “independent” republic and was gradually integrated in the Soviet orbit. Only the area of northern Hövsgöl was incorporated into the Mongolian nation-state. After the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1911/1912, the area surrounding Lake Hövsgöl was affected by the turbulent period of great political upheavals, including the political reorganization of the former Qing tributary areas, the striving for independence of Mongolia and Tannu-Urianhai, the socialist revolutions, and the Russian civil war.<sup>11</sup> Russia, China and later Mongolia competed for hegemony over the former Tannu-Urianhai for more than a decade and their armies crossed the territories bordering Lake Hövsgöl. In 1914, Tannu-Urianhai was declared a protectorate of Russia – making the neighboring Mongols, which had ruled over Urianhai for centuries, into a foreign state. In 1919, China not only regained power in Outer Mongolia but also defeated the Russian “White troops” of Ungern-Sternberg in Urianhai, claiming again authority over Tannu-Urianhai. Two years later, Urianhai leaders under Soviet tutelage proclaimed independence, accompanied by the new name “*Tyva Arat Respublika*” (translated in English usually as “People’s Republic of Tannu-Tuva”). In 1924, an insurrection of some leaders and high lamas claiming affiliation with the new socialist Mongolia was put down by Soviet troops and subsequently, Mongolia was forced to accept the omission of the former Urianhai territories (Barkmann 1999: 257). Tyva stayed nominally independent until 1944, when it became a Soviet republic.<sup>12</sup>

While the main parts of Tannu-Urianhai came under Soviet control, the areas to the west and east of Lake Hövsgöl were detached from the former Urianhai territories and integrated into the nascent Mongolian nation-state. There are two opposing views about how northern Hövsgöl was integrated into Mongolia: Soviet-influenced sources states that the Soviets transferred the area to Mongolia; the other, Mongolian view, silences the division of northern Hövsgöl from Tannu-Urianhai altogether implying that the status of the area was never disputed. Friters (1949: 131) mentioned that after the Soviets crushed the pro-Mongolian revolt in Tuva in 1924 and Mongolia subsequently demanded a joint

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<sup>10</sup> The authors stated that the map was based on a map included in “the History of the Mongolian People’s Republic”, Vol. II, 1968; the map does not declare the administrative status of the named units in northern Hövsgöl.

<sup>11</sup> For detailed accounts about the political events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Baabar (1999), Barkmann (1999), Forsyth (1992), Ewing (1981), Krueger (1977), Bawden (1968), Tang (1959), Paine (1957), and Korostovetz (1926).

<sup>12</sup> Tyva became first an autonomous oblast and later, in 1961, an autonomous republic. Since 1993, Tyva is a republic within the Russian Federation.

commission to solve the Urianhai question, “Moscow met the desires of the Mongols on only one small point. A strip of territory, sparsely inhabited and small in size (about 16 000 sq. km.), called Darkhat – west of Khöbsögöl – was given to Outer Mongolia.” This often cited statement is based on a field report of the German geographer Walter Leimbach (1936: 101), who wrote that the Soviets, declaring Tuva’s independence in 1921, abandoned the Darhad territory as part of Tuva.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, the Mongolian socialist authors Zhamtsarano and Badamhatan did not mention a dispute regarding the territories surrounding Lake Hövsgöl after the demise of the Qing dynasty. Neglecting the competition over Tannu-Urianhai, the Mongolian authors focused on the relationship between the subjects of the Javzandamba’s estate *ih shav’* and the new lay Mongolian rule in the Hövsgöl area until the theocratic leader Bogd Khan (the eighth Javzandamba Hutagt) died in 1924 and the revolutionary party declared Mongolia as a People’s Republic.<sup>14</sup> Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) mentioned that in the years of the autonomous government (1911-1919), some *sumon* leaders of the Urianhai changed with their people to the Buddhist estate of the Javzandamba Hutagt.<sup>15</sup> Badamhatan did not mention the transfers of subjects from lay to Buddhist authority but instead traced the administrative changes imposed by the revolutionary Mongolian government after 1921: the subjects of the Bogd Khan were integrated into a lay administrative organization, including taxation and military services although the *ih shav’* formally continued to exist (Badamhatan 1965: 34-5). After the Bogd’s death in 1924, his goods and lands were nationalized and the *ih shav’* was renamed Delger Ih Uul *hoshuu*. In 1928, the Urianhai territories were integrated in this *hoshuu* and, in 1931, the *aimag* Hövsgöl was founded and the Shishget area was organized in the *sum* Ulaan Uul and Renchinlhümbe.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On a hand-drawn map added to Leimbach’s report the political border is shown from the river Tengis in the north to the sources of the river Delger Mörön in the south, including the Ulaan Taiga and excluding the area to the west of the river Tengis that today belongs to Mongolia. This might explain why the stated territory of 16’000 sq km is too small to refer to the present-day Darhad territories. Leimbach’s map denotes the territory to the east of the border as Darhad; the Ar Shirhten Urianhai which are shown in the maps included in Lattimore and Isono (1982) are not mentioned by Leimbach. The description of Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) indicates similarly that the area to the west of the river Tengis belonged to Tannu-Tuva.

<sup>14</sup> With the demise of Qing rule over Outer Mongolia, the eighth Javzandamba Hutagt became the Bogd Khan, the theocratic leader of the first “autonomous” Mongolia. After the Russian Red Army and Mongolian partisans had defeated Chinese and White troops in Urga (the so-called “revolution” of 1921) the Bogd Khan remained formally the head of state although his political power was largely restricted (Atwood 2004). Mongolia’s independent status was ignored for a long time. China treated the People’s Republic as a “breakaway territory” until it officially recognized Mongolia’s independence in 1946; only in 1961 was Mongolia accepted as a member of the United Nations (Atwood 2004: 377; Barkmann 1999: 325-345).

<sup>15</sup> Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]: 87) talked about Urianhai people from the east of Lake Hövsgöl. I agree with Wheeler (2000) that his account is somewhat confusing as he mentioned the Ar Shirhten when he talked about the Hövsgöl Nuur Urianhai (which occupied the territories to the east of the lake). He only briefly mentioned that the Ar Shirhten Urianhai counted 848 people. Bawden (1968: 14) mentioned similarly that a whole banner (*hoshuun*) of the Urianhai was transferred in 1914 to the *ih shav’* (without mentioning a source).

<sup>16</sup> In 1933, the *sum* Bayanzürh was constituted from territories that had belonged to Ulaan Uul before

### The relationship of the Darhad and the Tuva to Qing administration

How is the present-day distinction between the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha related to the former administrative Qing administration of Tannu-Urianhai? I have already mentioned that constitution of the Darhad are referred by Zhamtsarano and Badamhatan to the transfer of lay subjects to the Javzandamba's estate *ih shav'*: the lay serfs, *shav'*, thereafter became called Darhad. The meaning of the term Darhad is commonly explained as "privileged", or as "exempted from taxes and services".<sup>17</sup> Although the authors do not mention a former name of the *shav'*, it seems reasonable to suppose that the subjects lived in the Shishget area before and were considered as Urianhai by the Mongols. However, to bluntly denominate the Darhad as former Urianhai subjects seems to be a highly delicate issue in Mongolian socialist ethnography. Zhamtsarano addressed this designation, which had already been put forward by Russian scholars, but left the answer open. Badamhatan however treated the question in length – without formulating it directly. To sum up his long-winded account very briefly, Badamhatan admitted that the Darhad had partly been Urianhai subjects, who were displaced to Haraa and Yöröö (to the north of Urga) and, when the subjects returned to the Shishget area, they were joined by newcomers.

The relationship of the present-day reindeer herders to the former administrative division of Tannu-Urianhai is difficult to trace as neither their present-day territories nor the people can be related to a particular administrative unit of the former Tannu-Urianhai. The area inhabited by today's Western Taiga group is either related to the Ar Shirhten Urianhai (maps in Lattimore and Isono 1982), or the Urianhai of the Dүүregch Van (Badamhatan 1965). According to the historian O. Pүrev, it is the same administration, called in detail the "Ar Shirhten *otog* of the Dүүregch Van *hoshuun* of the Hotgoid".<sup>18</sup> The earlier belonging of the "Eastern Taiga" area is disputed: according to Vainshtein (1980 [1972]: 255), the area was inhabited by reindeer herders belonging to the Urianhai Nuur *hoshuun* (whose main territories were to the east of the lake). According to the map included in Lattimore and Isono (1982), the taiga to the north of the Shishget river was divided between the Ar Shirhten Urianhai (to the west of the Tengis River) and the *ih shav'*. According to the information of O. Pүrev, the taiga areas in the north belonged to the *ih shav'* and, according to the accounts of older Taiga inhabitants, the area could well have belonged to the Toj *hoshuun* (to the north of the Eastern Taiga in present-day Tyva, also spelled "Tozhu").

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(Badamhatan 1965: 37); Tsagaan Nuur became a *sum* only in 1985 when the state farm was founded.

<sup>17</sup> See Atwood (2004) or Bawden (1997). Jagchid and Hyer (1979) discussed the term in detail; the term was in historical Mongol-ruled areas not only related to the Buddhist serfs *shav'* but also used to address people with outstanding privileges. Jagchid and Hyer identified the most important people called Darhad in the group in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, who maintains the Chinggis Khaan cult.

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication, 07. 09. 2004. *Otog* was an administrative unit under Qing rule.

The present-day older reindeer herders recall that they are not the descendents of a single distinct group that belonged to only one of the earlier administrative units. Chagdarsürüing (1994 [1974]), Farkas (1992), and Wheeler (1999; 2000) report that the present-day reindeer herders in Tsagaan Nuur associate themselves with distinct areas and administrative units. Some herders' ancestors stayed mainly in northern Hövsgöl, others belonged to the earlier Salchak *hoshuun* (occupying the Tere Köl area to the west of the Ulaan Taiga in present-day Tyva); still other ancestors belonged to the former Toj *hoshuun*. Sanjim, an elder living today in the Western Taiga, remembered that his father was migrating in the areas to the north of the river Shishget, between the rivers Tengis and Bilen (now on the Tuvan side of the border) and his grandfather was living in the area of Hanh (on the northern side of the lake, former Hövsgöl Nuur Urianhai).<sup>19</sup> The old man emphasized that his parents lived in the *hyazgaar*, the border belt, and that the border belt belonged neither to Tyva nor Mongolia. Sanjim told me that the reindeer herders occupying the taiga areas to the southwest of the Shishget River usually did not use the territories to the north of the river but migrated to the west. Sanjim's statement implies that the Shishget River –which, after the village Tsagaan Nuur, is too deep to be crossed by reindeer – might have constituted a border separating the hunting grounds of different taiga herders.<sup>20</sup>

Vainshtein (1980 [1972]: 237) explained in contrast that the administrative organization of Tannu-Urianhai was less a division of territories but was primarily a fiscal attachment. It might therefore be that people inhabiting the taiga areas could migrate over relatively large areas. With the separation of northern Hövsgöl from Tannu-Urianhai the taiga areas occupied by the reindeer herders became allocated to two distinct nation-states. Subsequently, the reindeer herders in the border area became a nuisance to the respective governments. Farkas (1992) retold stories of older taiga inhabitants about the expulsion of reindeer herders from Mongolia to Tyva from 1926/27 onwards. When the people returned they were sent back again. People were sent to Tyva for the last time in 1951. Sanjim, at that time a ten-year-old boy, told me how his family was brought by “Russian soldiers” from the river Tengis to Tyva and how the family returned covertly, leaving part of their reindeer and other families even leaving children behind. Sanjim and other older people emphasized that they preferred to live in Mongolia where the living conditions were better. The movements of people between Tyva and Mongolia are confirmed from a Tyvan perspective by Brian Donahoe (2004: 98-99). The author argued that one reason to relocate from Tyva to Mongolia was to escape the forced collectivization, which started after the republic became part of the Soviet Union in 1944. Donahoe cited one older Tozhu (Toj) reindeer herder who complained about the people who had left for Mongolia, accusing them of taking with them

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Sanjim on 15.07. 2004. Sanjim used the word *nutaglah*, to dwell, to refer to the area in which his parents were migrating.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, the river can be easily crossed in winter when the river is frozen. The herders in Tengis use today small rafts to cross the river in order to move to their autumn camps.

the reindeer of the collective farm and claiming that there had been no reindeer in Mongolia before.

Wheeler (1999) called the reindeer herders of the Western Taiga “relative newcomers” to the area as they moved during the 1940s from the Tere K l in the Kaa Khem region of Tyva to the neighboring Ulaan Taiga in Mongolia. The almost sixty-year-old shaman Goostoi confirmed that his father and others moved during the 1940s to Mongolia; however, he emphasized that the reindeer herders had used the same territories before.<sup>21</sup> Wheeler (2000: 51) and Farkas (1992) mentioned that with the families returning to Mongolia also some newcomers accompanied them. For thirty years people moved back and forth between Mongolia and Tyva. During the whole period, the two republics disputed the exact line of the border; the conflict was finally settled in 1957 (Tseden-Ish 2003) and the border agreement was signed the following year. Thereafter, those reindeer herders staying on the Mongolian side of the border were granted Mongolian citizenship rights.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the state started to modernize the area by the implementation of the collective farms in Renchinl mbe and Ulaan Uul and by the development of the fishing industry beside Tsagaan Nuur’s lakes.

In Badamhatan’s accounts, the relationship of the Tsaatan to the former administrative division of Tannu-Urianhai remains obscure. In the Darhad monograph he mentioned the neighboring Urianhai of the D  regch Van, occupying the western taiga areas (Ulaan Taiga, rivers H g and Gun), as engaged in reindeer herding.<sup>23</sup> As the Ulaan Taiga was occupied by the Western Taiga group when Badamhatan conducted his fieldwork, one could gain the impression that he considered the Urianhai to the west of the *ih shav’* as ancestors of the Western Taiga Tsaatan.<sup>24</sup> However, the association of the Tsaatan with the former Urianhai living in the western taiga areas is not reflected in the Tsaatan monograph: there, Badamhatan (1962: 3-4) called the reindeer herders Tuva *irged*, people (or citizens), from the Toj *hoshuun*, which during the revolutionary period were newly allocated to Mongolia.<sup>25</sup> Badamhatan’s assignation of the Tsaatan as Tuva *irged* is ambiguous. As I will later show, the term “Tuva” is related to an earlier self-designation of the *oin irged*, forest people, who were called “Urianhai” by the Mongols. However, when Badamhatan used the term only a

<sup>21</sup> Conversation held on 12.08. 2003. Some of the reindeer herders who relate themselves to Tere Kh l relate themselves to the Baligsh *s k/ovog* (clan name). Vainhstein (1980 [1972]: 190) associated the Baligsh of the Tere Kh l area not with reindeer herding but with fishing and a relatively sedentary lifestyle.

<sup>22</sup> There is no indication whether the status of all reindeer herders was questioned and that they all were sent to Tyva and accepted as Mongolian citizens in the 1950s only. People mentioned that they did not cross the border to visit relatives between 1960 and 1990.

<sup>23</sup> These areas are today part of Ulaan Uul *sum*.

<sup>24</sup> The reindeer herders were settled north to the present-day territories in Tsagaan Nuur and administratively joined with the Eastern Taiga group in 1985 only.

<sup>25</sup> Badamhatan repeated this assignation in a later article (Badamhatan 1996).

few years after the reindeer herders were accepted as Mongolian citizens, the term connotes an association with the neighboring Republic Tyva (colloquially called Tannu-Tuva). Badamhatan's remark indicates that he did not consider the reindeer herders as indigenous to the Mongolian taiga but that he associated them with the Toj area on the Tyvan side of the border.<sup>26</sup> Badamhatan reflected with his assignation the previous policy of the Mongolian government, which obviously had perceived the reindeer herders as Tyva citizens and therefore had sent them "back". It might be that Badamhatan assumed the former Urianhai occupying the western taiga areas as integrated into the Darhad in the early twentieth century and that he perceived all reindeer herders as newly immigrated from Tyva.

With Badamhatan's monographs distinguishing the Darhad and the Tsaatan, the perception of the two groups became associated with distinct livestock and with the character of the inhabited area. The Darhad are until today associated with "Mongol" livestock (cattle, horses, sheep and goats, and camels) occupying the river valleys, and the Tsaatan/Dukha are associated with reindeer herded in the taiga mountains, where grass is scarce and lichen for reindeer are abundant. This distinction does not reflect the presocialist administrative division: Badamhatan and Zhamtsarano recorded reindeer not only for all Urianhai administrations but also for the Javzandamba Hutagt's *ih shav'*.<sup>27</sup> Most well known from the earlier literature are the reindeer herders belonging to the earlier Toj *hoshuun* (Carruthers 1914; Vainshtein 1980 [1972]).<sup>28</sup>

### Socialist nationality politics in Mongolia

In the twentieth century, the former Buddhist subjects (*shav'*) and the lay subjects of Tannu-Urianhai became citizens of the new republics Tyva and Mongolia. Before this, the status and the name of the people had been related to the administrative authority to which the people had to render tribute and services.<sup>29</sup> In the twentieth century, the state border between Tyva and Mongolia became decisive in categorizing people. Together with the new border the kind of livestock people herded became a marker to distinguish the people in the Shishget area. The reindeer herders came to be perceived as Tuva and thus non-Mongols,

<sup>26</sup> It is irritating that Badamhatan related all reindeer herders to the former Toj *hoshuun*. As mentioned, in particular the parents of some of the Western Taiga people were related to the Tere K l area. In his introduction to the Darhad monograph, Badamhatan (1965: 3) equated the "Toj sum" with the "Tere H l raion"; it might be that he fused the two distinct administrative areas.

<sup>27</sup> Badamhatan mentioned 192 reindeer belonging to the *ih shav'* for the year 1764 (1962: 3); 67 reindeer for the year 1788, and 62 reindeer for the year 1821 (1965: 27).

<sup>28</sup> Vainshtein (1980 [1972]: 56; 186) showed that in the 1931 census of Tyva, around 500 households of the Toj *raion* were registered as reindeer herders, who held almost 10'000 reindeer in total.

<sup>29</sup> According to Vainshtein (1980 [1972]: 238 ff.), people in the eastern part of Tannu-Urianhai/Tyva retained in addition some functions of the old clan system; until the 1950s, adult men knew their *s k* (clan name). In contrast, the people of the western parts of Tannu-Urianhai usually confused clan names with the administrative divisions *sumon* and *arban*.

whereas the livestock herders to the west of Lake Hövsgöl, also those who had not been Buddhist subjects (*shav'*) before, became Darhad and thus unambiguously Mongols.

The changing status of the people was reflected by a shift in naming practice. Until the early twentieth century, the representations about the people living around Lake Hövsgöl were dominated by the term “Urianhai”, and they were distinguished from the *shav'*, the lay serfs of the Buddhist estate. According to Badamhatan (1996: 9), the term Darhad was the first time recorded by the Russian scholar Shishmarev in the late nineteenth century. In twentieth-century socialist Mongolia, the term Darhad became the dominant name to refer to the people and the area to the west of Lake Hövsgöl. In the meantime, the new term Tsaatan had emerged to name the small number of reindeer herders remaining in the Mongolian taiga. Badamhatan (1962: 4) assumed that the term Tsaatan originated from “*tsagaan buga*”, “white stag”, which was shortened to “*tsaa*”, to name the reindeer; subsequently, the reindeer herders were named after their reindeer, Tsaatan (lit. “those with reindeer”). The term had not yet been used by Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]). Although Zhamtsarano had mentioned that both the Darhad and Urianhai occasionally herd reindeer, he had not singled out named groups of reindeer herders in the taiga areas to the west of Lake Hövsgöl.

While the distinction between Urianhai and *shav'* had mainly reflected the administrative subjection of the people and the services they had to render, the distinction between the Tsaatan and the Darhad was molded in the language of nationality. The monographs about the people in northern Hövsgöl constituted the outstanding well-known ethnographic examples of the Mongolian adaptation of Soviet nationality policies.

The “national question” was a major and contradictory concern of Marxist-Leninist theory and socialist policies (Connor 1984). Although Marx and Lenin despised nationalism in Western Europe as a device of the bourgeoisie to support their own class interest, they nevertheless appreciated the strategic use of nationalism on the dialectical route of history to internationalist socialism and classless communism. Stalin propagated the implementation of the formula “national in form and socialist in content”: Socialist policy was mantled into the “national tongue” of national traditions and languages to accommodate it to minorities and to appease their potential resistance against socialist policies as an alien program of the state’s ethnic majority. Francine Hirsch (2005) has shown in a detailed study how in the constituting period of the Soviet Union ethnology (in exchange with local leaders) fulfilled a key role by defining census categories, describing the characteristics of the distinguished nationalities (*narodnost*), and providing maps on their geographical distributions. From the 1950s onwards, Soviet ethnology continued the contradicting task of bringing together evolutionist thinking with essentialist ideas of

national groups – symbolized in the “ethnos” concept, a unique amalgamation of a Marxist-Leninist evolutionary model with a German-originated *Volksgeist*.<sup>30</sup>

Bulag’s intriguing book “*Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*” (1998) is to this day the only major study about how socialist Mongolia adopted the Soviet national agenda. According to Bulag, Mongolia absorbed a policy that was designed to homogenize the heterogeneous Soviet realm and adapted it to its own small population, which was – with the major exception of the Kazak minority – relatively homogenous in terms of language, religion, and identity as Mongols.<sup>31</sup> Bulag argued that with the national classifications the Mongolian socialist regime furthered and institutionalized ethnicity and hierarchies among the distinguished nationalities. In particular, he accused the socialist regime of producing hierarchies between “genuine” Mongols inside of the national borders and the Mongols outside. Mongolian socialist nationality politics in fact equated the term Mongol with the new nation-state of Mongolia. Bulag, who is himself a Mongol from Inner Mongolia, criticized that socialist Mongolia relegated Mongols in China and Buryatia to a hybrid status: the Buryat were denigrated as “Russified Mongols” and the Inner Mongols as “Sinicized Mongols”. In socialist historiography and in popular perception alike, the Halha (the former Eastern Mongols) came to be perceived as the basis for building the Mongolian nation-state. As a consequence, the Halha have been regarded as the “genuine” Mongols producing also a hierarchy of more and less genuine Mongolness inside Mongolia.

Bulag distinguished two periods in the study of nationality in Mongolian socialist ethnography: in the 1960s, the focus lay in the description of the particularities of the material and spiritual culture of some nationalities, *yastan*, and their origin. In the 1970s, ethnography began to assess “ethnic processes”, the amalgamation of backward nationalities, *yastan*, into the formation of the socialist Mongolian nation, *ündesten*. The term *ündesten* (lit. “root-group”) was used to refer to the Russian term *nat’sionalnost*, which was borrowed from Western Europe (Hirsch 2005). Following the Soviet policy the idea of the nation was coined with a progressive connotation and the term *yastan* (for the Russian term *narodnost*) was associated with the feudal past before the revolution.<sup>32</sup> The term *yastan* relies on the metaphor of bones associated with male patrilineal descent. In socialist

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<sup>30</sup> The “ethnos” concept is usually ascribed to Y. Bromley (1977; 1980) who propagated the concept; however, it was originally elaborated by Shirokogoroff (1935). As Shirokogoroff lived in exile in China and published his work in English (which was not translated into Russian), his contribution was largely neglected in Soviet scholarship (see Dragadze 1980; Johansen 2001a; Schweitzer 2001).

<sup>31</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable number of Chinese, Russians, and other Europeans lived as traders and businesspeople in Mongolia. However, those who had not been driven out of the country from the 1920s onward were from the 1960s on classified as “foreign citizens” and were not included in the national minority classifications (see National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2003: 367).

<sup>32</sup> According to Hirsch (2005), the terms *narodnost* and *nat’sionalnost* were used by imperial Russian ethnographers divergently and often as synonyms; it was only from the 1920s that the terms were defined as distinct concepts related to different stages in the Marxist evolutionary logic; the *narodnost* was related to the feudal period and *nat’sionalnost* to the more progressive socialism.



Mongolia the term *yastan* was re-configured to refer to the Soviet concept of *narodnost* to name a social group with a unity of territory, language, and culture in the “feudal” past.

### **Making the Darhad into a model example of Mongolian nationality**

Bulag emphasized that the twentieth-century Mongolian nation-state was unprecedented in history and excluded the majority of people who in the past had considered themselves Mongols. Furthermore, socialist ethnography and in particular Badamhatan contributed to the consolidation of the new borders and the Mongolian nation-state. Badamhatan’s monograph about the Darhad *yastan* became the most well-known ethnography in Mongolia and Badamhatan subsequently became the dominant figure in Mongolian ethnography until the 1990s. With the accounts on small minority *yastan* in the borderland, ethnography delineated the state’s borders in the language of nationalities, *yastan*. By singling out people of the frontier as named *yastan* and the incorporation of these *yastan* into the Mongolian *ündersten*, these ambiguous people were distinguished from their Mongol neighbors outside the borders. The descriptions of the particular characters of the minority *yastan* of the frontier further offered a foil to constitute the identity of the majority perceived as Halha. Socialist Mongolia thereby not only furthered the distinctions to the Buryat and the Inner Mongols, which had been delineated by borders from Outer Mongolia since the eighteenth century but also from the Urianhai/Tuvas, which had for long been Mongol tributaries and which remained part of Outer Mongolia until the early twentieth century. One could see the Darhad as a harmless example of a *yastan* of the borderland because the Darhad as Mongol-speaking group could be easily distinguished from the neighboring Tuvan speakers in the Tyva Republic. However, to take the Darhad as a prototype for a Mongolian backward *yastan* is also surprising as the highlighting of the Darhad, who had been part of Tannu-Urianhai before, pointed to the recent loss of the major parts of Tannu-Urianhai and its people.

Bulag (1998: 31) argued that the Buryat scholar Zhamtsarano introduced the term *yastan*, which was not used among the Halha before, from Buryatia to Mongolia.<sup>33</sup> Zhamtsarano (Tseveen 1997 [1934]) produced the first major ethnography about the minorities of the new Mongolian nation-state. However, Zhamtsarano used the term *yastan* only once at the beginning of his account, referring to the earlier Urianhai in general. He used it neither to address the Darhad, nor the Urianhai groups in northern Hövsgöl, nor the other named groups he described; usually he used a simple plural form of the name to address the people.<sup>34</sup> Around half of the groups included in his account had before been mentioned as *plenyä*, tribes, in the 1918 census of the Russian scholar Majskij

<sup>33</sup> In a Buryat context the term had referred to the Buryat against the non-Buryat groups in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bulag 1998: 31).

<sup>34</sup> Zhamtsarano wrote besides the Darhad and Hövsgöl Nuur Urianhai about the Dörvöd, Hoton, Bayan, Ööld, Myangad, Zahchin, Torguud, Hoshuud, Dar’ganga, Altain Urianhai, Hasag, and Hamnigan.

(1959 [1920]). Almost all groups described by Zhamtsarano later were shown as *yastan* in the national census, which probably distinguished nationalities for the first time in 1956.<sup>35</sup>

Some decades later, Badamhatan used the term *yastan* widely to distinguish among Mongols within the boundaries of the new socialist nation. Badamhatan made the earlier Buddhist subjects from the Urianhai borderland unambiguously into a Mongolian *yastan*, which is reflected in the title, *Hövsgöliin Darhad yastan*. Along with Badamhatan's study the Darhad became separated as *yastan* in the national census.<sup>36</sup> Badamhatan's monograph exactly fits in Bulag's characterization of a Mongolian socialist ethnography of the 1960s: it describes in detail the material and spiritual culture of the Darhad and includes an extended discussion about the history of the Darhad and the origin of the *ovog*, clan denominations, found among the Darhad. Badamhatan used the shamans found among the Darhad to characterize the Darhad as unique in Mongolia. However, shamans retained their practice not only to the west of the lake among the Darhad and among the Tuva Tsaatan but also among the Urianhai to the east of the lake (Dioszegi 1961).<sup>37</sup>

Unsurprisingly, both Zhamtsarano and Badamhatan described people in northern Hövsgöl as backward.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the two accounts show considerable differences. The earlier report of Zhamtsarano focused on the administrative organization at the end of Qing rule and further on the economic development of the area. He described the area as culturally and economically backward due to the Qing's deployment of the border posts to the south of the Darhad area, restricting the Darhad in leaving their territory. The author discussed the temporary disruption of the economy and the number of people at the turn to the twentieth century and emphasized the social inequalities between rich and poor herders. Zhamtsarano ended his account by mentioning the trade routes to Russia and concluded that the Darhad and Urianhai borderland had the potential to become a rich and

<sup>35</sup> After the census shown by Majskij, Mongolia collected census data in 1935, 1944, 1956, 1963, 1969, 1979, 1989, and 2000 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia NSOM 2003: 77). It seems that the census included the category "nationality" for the first time in 1956 (NSOM 2003; Bulag 1998: 30). However, I have not seen representations of the 1934 and 1944 censuses. If the 1956 census was really the first one including "nationality", one wonders about the delay in respect to the Soviet Union, where the first nationality census of 1926 was central for the constitution of the Soviet Union (Hirsch 2005: 101 ff.).

<sup>36</sup> Although the "Darhad Bogd Geegen *shav*" were included in the table by Majskij (1959 [1920]), the Darhad were not enumerated as a named group in the 1956 census; however they appeared in the 1963 census (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2003: 367; Bulag 1998: 30). In the same year, Badamhatan (1963a; 1963b) published two first articles on the Darhad. I do not know with which terms the nationalities were shown by the socialist census, but I assume that it was by the term *yastan*. Ironically, in postsocialist statistics, the terms *yastan* and *ündesten*, which were so sharply differentiated in socialism, are now fused into a new term, *yas ündes*, translated as "ethnic groups". The term "*yas ündes*" now refers to distinct Mongol subgroups, non-Mongol Mongolians (i.e. Kazakh) and furthermore the categories Russian, Chinese, and "foreigner". The term *yas ündes* is now also used in overviews including socialist census data (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2003).

<sup>37</sup> When I visited the areas to the east of Lake Hövsgöl in March 2003, I was told that there were no more shamans practicing.

<sup>38</sup> The trope of backwardness is reflected by Atwood (2004: 132) who presented the Darhad as the "most rural of Mongolia's ethnic groups" in 1989.

attractive region. Obviously, one of Tseveen's main concerns was to assess the economic potential for socialist development and growth. Social inequality was a major concern of the early socialist economic policy leading to the expropriation of nobles in 1929 and the subsequent expropriation of rich herders (Trapp 2007). As I have already discussed in the last chapter, a further concern of Zhamtsarano was the reform of Buddhist practice; also this interest reflected a dominant political interest of his time.

Robert Rupen (1956a; 1956b) portrayed Zhamtsarano as one of the Buryat intellectuals who dominated Outer Mongolian politics and pushed the country to modernization during the 1910s and the 1920s. According to Rupen, the Buryat intellectuals educated in Russia were incipient nationalists, Pan-Mongolists, Russian (Czarist and Soviet) agents, as well as serious scholars and educators. Zhamtsarano wrote the first platform for the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1921, he founded the Mongolian Scientific Committee, the state library, a museum, and published books and newspapers. Zhamtsarano fell from favor in the 1930s; he was charged with "bourgeois nationalism" and "Pan-Mongolism" and he was banished to Leningrad in 1932 where he was arrested in 1937 and never heard of again (Rupen 1956b: 397).<sup>39</sup>

More than Zhamtsarano, Badamhatan was concerned with relating the backwardness of the Darhad to the exploitation by the Buddhist authority and to show the Buddhist past in a negative light (see Chapter 8). Significantly, Badamhatan did not discuss the semantic content of the term Darhad, which would have related the Buddhist serfs to the idea of privilege compared with subjects of lay nobles. In contrast he reflected the Soviet perception of the *hamjilga* relationship between the Buddhist monastery and the lay serfs as exploitative. Badamhatan endorsed the claim of exploitation with numerous statistics about tax and tribute burden.

Badamhatan's ethnographies are closely related to the closing of the border to Tyva and the ensuing implementation of the collective farms in the area. The ethnographer conducted his fieldwork between 1959 and 1962; each year he stayed for three to four months. Badamhatan thus started his fieldwork immediately after the definitive enactment of the border in 1957/58 and the constituting of the collective farms, *negdel*. According to Badamhatan, the *negdel* were founded in 1956; today the people argue that the first founding failed and that effectively the *negdel* started to function in 1959.<sup>40</sup> With the consolidation of the border, the area belonged unambiguously to Mongolia. The opening of the collective farms integrated the area into socialist organization and modernization. The

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<sup>39</sup> According to Rupen's description, Zhamtsarano wrote his ethnography after he was expelled from Mongolia. According to Rachewiltz and Krueger (Čeveng 1991 [1934], introduction), Zhamtsarano had finished his ethnography already in 1931 and it was published in Mongolia in 1934 only.

<sup>40</sup> Compared to the Soviet Union the collective and state farms were introduced late in Mongolia. After the first nationwide attempt at collectivization largely failed in the 1930s, the majority of collective farms, *negdel*, were implemented in the late 1950s (Müller 1997: 293 f.).

ethnographer accompanied the start of socialist modernization, documenting traditional culture in the very moment when socialist policy “developed” it out of existence. In projecting the current name Darhad onto the area and the people also when writing about history, Badamhatan strove to make the people and the area into an unambiguous Darhad and thus Mongolian homeland.

### **Undermining the boundary between Darhad and Urianhai/Tsaatan**

Despite the highlight on the distinction between the Darhad and the neighboring former Urianhai and the later Tsaatan, Badamhatan’s accounts include much information that questions a clear distinction and instead points to a joint history and a similar lifestyle. Zhamtsarano had left the question whether the Darhad were “mongolized Urianhai” unanswered. In contrast, Badamhatan (1965: 57) refused the earlier Russian attribution of the Darhad as “mongolized Urianhai”.<sup>41</sup> He defended the distinctness of the Darhad from the neighboring Urianhai and stated that at the end of the nineteenth century the Darhad *yastan* had a particular language, economy, material and spiritual culture, and social organization. It is noteworthy that Badamhatan focused on cultural traits and did not apply biologically connotated traits to outline the distinction.<sup>42</sup> For the demonstration of the Darhad as a unique Mongolian *yastan* the extensive discussion of history was a contradictory task: it showed that indeed at least part of the Darhad’s population goes back to the former Urianhai who had settled in the area before. To avoid a straightforward presentation of the Darhad as descendents of Urianhai and the joint history of the Darhad and the Tsaatan, Badamhatan developed a complicated argumentation to present in reverse the Urianhai as amalgamated into the Darhad.

A case in point is his discussion about the *ovog* denominations of the Darhad and their origin. Visiting the area thirty years before him, Sanjeev had enumerated sixteen and Zhamtsarano had listed ten *ovog* names; Badamhatan eagerly collected thirty-two *ovog* names. Similarly to a geological model, Badamhatan interpreted the names as remnants of different earlier tribes of Mongol, Buryat, Tuva, Turkic, Kyrgyz, Nen, Ket, or Kitan origin. Badamhatan mentioned that all Urianhai *ovog* (clan names) were present among the Darhad. To bridge the gap to his emphasis on the uniqueness of the Darhad he explained that the joint *ovog* denominations would be the proof that from the old time (*deer üyed*)

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<sup>41</sup> This view on the Darhad is not constricted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Ulla Johansen (1989: 219) wrote that the Darhad were “until recently” reindeer herders, hunters and gatherers and only “of late” adopted the Mongolian language.

<sup>42</sup> In contrast, Carruthers (1914: 126) argued with “phenomenological” traits and argued that some of the people of the reindeer herders in eastern Tannu-Urianhai showed a “Mongolized appearance”. His account is highly contradictory as Carruthers attempted to show the reindeer herders as remote and without any contact to the outside world and at the same time discussed that the reindeer herders were an “intermixture of the aboriginal inhabitants” with the “old Turki or Uigur nation, influenced by and infused with a strong Mongol element” (ibid.: 126).

Urianhai *irged*, people, were assimilating and permeating into the Darhad. The amalgamation of earlier tribes into the Darhad *yastan* seems to provide a micro-model of evolution and the example how on a broader basis the evolution of the feudal *yastan* into the socialist *ündesten* could happen.

Badamhatan's discussion of shamans' practices is a further central topic that questions the blunt distinction of Darhad and Tsaatan. Badamhatan assessed in both monographs that the practices were similar. In the Darhad monograph (1965: 234, footnote 10) he mentioned shortly that the Darhad shamans' practices originated from the Sayan taiga environment. In the Tsaatan monograph he wrote that the Tsaatan shamans' practice was similar to the practice of the Darhad as well as to the Tyva Toj shamans. However, he argued, the Tsaatan shamans had been less influenced by Buddhism and thus they could better retain the traditional content and form (1962: 37). Badamhatan approached the Huular shamans as intermediates between Tuva and Darhad shamans and he depicted the link as kin relationship. He mentioned in the Darhad monograph the shamans Jitag (Jatag), his sons Haj and Noyoo Zönög, and the descendents of Haj as Darhad Huular shamans (1965: 259; footnote 53).<sup>43</sup> In the Tsaatan monograph however, he named Noyoo Zönög as the ancestor of the Tsaatan and Urianhai shamans. Badamhatan thus showed the Urianhai/Tsaatan shamans as descending from a Darhad genealogy instead of tracing vice versa the Darhad shamans to former Urianhai shamans.<sup>44</sup>

A third example that undermined Badamhatan's distinction between Darhad and Tsaatan is his discussion of the domestic economy. The author mentioned that for the Darhad just as for the Urianhai or the Tsaatan hunting and gathering had been important subsistence activities and that all groups had participated in the commercial trade with furs. As I already mentioned his account further indicates that also some Darhad held reindeer in the past.

By textual practices of homogenization and differentiation Badamhatan aspired to show the Darhad as a unique Mongolian *yastan*. His attempt to distinguish the Darhad *yastan* from the Tsaatan *ard* and the former Urianhai (as Tuva) is undermined by a contradictory subtext pointing to the similarities and joint history. Badamhatan showed the Tsaatan as more backward than the Darhad: he cited in the Darhad monograph Rashid-al Din's characterization of the Dubo who lived in the taiga mountain areas back in the seventh century. Badamhatan commented that the Tsaatan had until recently retained a similar lifestyle. Interestingly, he attributed the Tsaatan not as *yastan* but as *ard*. The term *ard*

<sup>43</sup> See the Huular genealogy of O. Pürev (2002) depicted in Figure 4 and the related discussion in Chapter 6.

<sup>44</sup> In contrast, Diószegi (1963) showed the Huular ancestors as migrating from the Toj *hoshuun* into the Darhad area. The Huular shamans also have an ambiguous position in O. Pürev's (2002) representation as he sometimes distinguishes the Huular from the Darhad shamans. According to Vainsthein (1980 [1972]), people attributed as Huular were present everywhere in Tannu-Tuva.

historically referred to people who were neither nobles nor lamas, thus to the commoners and lay herders. In socialism the term was reconfigured to denote the socialist person and was devoid of an ethnic/national connotation. As recently naturalized citizens, the Tsaatan's Mongolness was at the very least doubtful. By attributing them as *ard* and not as *yastan*, Badamhatan avoided relating the Tsaatan to nationality, which in a Mongolian context was related to Mongolness centered on the Halha. Instead, he integrated them as citizens into the Mongolian nation-state. It might be that Badamhatan perceived the reindeer herders simply as too small a group to call them a *yastan*. In sum, Badamhatan delineated the northern border in cultural terms; he showed the Darhad as unambiguously Mongolian and assigned the Tsaatan a hybrid status as culturally Tuva but Mongolian citizens.

It is interesting that Badamhatan did not emphasize language as a primary marker to characterize the Tsaatan. Badamhatan mentioned the Darhad as *yastan* with an own distinct language – although the Darhad language might better be perceived as a Mongol dialect. However, Badamhatan did not emphasize that the Tsaatan, at least partly, speak Tuvan.<sup>45</sup> At the end of his Tsaatan monograph he added a glossary of “Tsaatan terms” without stating that it is a Tuvan dialect.

### **The new interest in the reindeer herders**

In postsocialism, the attention of an international audience has shifted from the Darhad to the few reindeer herders living in the taiga borderlands of the Shishget area.<sup>46</sup> The two groups of reindeer herders represent the southernmost reindeer herders in Southern Siberia. Brian Donahoe (2003) points to the similarities of reindeer husbandry of different reindeer herding groups in the wider area of the eastern Sayan mountains; of the Tozhu (Toj) in the Tyva Republic, the Tofa of the Irkutsk province, the Soyot in the Buryat Republic, and the Dukha in northern Mongolia. He argues that the traditions of these reindeer herders transgress the common anthropological categories of nomadic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers: in contrast to the northern tundra reindeer herders, the southern taiga herders keep small herds of reindeer for transport and riding and process the milk, while hunting game, fishing, gathering roots, and berries provided the main part of traditional subsistence.

Today, the reindeer herders in the Mongolian taiga attract enormous attention not only from anthropologists but further from several NGOs aiming to support the reindeer herders, from media including TV documentaries, and from tourists. The reindeer herders

<sup>45</sup> Today, some people among the reindeer herders converse in Tuvan. The children are said to no longer know Tuvan. Already in the 1970s, Chagdarsürüng (1994 [1974]) had mentioned that only the elders still spoke Tuvan.

<sup>46</sup> I thank Brian Donahoe for his comments on an earlier draft of my discussion about the Tsaatan and the Dukha.

figure as one of the highlights in the advertisement of all larger Mongolian tourist companies. The new international interest in the reindeer herders is accompanied by a shift in naming policy. While the reindeer herders have internationally become known as Tsaatan, anthropologists and associates now call the reindeer herders “the Dukha” and claim this term to be the self-designation of the people. Badamhatan’s naming focused on the occupation and he avoided an association of the Tsaatan with nationality. Now, “the Dukha” are presented as an ethnic group with a distinct name, culture, language, and a territory. While the connotation of Badamhatan’s representation was backwardness, the present-day focus on the reindeer herders celebrates their “traditional culture close to nature” and perceives them as “vanishing people”. The context of the anthropological discourse has shifted from a concern with modernization to an emphasis on conservation and protection related to the new global issues of indigenous people’s movements, nature protection, and park building.

My own experiences in the camps of the reindeer herders are rather limited. I visited the camps of the Western and Eastern groups for two short stays each starting with a visit as a tourist in spring 2002. Later, I went to the taiga camps to meet with the shamans; I mainly met with Ganzorig and Goostoi; Suyon was already very old when I encountered her, and her daughter Tsend I only met once shortly in Harmai and I missed her on my visits to the Eastern Taiga. I talked with Suyon about her life between Tyva and northern Mongolia, with Goostoi about his practice as a shaman, about his father Ak Sal who was a reputed shaman, and about reindeer herding in socialism. I also talked with Ganzorig about his inspirational practice and I attended a seance of Goostoi and Ganzorig. However, the two brothers only reluctantly talked about their practice and they refused to disclose their relationship to their spirits or to discuss the seances afterwards in detail as I usually did with Darhad shamans. As a tourist and as an anthropologist alike, I felt ambivalent towards visiting the reindeer herders, vacillating between feeling attracted by the romantic imagery of the cute reindeer around the tepees in the landscape and the reluctance to bother the few people, who attract so many visitors, with my presence. Due to my own ambivalence, my interest focused on the interactions of the reindeer people with foreign visitors.

The study on this subject was not restricted to my visits in the taiga camps. I met reindeer herders in homes in Harmai, in the village of Tsagaan Nuur, in the provincial capital Mörön, or I crossed them on horse when they were guiding tourists. Furthermore, I often heard about the foreign visitors to the taiga when staying in the Shishget area. People constantly spread rumors about how many tourists, with how many local guides, on how many horses, to which price were brought to the taiga. People spread fantasies about the number of planes bringing food and bottled water to the film crew staying in the taiga. Furthermore, tourist guides talked about their experiences in the taiga camps. The people living in the steppe areas were less interested in the taiga reindeer herders as such as they

were interested in the tourists visiting them. In particular, people were interested in the earnings locals could gain by providing horses to bring the people and their large luggage to the taiga camps. If the rumors gave the impression of numerous groups of tourists visiting the taiga camps, the people in the taiga in contrast emphasized how few visitors they had recently received.

To discuss the postsocialist attention for the reindeer herders, I first give a detailed account of one of my stays in a reindeer herding camp and the contacts between the locals and foreign visitors. Then I will trace the reintroduction of the name Dukha before I analyze the connotations of the approaches accompanying the new name. Finally, I will discuss the ambivalent relationship of the supporters of the reindeer herders to tourism.

### **A visit in the Eastern Taiga camp**

In August 2004, Davaanyam and I visited the Eastern Taiga group in their summer camp on a site called Tsagaan Chuluut Eh (“white stony spring”), approximately twenty kilometers to the north of Hogrogo. To reach it we had to follow a swampy trail through a long valley and as we had left as usual in the afternoon we arrived shortly before nightfall. Ten tepees, or half of the households of the Eastern Taiga, were perched on the exposed bank just beyond the pass. The camp site offered a marvelous view over the whole Shishget depression to the Hor’dal Sar’dag range to the south and the Sayan range to the east. When we arrived at the camp, an icy wind from the north came up and brought snow the following night. The camp inhabitants talked about moving to the autumn site down in the valley close to Hogrogo however they awaited an appointed visit. During our two nights’ sojourn I mainly stayed with Oyunbadam, whom I had got to know at her sister’s in the Western Taiga some weeks before. Oyunbadam lives with her husband Erdenee and her two children only during the summer months in the taiga; the rest of the year Oyunbadam works as a teacher in the local school in Tsagaan Nuur.

Upon our arrival, the Canadian journalist Allan Coukell interviewed the couple.<sup>47</sup> He addressed the life conditions and the future of the taiga reindeer herders. Oyunbadam and Erdenee told the journalist about their hard life and that living conditions were deteriorating as the number of reindeer dropped while the number of people in the taiga camps increased. In that year, the twenty households in the Eastern Taiga held one hundred and seventy reindeer only and the small number was unevenly distributed. The Eastern Taiga group was considerably poorer in reindeer than the Western Taiga group, which held over four hundred reindeer. Oyunbadam and Erdenee related the decrease of reindeer to diseases, inbreeding, and losses due to wolves. The journalist addressed the

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<sup>47</sup> See Allan Coukell’s reports about the reindeer herders and the taiga shamans on the Internet (<http://homelands.org/worlds/mongolia.html>; <http://homelands.org/worlds/shaman.html>; accessed 22.02.2007).



impacts of tourism and asked the couple about their attitude towards Enhtuya, who had moved to Lake Hövsgöl close to the bulk of tourist camps. Coukell asked about their feelings in view of the decline of their traditional culture caused by tourism. Not knowing that Oyunbadam was the sister of Enhtuya's husband Dūjii, the journalist was apparently astonished to hear that Oyunbadam and Erdeene also wanted to move with their reindeer to the lake. The couple said that unfortunately the administration of the National Park did not allow them to settle at the lake. They refused the idea that contact with tourists would corrupt their traditions: these would remain the same, Erdenee said; however they could gain an income and increase their living standard. Oyunbadam added that she had heard that reindeer herders had also lived in the Sayan range next to the lake in ancient times.



*Photograph 39: The summer camp of the reindeer herders in Tsagaan Chuluut Eh (12.8.04).*



*Photograph 40: Oyunbadam and Erdenee and their family (12.08.2004).*

The next day, Allan Coukell went to the other camp of the Eastern Taiga, which stayed some kilometers away, to visit the shaman Tsend. I spent the day in the camp; I visited all families around and mainly I stayed with my host. Oyunbadam told me about the inhabitants of all tepees and how they are related to her husband's parents, Tsendelii and Gombo. Most of the households were related to her mother-in-law Tsendelii, and the rest to Tsendelii's younger sister's husband. Oyunbadam talked about the families' histories, about her recent visit to the capital, and she speculated together with Davaanyam about the reasons why the reindeer in the Eastern Taiga were bigger and looked better than the reindeer in the Western Taiga. Now and then, Oyunbadam took the binoculars, left the tepee (*urts*) and scanned the trail through the valley. Finally, in the evening, the looked-for visitors arrived: Dan Plumley, the American director of the "Totem Peoples' Preservation Project", his wife and translator Tsermaa, the chief of the rural herders (*bag*) of Tsagaan Nuur, Buyantogtoh, the two veterinarians Bayaraa and Nansalmaa, and a representative of the organization "Taiga Nature", Batulag, who grew up in the Eastern Taiga. Arriving in the camp, the visitors dismounted from the horses and entered the tepee of the elder Gombo and Tsendelii. However Gombo, the informal leader of the group, was absent.

The next morning, the almost thirty adults around gathered in Tsendelii's tepee for the announced official meeting. For two hours, they listened to the speeches of the foreign guest, the veterinarians, and the *bag* chief. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a recent visit of three delegates of the reindeer herders to Ulaanbaatar. Furthermore, the veterinarians informed them about reindeer health and care. Dan Plumley opened the meeting and asked Oyunbadam to report on the visit to the capital. Oyunbadam told her neighbors about the encounters with the representatives of the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry for Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of Nature and Environment, and the president's advisor for economic affairs; she further mentioned the meetings with the media and discussions with national politicians: "We told them who we are. We told them that they should not tell lies about us. We told them that they should not call us 'Tsaatan' but accept us as *ard tümen* (people, folk), and call us 'Tuva' or '*tsaachin*'."<sup>48</sup> Oyunbadam communicated that the delegation asked the Minister of Agriculture to provide two cows with calves and five goats for each taiga family. Furthermore, the delegation from the taiga negotiated with the Ministry of Nature and Protection for sable hunting permissions, arguing that hunting sable was not only done during socialism but had been a very old tradition in the taiga. Oyunbadam reported on the meeting with the national parliamentarian Gündalai, who recommended they move to the lake shore if they wanted to improve their living conditions.

J. Bat, a brother of Tsendelii and a further delegate, emphasized that they did not go to Ulaanbaatar for pleasure as many might think but that the delegates worked hard and went

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<sup>48</sup> See also the report on Cultural Survival (Portalewska 2004).

from one meeting to another. Dan Plumley pointed to the purposes of the meetings in the capital: first, the cultural survival and the cultural identity, to be recognized as a group; second, to explain the long-term goals and to dictate the needs to the government; third, to receive specific responses from the government. Plumley assessed that the government seemed to recognize their cultural identity. He requested that the Dukha had to take control, that they had to exert pressure so that the promises would be met in future. The veterinarians then talked about the diseases of the reindeer. Nansalmaa, who grew up in Ulaan Uul, advised the people that they have to learn how to treat wounds themselves because the local veterinarian could not visit them for every animal. She reminded that the livestock now was private and the holders were responsible for their deer. Nansalmaa reproached the people for accepting medical care from foreigners who came by and took blood tests and she demanded that the people should only accept the aid of the Totem Peoples' Project. After the participants had listened to these long speeches, which all were translated between Mongolian and English, only a single comment was made: one participant complained that the foreign doctors and help organizations mainly visited the Western Taiga group. The meeting found a sudden end with the distribution of vitamins for the children.

The interview of the Canadian journalist and the meeting with the representatives of the Totem Peoples' Preservation Project raised those issues that shape the international perception of the reindeer herders: the concern for decreasing reindeer numbers due to sickness and inbreeding, the fear that the people will lose their "traditional culture", and the negative impacts of tourism. Before I put these issues in a wider context I will trace the shift in naming practice.

### **"The Dukha" as an ethnic minority**

At the meeting, Oyunbadam expressed the unease some of the Taiga people feel about the Mongolian term "Tsaatan", which they perceive as pejorative, claiming that the term equates people with reindeer. Literally the term Tsaatan means "those with reindeer". The term *tsaachin*, which Oyunbadam recommended as an alternative, can be translated as "reindeer herder" and is an equivalent to the terms *malchin* (livestock herder), *aduuchin* (horse herder), or *hon'chin* (shepherd). Oyunbadam asked for her people to be accepted as professional herders and for the reindeer to be accepted as livestock. The people talking at the meeting said "*manai taigihan*" (lit. "ours from the taiga") or "*Tuva*" when they addressed all reindeer herders. In contrast, the foreign guest of the Totem Project and his translators deliberately addressed their hosts as "the Dukha".

The rise of the term Dukha to name the reindeer herders probably started with the Hungarian anthropologist Otto Farkas, who in 1992 presented a paper with the title

“Tsaatan Reindeer Herdsmen” at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit in Cambridge. In his paper, Farkas distanced himself from the title and the name Tsaatan. He argued that the Tuvian-originated people did not accept the term to name their ethnic group but accepted it only in relating to their occupation of reindeer breeding. Farkas (1992: 2) declared that the people found the name Tsaatan offensive and that they called themselves “Uigur speaking, Uigur originated Dukha”.<sup>49</sup> Farkas recommended naming only the reindeer herders as “Tsaatan” and that the term “Dukha” be used to name the whole ethnic group of Tuvian-originated people, including those who had given up reindeer herding and lived in the villages or as herders of common livestock.

In the following, the anthropological literature adopted the name Dukha, usually with the remark that the term would be the native self-designation.<sup>50</sup> In distinction to Farkas’ suggestion, in particular the reindeer herders became associated with the name Dukha. Often, the authors mention that the ethnic group included further people not living in the taiga; the interest nevertheless focuses on the reindeer herders. In the meantime, the term Dukha is not only widely used in anthropology but has also spread to related fields of NGOs working with the reindeer herders, like the Totem Peoples’ Preservation Project. Although the term Tsaatan is still more widespread in the local arena, in Mongolia in general and among tourists, the term Dukha is coined with the anthropological authority to represent the “native term”.

However, there remains some doubt whether the term really reflects the present-day self-designation of all taiga reindeer herders. Anthropologist Alan Wheeler (1999; 2000), who did his PhD fieldwork with the reindeer herders, declared that the Tuva of Tsagaan Nuur call themselves Dukha. Nevertheless, Wheeler (2000: 11) seems to have some doubts about this self-designation: “Dukha informants may offer sundry responses” in calling themselves “‘Dukha’ to an American anthropologist, ‘Urianhai’ to a Mongolian historian, and ‘Uigur’ to a Hungarian linguist”. Wheeler assumed that the term Dukha would be “more than likely” a variation of the term Tuva (Wheeler 1999: 60).

I was a latecomer to the “Dukha” name discussion. Although I had realized that some of the reindeer people refuse the term Tsaatan, I never heard the term Dukha during several months staying in the Shishget depression. Only when I found Wheeler’s master thesis in the national library in autumn 2003, did I become aware of the name concern. During my visits in the taiga camps the following year, I intently listened how people talked about

<sup>49</sup> The Uigur were an empire ruling over the steppes of present-day Mongolia from 744 to 840 (Atwood 2004: 560). Farkas formulation “Uigur speaking, Uigur originated Dukha” resembles closely Badamhatan’s formulation (1962: 3).

<sup>50</sup> Striking is the shift in the French representations of the journal *Études Mongoles et sibériennes*. In the translations of Badamhatan’s monographs about the Darhad and the Tsaatan (Badamxatan 1986; 1987) in the late 1980s, the term Tsaatan was translated as “Caatan”. During the 1990s, the reindeer herders were named “Doukha” even in translations of older articles of Mongolian authors (for example Chadarsürüng; Even; Dulam and Even; all 1994).

themselves, and I asked them explicitly about their self-denomination. As Wheeler had mentioned, people answered with different terms, with “Tuva”, “Urianhai”, or “Uigur”. Only when I asked specifically about the term “*Dukha*” did people recognize it as a label for the group, in particular in the Eastern Taiga but only few were able to trace the term. Some of them considered “*Dukha*” as the mongolized version of the term “*Tuva*” while others called it “our term” and regarded “*Tuva*” as the mongolized variant; others perceived the name as denoting a particular area in the Taiga borderlands in the present-day territory of Tyva.

Although I doubt that the term *Dukha* is an unambiguous identity marker for the reindeer herders and the related people, my argument is not that foreign students invented a new ethnonym. In fact, the term has for long been reported as self-designation of those people that were called “Urianhai” by the Mongols. Diószegi (1961: 200) had mentioned that the Urianhai to the West of Lake Hövsgöl called themselves *toha* or *tohalar*.<sup>51</sup> Badamhatan (1962: 3) had also mentioned the term. He wrote that Soviet authors called the Tsaatan “mountain Toj”, after the former administrative unit Toj *hoshuun*, whose *ovog* where one part of the Tuva people and called themselves “Duha (Tuva) of Uigur language and origin”. Thus, Badamhatan interpreted the term as a name for the people of the Toj *hoshuun* of the former administration of Tannu-Urianhai. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the term had been presented as native self-designation of the people of the Toj *hoshuun*.<sup>52</sup> The similar terms Tuva or Tuba were commonly mentioned as self-designation of the people of the former Tannu-Urianhai (for example Radloff 1883: 14-15).<sup>53</sup> I conclude that the term Toha/Tuha/Duha/Dukha was historically not confined to a small number of reindeer herders living to the west of Lake Hövsgöl but that it was a self-denomination either of the people in Eastern Tannu-Urianhai generally or of the people belonging to the Toj *hoshuun* in particular. I assume that it was a local variant of the term Tuva/Tuba and may have indicated the demarcation between the livestock herders in the western part of Tannu-Urianhai and the hunters and horse or reindeer herders in the eastern part of Tannu-Urianhai (see Vainsthein 1980 [1972]). Neglecting the difference between the terms Tuva/Tuba and Tuha I suppose that by these terms people opposed the denomination “Urianhai” imposed by the Mongols.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> However, Gábori (1959: 458) who visited the reindeer herders in the taiga of Ulaan Uul *sum* in 1958 explicitly mentioned that the people call themselves “Urianhai” with “Uigur” language. Gábori did not use the term “Tsaatan”.

<sup>52</sup> Pyotr Ostrovskikh, who reported to the Imperial Russian Geographic Society in 1897 from his study in Tannu-Urianhai, mentioned that the livestock herders of the western parts of Urianhai called themselves “Tuba” or “Tuva” but that the Tozhins, the reindeer herders in the eastern Urianhai areas, called themselves “Tuha” or “Tuhalar”; (Ostrovskikh 1898: 425-426; cited and translated by Donahoe 2004: 77). The name of the *hoshuun* (Toj), has in the meantime become the ethnonym (Tozhu) for the reindeer herders in Tyva. Donahoe (2004: 75) argued that the term goes back to a tribal name “Tochi” or “Tochigasy” which was mentioned in 17<sup>th</sup> century Russian sources.

<sup>53</sup> Carruthers (1914: 124) claimed that also the “true wild Urianhai”, the reindeer herders of the Eastern Toj *hoshuun*, called themselves “Tuba”.

<sup>54</sup> The terms Tuva/Tuha are commonly traced back to a Chinese source of the Tang dynasty in the seventh

With the reintroduction of the old term *Duha* in the context of the postsocialist nation-state the connotations of the term have changed. The people living in the area of the former Toj *hoshuun*, to whom the term *Duha* mainly referred, have in the meantime become renamed *Tozhu* (Donahoe 2004). The term “*Dukha*” is now confined to the few families of reindeer herders and further Tuva- originating people in *Tsagaan Nuur*.<sup>55</sup> With the reintroduction of the former name, the term now refers not only to a much smaller group of people. In the context of the nation-state the reindeer herders are associated with a distinct culture, territory, and language. The *Dukha* are not only delineated from their neighbors *Darhad* but also from their neighbors on the Tyvan side of the border to which the term was mainly assigned before. By the use of the term *Tsaatan* and *ard Badamhatan* avoided a relationship to nationality/ethnicity and he located the reindeer herders ambiguously as foreign and as belonging to the Tyva Toj *hoshuun*. Now, anthropologists and TV documentaries represent the *Dukha* as unique ethnic group.

The engagement of the Totem Peoples’ Preservation Project moreover approaches the *Dukha* as “indigenous people”.<sup>56</sup> Before Dan Plumley came to Inner Asia he had been working as consultant for Native Americans in Northern New York. In the early 1990s, he implemented a first project with reindeer herders in Southern Siberia.<sup>57</sup> Plumley visited the reindeer herders in the Mongolian taiga for the first time in 1997 and founded the Totem People’s Preservation Project in 1999. The aim of the project is to “support the traditional culture of the *Dukha* by providing primary aid for reindeer and people”, explained Plumley when we met in August 2004 in the Eastern Taiga.<sup>58</sup> Beyond the provision of medical and veterinarian aid, the project could successfully convince the herders to stop cutting the soft

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century A. D., which reported about a tribe called *Dubo* related to the Sayan mountains during Uigur rule. The *Dubo* were described by Rashid-al Din as living in grass tents, as not breeding cattle but gathering lily-roots, fishing and hunting, and as wearing sable and deer skin and the poor bird-feathers; the sources further reported that on weddings the rich people gave away horses. The dead were placed in coffins attached to trees in the mountains (Potapov 1964 [1956] b: 382). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, authors who discuss the origin of the hunting and reindeer herding people of the Sayan mountains mention the term *Dubo*, however they do not agree whether the name did relate to ancient Samoyed-speaking reindeer herders or rather to Turkic horse breeders and newcomers to the area. For a discussion about the history and origin of the hunting and reindeer herding people of the Eastern Sayan mountains, see for example Potapov (1964 [1956] b), *Badamhatan* (1965), *Vainshtein* (1980 [1972]), Donahoe (2004), and *Wheeler* (2000).

<sup>55</sup> I have never heard that the term was assigned to those people who call themselves *Urianhai* or *Tuva* living in *Ulaan Uul*.

<sup>56</sup> To my knowledge, Plumley’s project is the only support project for the reindeer herders that constitutes such an obvious relationship to the new indigenous peoples’ discourse.

<sup>57</sup> Plumley initiated a project that transferred over sixty reindeer from the *Tofolar* in the *Irkutsk raion* to the *Soyot* in the *Buryat Republic* of the Russian Federation, whose reindeer herds had dramatically declined. After an initial success and an increase in the number of reindeer the project collapsed after *USAID* (U. S. Agency for International Development) withdrew financial support and diseases decimated the reindeer. Although there are almost no more reindeer in the *Soyot* area, the *Soyot* “successfully restored their name and identity as one of the officially recognized Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North” (*Pavlinkaya* 2003).

<sup>58</sup> See also Plumley’s homepage ([http://totempeople.hypermart.net/about\\_us.htm](http://totempeople.hypermart.net/about_us.htm); 23.02. 2007) and his articles on Cultural Survival (<http://www.cs.org/publications>; 23.02. 2007).

velvet antlers of the reindeer and instead to carve hard antlers to sell the crafts to tourists.<sup>59</sup> The project further aimed to introduce reindeer bulls from one of the Russian republics. From the perspective of the project and the reindeer herders alike, inbreeding is a major problem that causes reindeer loss. In view of bureaucratic obstacles the project abandoned the idea to import bulls and instead considered insemination. To support the traditional culture the project further aims to convince the government to provide Tuvan language classes for the reindeer herder's children in the school of Tsagaan Nuur.

Beyond primary aid for people and reindeer Plumley aspires to support "native rights and self representation". Does Plumley strive for an official indigenous status for the Dukha, similar to the reindeer herding groups in Russian Siberia or for a UN indigenous peoples' status? "This is in the decision of the Dukha", Plumley replied. However, he identified the absence of recognition as ethnic minority and the lack of a law on ethnic minorities in Mongolia the biggest problems the Dukha face. Plumley claimed that the Mongolian government sold licenses to exploit the natural resources of the taiga, for example mineral resources and semi-precious stones. "Only if the Dukha are accepted as ethnic minority are they protected against exploitation, and will they receive the right to take part in decisions and will they get their reindeer pastures guaranteed", Plumley argued. One of Plumley's long-term goals is a "trans-boundary peace park" with open borders for the frontier people to cross with their reindeer. The park shall be a means and a symbol to promote cultural identity, indigenous rights, a sustainable economic development, and culturally sensitive ecotourism.

### **The development of reindeer herding in the twentieth century**

The new international attention for the Dukha is shaped by a trajectory of decline: the reindeer herds are viewed in a historical decline and, along with the deer, the people and their lifestyle are perceived as deteriorating. Wheeler (1999: 58, 65) writes that the "reindeer-herding culture of the Dukha is truly at risk of extinction" and, even more drastically, about a "vanishing people". Donahoe (2003) worries for the larger area of the Eastern Sayan that the reindeer-herding cultures are threatened in their cultural survival by transition to market-based economies, land privatization, mineral extraction, tourism, global warming, language endangerment and loss, and assimilation into the dominant Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese cultures. He assesses the number of domesticated reindeer as having declined from around 15'000 to 3500 animals during the 1990s and consequently fewer than 1000 people are still actively involved in reindeer herding. Donahoe (2003: 12) concludes "the disappearance of reindeer and the demise of these

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<sup>59</sup> The soft velvet antlers can be sold at higher prices than the hard antlers that the reindeer lose in autumn. According to the veterinarians, the cutting of the velvet antlers threatens the health of the reindeer. The selling of soft antlers to China is reported also for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reindeer herders of eastern Tannu-Urianhai (Vainshtein 1980 [1972]).

cultures would mean a decline in biological and cultural diversity and the loss of unique and valuable cultural knowledge”.

Donahoe relates the overall decline of reindeer herding in the wider Eastern Sayan to the recent developments in postsocialism. Often, however, anthropologists and other visitors concerned about the destiny of the reindeer herders accuse the socialist regime of deteriorating the “traditional reindeer herding culture”. They argue that by the state’s restriction of hunting, the collectivization of reindeer herds, the settling of the people in the villages of Tsagaan Nuur, and their integration into salaried work, the socialist regime caused the retreat of the traditional life of the reindeer herders (Farkas 1992; Wheeler 1999; Batulag et al. 2003). Undoubtedly, socialist policy aimed to modernize the “backward” Tsaatan and attempted to bring them out of the taiga. The socialist policy was reflected by Badamhatan (1962: 53), who recommended feeding the reindeer with grass and fodder in order to settle the Tsaatan on lower pastures closer to the *brigade* and *sum* settlements. The Mongolian geographer Sühbaatar, who studied the life conditions of the reindeer herders in the 1970s, remembers that the living standard of the people in the taiga was miserable and that they did not find enough hunting game to provide their subsistence.<sup>60</sup> He argues that the government did not settle the people by force and that the people themselves wanted to move to the villages, that they wanted to have salaried jobs and to send their children to school. Thus, while foreign visitors who have been allowed to visit the area since the 1990s focus on the decline of “traditional culture”, Mongolian scholars have emphasized the economic improvements during the socialist past. Older reindeer herders who told me about socialist modernization did not recall the changes as negative. However, they confirmed that their parents first did not like to live in houses and erected tepees to live next to the new houses. Overall, the people remember the 1970s as a period when the overall living conditions became better. The socialist modernization affected not only the people in the taiga but changed the lives of the neighboring pastoralists as well. The neighboring Darhad pastoralists as well became salaried herders or settled in the villages and were provided with occupations by the collective farms.

In contrast to the view that socialist modernization caused the decline of the traditional reindeer herding culture I argue that socialist economic organization also contributed to maintaining reindeer herding in the taiga. The integration of the reindeer in the *negdel* and the engagement of some of the people as salaried herders secured the maintenance of the reindeer in the taiga which otherwise might have been abandoned if hunting game was really too scarce to provide subsistence. However, the social and economic organization changed thoroughly: while the reindeer herders before had gained their subsistence and additional cash by hunting and gathering, in the socialist economy herding of reindeer became a paid profession.

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<sup>60</sup> Personal communication, Ulaanbaatar, 10.09. 2004.



The development of reindeer numbers during the collectivist period did not follow the claimed trajectory of decline. After collectivization, the numbers of reindeer were fluctuating, depending on an erratic policy that oscillated between the contradictory aims of increasing production, and the general neglect of reindeer in national production plans. At the beginning of the collectivization the reindeer numbers as well as the people involved in reindeer herding were similar as today. Badamhatan (1962: 4) counted thirty-three households herding 574 reindeer; the official data of December 2003 showed thirty-five families herding six hundred reindeer.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the average is for both periods at a meager seventeen reindeer per family and reflects the previous period of crisis. Badamhatan (1962: 10) estimated that at the turn of the twentieth century an average household kept between thirty and fifty reindeer. This estimation however seems to be rather high: the 1931 census of Tyva showed sixty percent of the five hundred reindeer-herding households of the Toj as holding between ten and twenty reindeer (Vainshtein 1980 [1972]: 186).

According to the accounts of older herders in the taiga and the Mongolian geographer Sühbaatar, reindeer numbers rose considerably in the 1970s.<sup>62</sup> The reindeer herders that had belonged to Ulaan Uul until 1985 remember that a first reindeer holiday to celebrate the number of 1000 reindeer was held in the 1970s, and Sühbaatar (2004) collected the number of 2200 reindeer of both taiga groups at the end of 1975. The reindeer numbers again dropped in the 1980s; one reason was that the *negdel* of Renchinlhümbe ordered the slaughter of a considerable part of the reindeer herds to provide resources needed for the school. During the early 1980s, only a few families herded reindeer in Renchinlhümbe.

In the mid-1980s, an economic and administrative reorganization deeply shaped the further development. Tsagaan Nuur, which had belonged to the *sum* of Renchinlhümbe, was organized into an own *sum* and a state farm for hunting and fishing, *an aj tsagaschin, sangin aj ahui*.<sup>63</sup> The reindeer were integrated into this new state farm. Therefore, the reindeer herders belonging to Ulaan Uul were resettled from the Ulaan Taiga to the north to

<sup>61</sup> Badamhatan counted thirty-nine Tsaatan households in Ulaan Uul, thirteen of which were engaged in the herding of the two hundred reindeer (sixty of them belonged to the collective farm). In Renchinlhümbe, twenty families herded the three hundred and seventy reindeer, of which again sixty belonged to the *negdel*. Furthermore, Badamhatan mentioned three reindeer-herding households in Hanh (to the north of the lake). Badamhatan mentioned that over all sixty-two households owned reindeer, however half of them lived as herders of other livestock or as workers.

<sup>62</sup> I collected information about the development of reindeer herding mainly from Goostoi (August 2003) and Sanjim (July 2004) in the Western Taiga; and from J. Bat, Tsendelii, and Gombo in the Eastern Taiga (August 2004).

<sup>63</sup> I took this name from a socialist information sheet about Tsagaan Nuur. Farkas (1992) mentioned the name differently with “*An agnuur tsaabugin aj akhui*”, “state farm for hunting and reindeer”. He argued that the *sum* was specifically constituted for the Tuva people in the area. According to Farkas, Tsagaan Nuur became a fishery in the 1950s and was a hunting state farm between 1972 and 1982. Dashdorj, the representative of the administration of Tsagaan Nuur, did not mention a state farm before 1985 but said that Tsagaan Nuur had been a hunting and fishing *brigad* (socialist production unit) of the *negdel* in Renchinlhümbe (24. 06. 2003).

Ming Bulag. The new reindeer farm started with around six hundred reindeer only.<sup>64</sup> The reindeer herders of Renchinlhümbe handed over the remaining reindeer to the herders arriving from Ulaan Uul; they gave up reindeer herding and entered salaried work as hunters or fishers. In the following years, the number of reindeer increased once more and the herders celebrated again a 1000 reindeer holiday in 1990 when the number of reindeer was raised to 1200 (Wheeler 1999: 64). Only a few years after Tsagaan Nuur was reorganized into a state farm, the socialist economy collapsed. People in Tsagaan Nuur gradually lost their salaried jobs and were left with almost nothing. Lacking sufficient salaries and other perspectives, young people leased reindeer and moved back to the taiga from where their parents came. The state farm of Tsagaan Nuur was finally dissolved in 1995. The reindeer were privatized by surrendering them to those families that had already herded them (Wheeler 1999).

I assume that this accomplishment of privatization laid the base of the uneven distribution of reindeer numbers between the Western and Eastern Taiga.<sup>65</sup> Today, the households of the Western Taiga own four hundred and thirty of the around six hundred reindeer (official numbers of December 2003). In the early 1990s, reindeer numbers decreased considerably and they slightly increased again at the end of the 1990s. However, one might be surprised that the herders were able to retain reindeer altogether as the economic situation of Tsagaan Nuur was desperate. People were left without salaries,



*Photograph 41: Reindeer in the summer camp in Ming Bulag, Western Taiga (16.07. 2004).*

<sup>64</sup> Information provided by Dashdorj, *Tamagin gazarin darga* of the administration of Tsagaan Nuur, 24.06. 2003. Dashdorj was the chief of the reindeer herders in 1985.

<sup>65</sup> I was told that the richest reindeer herder in the Western Taiga, who owned one hundred reindeer in summer 2004, was a successful reindeer herder in late socialism and therefore could lease a big number in the early 1990s, which he subsequently could buy for a very cheap price when reindeer were privatized.

almost without livestock, and with lakes and forests empty of fish and hunting game, while prices rose sharply in the early 1990s.

The exceeding poverty of Tsagaan Nuur's population is mainly a legacy of the foundation of the state farm and the delineation from Renchinlhumbe in 1985. The state enterprise was based on fishing, sable hunting, and reindeer herding, and held no other livestock and, consequently, the land of the new *sum* included mainly taiga areas.<sup>66</sup> In the early 1990s, Renchinlhumbe distributed the livestock of the *negdel* to the population. The people of Tsagaan Nuur, most of whom had worked for the collective farm of Renchinlhumbe until 1985, did not receive livestock from Renchinlhumbe. With the collapse of the state farm of Tsagaan Nuur, there was almost nothing to distribute but the few reindeer. The way things fell apart has been shaping the situation until today. The population of Tsagaan Nuur is considerably poorer than the average of Renchinlhumbe.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the outside view of the reindeer herders as a neglected part of the population, the distribution of livestock holdings shows the reindeer herders as no poorer than other households in Tsagaan Nuur. The reindeer herders are not all equally poor and they show the average range of poverty of the *sum*. The thirty-five reindeer-herding families constitute eleven percent of the population and they hold fourteen percent of the livestock in the *sum*.<sup>68</sup>

The international attention and support focuses mainly on the reindeer herders who make between a fourth and half of the Tuva families in Tsagaan Nuur.<sup>69</sup> The attention focuses on the reindeer and the related lifestyle or the "traditional culture". This perception is essentializing the people by neglecting the historical political and economic changes and the integration of the reindeer herders into tribute and trade relations with Chinese and Russian authorities. Only during the twentieth century, did the reindeer herders change from mobile hunters into socialist state employees and finally into attractive objects of a "traditional lifestyle". The focus on the "traditional reindeer herding culture" ignores that people have moved out of and back into taiga life and that only a few of the present-day reindeer herders have lived in the taiga all their lives. Most of them spent at least some years away in military service, to work in the fishery in Tsagaan Nuur, to acquire a higher education, or to labor in the timber factory in central Mongolia. The focus on the "reindeer herding culture" furthermore neglects that traditional subsistence was not based on reindeer herding alone but that mainly gathering roots, berries, nuts, and fishing and

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<sup>66</sup> Farkas in contrast showed the state farm as holding ordinary livestock.

<sup>67</sup> Renchinlhumbe shows an average of twenty-one heads of livestock per person, while the average per person is only seven heads of livestock in Tsagaan Nuur (census data of December 2002, provided by the administration in Mörön).

<sup>68</sup> The data are from December 2002 and were provided by Dashdorj from Tsagaan Nuur's administration, 24.06. 2003.

<sup>69</sup> The administration counts seventy families with both parents considered Tuva as "pure" Tsaatan; including those families with one parent considered Tuva, the Tsaatan/Dukha comprise 140 families or half of the population of Tsagaan Nuur *sum* (information provided by Dashdorj, 24. 06. 2003).

hunting had maintained subsistence. Moreover, the taiga dwellers had been involved in tribute relations and in commercial trade of sable furs to Russia and China for centuries (see Tatár 1991; Tseveen 1997 [1934]; Vainsthein 1980 [1972]). The Mongolian geographer Sühbaatar argues that not only socialist modernization threatened the traditional lifestyle but that also depleting hunting resources motivated the people to move out of the taiga. Finally, the focus on the “Dukha” neglects the fact that until the early twentieth-century reindeer herding was not related to a particular ethnic group with a distinct name but that it was a common economic strategy for people living in the taiga borderland to hold some reindeer for hunting.

After the meeting of the Totem Peoples’ Project in the Eastern Taiga camp, my guide Davaanyam and I went on to visit the other camp of the Eastern Taiga and the shaman Tsend. However, we missed the way, did not find the other camp, and finally proceeded to Tengis. The next day we were lead over the flooding Tengis River to a hayfield to meet with Gombo, the husband of Tsendelii and the informal leader of the Eastern Taiga group. Gombo liked to talk about the life of his ancestors and his own earlier life as a salaried reindeer herder. When I told him about Plumley’s visit and the joint meeting, Gombo showed himself thankful for Plumley’s help. However, he said that Plumley was mainly concerned about the reindeer. For himself, Gombo said, the most important thing was not the reindeer but to find work for the young people and to increase the living standard of the people.

### **Ambivalent relationship to tourism**

Anthropologists and NGO activists engaged in the support of the reindeer herders and the preservation of their “traditional culture” are in a competition with each other and in an ambivalent relationship to tourism. The increasing number of foreign visitors compete for access to the few reindeer herders and their trust; furthermore, they compete for the authority of representation. Wheeler (1999: 65) mentioned that the organizations appeared to race to implement their “Save-the-Reindeer-People” project first.<sup>70</sup> In particular, anthropologists and support organizations strive for a privileged access and trust relationship to the reindeer herders. In this context I perceive the reintroduction of the term “Dukha” and the claim that it is the self-denomination of the reindeer herders as a delineating strategy to hold less professional visitors at bay. Anthropologists and support organizations claim an insider position and exclude tourists who use the alleged misnomer Tsaatan. I view this delineation practice as disciplinary boundary maintenance between anthropology, applied anthropology, journalism, and tourism in a time when

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<sup>70</sup> Besides Plumley Totem Peoples’ Preservation Project, further projects are for example the Itgel foundation (<http://www.itgel.org/reindeer.htm>; 21.02. 2007) or the Italian project “SOS Taigana” (<http://www.soyombo.it/pages/taiganold.htm>; 21.02. 2007).

anthropologists no longer have privileged access to “the field”. However, the distinction becomes blurred as foreign tourist companies increasingly adopt the name Dukha.

Anthropologists and support organizations usually perceive tourists as a threat to the culture of the Dukha, assuming similar negative consequences of tourism elsewhere. Wheeler (1999: 65) for example wrote: “As it is evident in other parts of the world, the tourism industry will inevitably alter the face of Dukha society. With these increasing intrusions into their lives, it will be difficult for the Dukha to fully maintain their uniqueness, the very trait that brings the tourists.” Plumley argued that the Dukha are exploited by tourism, that they earn only the “tail of the dog”. The taiga inhabitants earn limited income by providing horses to bring tourists to their camps, by selling carved souvenirs, and, in particular the households in the Western Taiga, have recently started to request money for taking pictures. Plumley proposed that the Dukha should assume responsibility and become tourist managers to have a better stake in the tourism business.



*Photograph 42: American tourists in a tepee in the Western taiga (16.07. 2004).*

The concern about the negative consequences of tourism was also addressed by the Canadian journalist Allan Coukell with Oyunbadam and her husband Erdenee described above. The journalist asked about the couple’s attitude towards Enhtuya living with reindeer by the lake to attract tourists. The journalist was astonished to hear that the couple intended to follow Enhtuya’s example and to move to the lake. However, other taiga inhabitants jealously complained about Enhtuya, claiming that she showed the tourists a “fake life” and that she was holding potential visitors off from attempting the exhausting journey to the taiga. When asked about the social impacts of tourism some taiga inhabitants admitted that they compete for the access to tourists and income by tourism and that conflicts arose now and then, within a camp or between the two groups. While hunting

game is shared among the camp dwellers according to tradition, tourism income is gathered privately.

While NGO organizations and anthropologists are concerned about the negative impacts of tourism on the Dukha culture, the Mongolian government and its tourist initiative advertise the Tsaatan to international tourism markets. International tourism is perceived as an economic development strategy and goes along with the implementation of national parks. Lake Hövsgöl is one of the primary sites of tourism and shows numerous tourist camps by the western shore of the lake, whereas in the adjacent Shishget depression tourist infrastructure is only meagerly developed and embraces a few tourist camps only. The lake and its surrounding mountain ranges are integrated into two adjoining parks, the “Hövsgöl Lake National Park” built in 1992, and the “Hor’dol Sar’dag Strictly Protected Area” established in 1997. The Mongolian government nominated the area as “Hövsgöl Lake Tsaatan shamanistic landscape” for the Unesco Heritage list in 2002.<sup>71</sup> The nomination combines the three major attractions of the wider area for an international audience: the lake, the reindeer herders, and the shamans. The practical challenge is that – besides the family of Enhtuya and Dүjii – neither shamans nor reindeer herders live on the lake’s shore. The lake is separated from the Shishget depression by high mountain ranges; the distance to the reindeer herders is three hundred kilometers by car and roughly two hundred kilometers by horse.

To bring the three attractions together, the national tourist initiative organizes tourist events with the contribution of shamans and reindeer herders by the lake’s shore.<sup>72</sup> The two events I came across were organized by public administrations together with tourist companies; in the second event, Mongolian scholars were also engaged. In February 2003, I attended the “Ice Festival” on the frozen lake. The two-day-long festival included games, wrestling, skating, a horse sledge race, and was attended by a Swedish skater group. Two reindeer herders from the Eastern Taiga, J. Bat and Gombo, visited the event; they came all the way down in deep snow just to show their reindeer at the festival. The shaman Baldandorj from Harmai shamanized to honor Dalai Eej, Lake Mother: he carried out a ritual by jaw harp in the afternoon, and in the night he shamanized with drum and armor. However, his meticulously prepared seance got out of control as an increasing number of people entered the *ger*, among them many drunks who almost brought the *ger* down. His *ongod*, the shaman explained after the seance, were angry with the mess and refused to contact him properly. Strikingly, the Swedish skaters did not attend his seance.

<sup>71</sup> The “Hövsgöl Lake Shamanistic Landscape” was put on the tentative list in 1996 and it was accepted as a nomination in 2002 (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/938>; <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/periodicreporting/cycle01/section1/mn.pdf>; accessed 26. 02. 2007).

<sup>72</sup> See the official tourism website of the Ministry of Road, Transport and Tourism (<http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn>; accessed 23.02. 2007).





Photograph 43: The shaman Baldandorj shamanizing by jaw harp during the “Ice Festival” on the frozen Lake Hövsgöl (27.02. 2003).



Photograph 44: A horse race on the frozen Lake Hövsgöl (28.02. 2003).

In the following summer, the “Visit Mongolia 2003” governmental tourism initiative organized a five-day trip to lake Hövsgöl, including Mongolian scholars informing about shamanism, and as a highlight the performances of two female shamans in the night. Although almost no foreign tourists participated in the whole tour, the seances of the shamans Batbayar and the old Byenda, staged at the same time in close proximity, attracted several hundred foreign and domestic visitors.<sup>73</sup> The next day, the tour proceeded with the biggest Mongolian ship “Sühbaatar” to meet with some reindeer herders and further

<sup>73</sup> This seance in early July 2003 was probably the last public performance of Batbayar *udgan*. She was a Darhad shaman originating from Tsagaan Nuur who became one of the best-known shamans in Ulaanbaatar (see Chapter 7). Byenda/Byambazogt was a then seventy-year-old female shaman from Ulaan Uul, who moved to her daughter’s in Mörön in 2003.

shamans further up on the lake's shore. When I arrived at that place in the evening, the invited shamans Baldandorj and Ganzorig had already left; they had been brought away by car to shamanize in one of the tourist camps. The reindeer herders returned to the taiga the next morning. With such events the Mongolian government stages Lake Hövsgöl as "Tsaatan shamanistic landscape" for an international audience. The reindeer herders and the shamans of the Shishget area are thereby framed into a global discourse of nature protection performed for tourists.

The governmental initiative to develop tourism is not the only one to stage Lake Hövsgöl as "shamanistic landscape". In summer 2005, the "Roaring Hooves" music festival was held on Lake Hövsgöl highlighting the performances of shamans. "Roaring Hooves" is an international music festival which aims to join "traditional Mongolian music with contemporary music from all over the world" and has been held in Mongolia annually since 1999.<sup>74</sup> On the video "*Vom Blauen Himmel*" (Wulff 2005/2006) about the festival on Lake Hövsgöl, one could recognize the shamans Yura from Ulaan Uul, Nergüi from Harmai, Ganzorig from the Western Taiga, and Baljir from Dood Nuur/Ulaanbaatar participating in the event and giving interviews.<sup>75</sup> The video showed a collective ritual of shamans that was headed by the "chiefly" shaman Byambadorj from Ulaanbaatar (see Chapter 7).

Ironically, the only family who lives by the lake's shore and successfully performs the label "Lake Hövsgöl Tsaatan shamanistic landscape" is deliberately excluded from organized events. Enhtuya lived close to the places where the events I attended were staged and it would have been easy to let her participate at the Ice Festival or the shamanism-tour. However, Enhtuya is a thorn in the side of the administration of the national parks. In summer 2004, I visited Enhtuya together with her French shaman disciple Corine Sombrun. At the park entrance in Hatgal, the rangers advised us not to visit Enhtuya and they explained that almost nobody visited her that year. When I asked about the reasons for this the rangers told me those arguments against her that I had heard before; that the reindeer would not belong to the lake and that the family would cause damage to the fauna and flora of the area. In the following days, the visitors at Enhtuya's were as numerous as in the previous seasons.

### **Local practices of boundary maintenance**

Starting from the distinction between Darhad and Tsaatan/Tuva shamanism I have discussed in detail the very discursive delineation of the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha. I showed that the socialist attention towards the Darhad was shaped by the Mongolian adaptation of the Soviet nationality politics and that Badamhatan's monograph made the

<sup>74</sup> See the website of the organization, <http://www.roaringhooves.com> (16.08. 2006).

<sup>75</sup> The film is described on <http://www.mongoleifilm.de> (accessed 26.02. 2007).



Darhad into a model of a “backward” *yastan*. Thereby, the people and the area that had been part of Tannu-Urianhai until the early twentieth century were made unambiguously Mongolian. The central feature characterizing the Darhad was the shamans amongst them. In postsocialism, the attention of foreign visitors who have gained almost unlimited access to Mongolia as a field for activities shifted to the two small groups of reindeer herders living in the taiga areas of Tsagaan Nuur *sum*. The reindeer herders are no longer perceived as backward but now they are celebrated for their traditional lifestyle close to nature. With the shift in attention the old self-designation of the people from Eastern Tannu-Urianhai was reintroduced to name the Mongolian reindeer herders in ethnic terms. I will end this chapter with a short glimpse on how locals practice the delineation between Darhad and Tsaatan/Tuva/Dukha. As I have done my fieldwork mainly with steppe pastoralists, my account mainly reflects those perspectives.

The most obvious issue is that local people perceive a boundary between the Tuva/Tsaatan and the Darhad. Despite the maintenance of the boundary, the distinction is constantly blurred in conversations and practice. A Darhad man may talk about relatives in the taiga, a Darhad shaman may receive Urianhai ancestor *ongod* talking in Tuvan during the seance, a Tuva Tsaatan may disclose his parents as Darhad, and a Darhad shaman may himself call a *taigihan*. Boundaries are positioned by shifting criteria of affiliation: people may invoke traditional metaphors of exogamic clans (“we reindeer herders have been marrying women from outside of our clan *ovog*”) as they may refer to the socialist nationalities as endogamic units (“our children have to marry Darhad because all Tuva are now relatives of each other”) as they may use recent ideas of “ethnic purity”. The administration of Tsagaan Nuur *sum* for example identifies seventy families as “pure” (*tsever*) Tsaatan/Tuva (viewing both husband and wives as Tsaatan). The families with one parent being Darhad/Mongol are termed *holimog*, “mixed”. Including the “mixed families”, 140 families, or half of the *sum* population, are perceived as Tuva/Tsaatan.<sup>76</sup> The identity of children is constituted dependent on the context and the interest. The shaman Moko, the child of a Tuva reindeer herder from the Eastern Taiga and a Darhad woman, considers himself as Tuva. However, he is rejected by some taiga reindeer herders to be a “genuine” Tuva shaman. When Moko showed me his certificate of the shamans’ association in Ulaanbaatar that displayed him as Darhad shaman, he complained about this assignation as being a mistake. The shaman Ganzorig however, whose parents moved from the Tere K l area to the Ulaan Taiga in Mongolia during the 1950s and who lives in the Western Taiga, seemed not to be bothered about the assignation “Darhad shaman” in his certificate. After all, the certificate is in particular useful in Ulaanbaatar where it is advantageous to be perceived as Darhad shaman. Of course, the distinction between Tuva/Tsaatan and Darhad is not the only social boundary people maintain. Depending on the context, people may

<sup>76</sup> I do not know how the administration categorized the parent’s belonging. The information was provided by Dashdorj, 24.06. 2003.

distinguish between the Eastern and the Western Taiga group, or they may put the whole population of the area in opposition to the Halha Mongolians in the south.

Plumley complained that the Dukha had a bad local recognition and that for example their children were exposed to discrimination in the local school in Tsagaan Nuur. I cannot judge the claim of discrimination of the children; however, I agree that the local discourses about the Tsaatan maintain socialist connotations and approach the Tsaatan as even “more backward” and as “less civilized” than the Darhad. This denigration is related to general concerns that the people of the area would fail to be *soyoltoi*, well mannered, “cultured”, or “civilized”. Characteristically, the rudest way to disparage the Tsaatan/Tuva is to imply that they practice incest. The contempt echoes a hysterical concern with “inbreeding” and mental retardation of present-day Mongolian nationalism (Bulag 1998).<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the accusation seizes the reindeer herders’ concern about the inbreeding of their reindeer and adheres it to the people.

Darhad are in general not interested in the reindeer-herding lifestyle. Unless they have friends or relatives in the taiga camps they usually do not visit the reindeer herders. People are interested in traveling to the southern centers but not in going to the margins in the north. Often, Darhad men visit the reindeer herders for the first time when they are hired as tourist guides. In this case they often themselves have to ask for the way. An elderly guide from Hatgal showed himself delighted after his first visit to the Eastern Taiga and emphasized that the people were very nice. My guides Davaanyam and his brother Buyanölzii also visited the taiga camps for the first time during our journeys. Thereafter, they obviously enjoyed entertaining people with descriptions of the reindeer and the taste of the fatty reindeer milk. In sum, the reindeer herders are equated with the taiga as the wild margin and they are referred to the social margins.<sup>78</sup>

### **Darhad “Huular” shamans as former Tuva shamans**

Scholarly representations distinguish between “Darhad shamanism” and “Dukha shamanism”. Is this distinction also maintained in the local area? Local people may perceive the Darhad shamans and the Tuva ones as representatives of distinct traditions as well as merging them into one tradition that is inherited from joint Urianhai ancestors. Now and then I heard that the Darhad had inherited shamanic practice from the Tuva

<sup>77</sup> Mongolian academic, political, and popular discourses perceive incest and mental retardation as a threat to the strength of the “Mongolian gene pool”. The problem of incest is associated with widespread promiscuity and primarily identified as a problem of the Gobi areas which show high rates of female-headed households. However, according to a statistic cited by Bulag (1998: 111) showing the “distribution of mental retardation” of the year 1990, the percentage of “mentally retarded persons” in relation to the whole population was obviously higher in Hövsgöl than in the Gobi provinces.

<sup>78</sup> The association of the taiga with “the wild” is also made by scholars writing about the neighboring Toj/Tozhu, Carruthers (1914), Vainshtein (1980 [1972]) and Donahoe (2004). The authors translated the term taiga with “the wild”.

shamans. Or people identify the “Huular” shamans as Tuva shamans and at the same time call them Darhad shamans. People know that “Huular” is a Turkic term (lit. “swan”) deriving from the western areas of the former Tannu-Urianhai administration. Like the scholars Badamhatan (1965), Diószegi (1963), and Pürev (2002), people perceive the “Huular” shamans as the link between the Tuva/Tsaatan and the Darhad. Adequately to this assignation, the majority of Huular shamans live at the borders of the taiga, in the valleys of the rivers Hög, Harmai, Hogrogo, and Tengis.

When people emphasize a distinction between Darhad and Tsaatan shamans, they usually focus on the shamans’ power: in this case, the Tuva/Tsaatan shamans are invoked as more powerful than the Darhad shamans. The superior powers of Tuva shamans are identified in the Taiga shamans as being related directly to powers in nature, while Darhad shamans are associated with ancestors’ power. As I have argued already in Chapter 7, the wild margins are seen as a source to power. With these associations local people reflect Hamayon’s (1990) model distinguishing between hunting and pastoral shamanism. Hamayon associates hunting shamanism with an alliance logic, the symbolic exchange with the game giving spirit; in contrast, she equates pastoralist shamanism with a descent logic and the reproduction of clans.<sup>79</sup>

However, the association of the taiga shamans with nature spirits in opposition to the association of Darhad shamans with ancestors seems to be rather new: photographs displaying the shaman Ak Sal, the father of the taiga shaman Goostoi, show the shaman’s back decorated with the image of a backbone, the symbol of patrilinearity. According to Diószegi (1962), backbones and further representations of the human body were typical symbols of shamans of eastern Tuva and Hövsgöl taiga shamans distinguishing them from the shamans among the steppe pastoralists in Tyva. Although the suits of armor of present-day Darhad and Tuva shamans in the Shishget depression look similar to the one of the former taiga shaman Ak Sal, the symbolic bone is absent on the present-day gowns; it is absent on the armor of his two sons Goostoi and Ganzorig and on Darhad shamans’ gowns as well.<sup>80</sup> In 1960, the symbol of the bone associated the taiga shamans with patrilineal reproduction – now, the Darhad shamans are associated with ancestors, while the taiga shamans are associated with nature and “the wild”.

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<sup>79</sup> Drawing on Hamayon’s model, Dulam and Even (1994) perceived the Darhad shamans as dominated by the human attributes of pastoral shamanism but that they show also numerous animal features belonging to the model of hunting shamanism.

<sup>80</sup> The two faded monochrome photographs showed the shaman in his gown, once from the front and once from the back, in a small clearing at noon. The picture showed the shaman alone, without a ritual site or other people nearby. Obviously, the shaman wore armor and drum to pose for the photographer only. Goostoi showed me the photographs in August 2003.



*Photograph 45: The ovoos on the Hogrogo pass, looking down towards the village of Tsagaan Nuur (07.08. 2004).*

## Beyond the question of “authenticity”

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*Authenticity is a main theme shaping local, national, and international discourses on “shamanism”. In all three arenas, the question whether shamans are “genuine” is of central concern. While locals assess the magical power of shamans, scholars focus on cultural authenticity. I conclude my thesis by focusing on the processes that constitute authenticity. I argue that only in a context of general doubts over the authenticity of shamanism will individual shamans be selected as “genuine”. Furthermore, I hypothesize that the questioning of the authenticity of shamans is a constituting feature of “shamanism”.*

During the one-week documentary film festival “*Regards comparés Mongols*” presented in the *Salle Rouche* of the *Musée de l’Homme* in Paris in October 2005, a day was dedicated to shamans’ practices in Mongolia and neighboring regions since their opening in 1990. I compare the two last documentaries shown that evening to develop my arguments about the production of authenticity.

The film “*Esprit nouveau*”, produced by the French anthropologist Charles Stépanoff (2005), focuses on the “new shamans” in Kyzyl, the capital of Tyva. The film was announced in the program with “*À Tuva, le chamanisme est pratiquement oublié. Quelques chamanes issus de l’intelligentsia soviétique s’organisent et reçoivent leur clients*”.<sup>1</sup> The film opens with a sequence somewhere in the countryside, showing an old woman in her home who recalls that her mother’s shamans’ gown was burnt when she was still a child, that not even a single *eren* (shamans’ spirit) was left to her, and that she remembers nothing of her mother’s shamanizing. This opening contrasts with the film’s main focus on the contemporary urban shamans. The spectators are led to a shamans’ center in the capital Kyzyl where they observe shamans wearing colorful gowns waiting for clients or treating customers. Later on, a group of shamans standing in full armor in a hall welcome a group of arriving Westerners with their drumming. During this reception, the filmmaker interviews Kenin-Lopsan, who is a scholar and the author of “*Tuvan Shamanic folklore*” (1995), and at the same time is a dominating figure in the promotion of shamanism in Tyva and heads three shamans’ associations in Kyzyl (Stépanoff 2004). The interviewer’s questions are translated into Tuvan, while the old man answers in Russian, speaking with the authoritative habitus of a Soviet apparatchik. He invites tourists to visit Tyva and demands that the rich Westerners support his shamanism organization. A further impressive sequence of the film shows the visitors holding drums in their hands, moving and drumming around local people sitting at desks. The shamans portrayed, both the urban

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.comite-film-ethno.net/regards/mongole-index.htm> (accessed 02.05, 2007); <http://www.slavika.com/article249.html> (accessed 02.05. 2007).

shamans from Kyzyl as well as the visiting ones, are presented as actors in a commercialized performance staged in the name of “tradition” (Stépanoff 2004).

Stépanoff’s documentary was followed by a film by his French colleague Laetitia Merli (2005), “La Quête du son”. According to the program information, Merli’s documentary introduces the “[i]nitiation chamanique de Corinne, musicienne française, auprès de la chamane tsaatane, Enkhetuya. L’anthropologue suit le processus initiatique de la jeune femme qui nous confie ses doutes avec autodérision.” The film starts with the French woman’s horseback journey to the shaman’s camp in a remote mountainous location and her cordial reception by Enhtuya and her family. The film portrays the warm-hearted relationship between Corine and Enhtuya and their complicitous communication by gestures and with the few words they know in each other’s language. The spectators follow Corine’s participation in everyday chores: fetching chopped wood, cooking, milking reindeer, or securing the tepee during a snowstorm.



*Photograph 46: Enhtuya, her husband Dūjii, and her French disciple Corine (04.07. 2004).*

The audience witnesses the preparation of the disciple’s paraphernalia and her first testing of the deerskin drum and takes part in the lessons the shaman Enhtuya teaches her disciple. Provided with a translation of Enhtuya’s elaborations in the subtitles, the audience has a better chance to follow them than the shamans’ disciple, who, due to her lack of Mongolian, seems to grasp only a vague outline of the lessons. Only once, the film shows a mediated conversation between the two women: a tourist guide, who initially had led Corine to Enhtuya, translates between the shaman and her disciple. Longer interviews of the film-maker with Corine reveal her doubts and self-irony about being in the process of becoming a shaman. Finally, the camera records Corine’s first seance with the new drum and armor. The poorly lit and blurred sequence alludes to the mystery of a shaman’s seance

and at the same time obscures the answer to the question whether the French disciple can “really” enter the mystery and become initiated.

The point I aim to make by highlighting and juxtaposing these two documentaries is that the two films, taken together, produce a typical feature of the discourses on “shamanism”: they produce the authenticity of a single shaman against the background of the general questioning of the authenticity of shamanism. Stépanoff’s film enacts the undermining of the authenticity of contemporary shamanism: it shows the shamans in the urban shamans’ center as commercialized “neoshamans” detached from an earlier “traditional” shamanism. In contrast, Merli’s film stages Corine’s encounter with Enhtuya as an authentic experience and the shaman Enhtuya as an example of “traditional” shamanism. Interestingly, both films address the visits of Westerners in the traditional areas of shamanism, where they encounter “new” postsocialist shamans. Nevertheless, the different perspectives of the films provoke contrasting impressions: Stépanoff’s documentary about Kyzyl shows shamans in groups in an urban context, meeting with a group of tourists. Neither the tourists nor the local shamans are portrayed as individuals or are interviewed. Merli’s film portrays Corine and Enhtuya as two individuals with names and gives them voices. Furthermore, the remote mountainous location of Enhtuya’s camp authenticates her as a “traditional” shaman. I argue that the staging of this contrast shapes the discourses on contemporary “shamanism” in Siberia and Inner Asia in general.

That the affirmation of a single shaman’s authenticity in the context of general doubts is not related to the individual shaman is demonstrated by Merli’s documentary. While the film stages Enhtuya as an “authentic” shaman, her authenticity is highly contested in local arenas, as I have discussed in Chapter 7. One of the main reasons for this contestation is Enhtuya’s successful engagement in the tourist business. Some of the tourists visiting her likewise question Enhtuya’s authenticity – because she receives tourists like themselves. However, other Mongolian and international tourists seek her assistance or just enjoy her performance. My purpose is neither to support the denial of Enhtuya’s authenticity nor to attack my colleague for presenting her as authentic when she is contested. The example shows, on the contrary, that authenticity is not an “authentic essence” of individuals or objects but is socially produced and dependent on the particular contexts.

### **The production of authenticity in local and scholarly discourses**

I argue that authenticity exists neither before nor outside the questioning of it – only when it is at stake does authenticity become a concern. It seems that the quest for authenticity emerges mainly in a context of transformation due to modernization and in particular on the stages where “traditional culture” is presented to tourist audiences (MacCannell 1976; 1992; Chambers 2000; Bruner 2005). This is also the case for contemporary shamans: it is

mainly the new urban shamans and their performance of rituals for tourists that induces anthropologists to cast doubts on the authenticity of present-day shamans' practices. In this context of general doubts, individual shamans are selected as representing "genuine" shamanism. Richard Handler (1986: 2) argued that "authenticity" is a cultural construct of the modern "Western" world: "Our search for authentic cultural experience – for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional – says more about us than about others." Handler's statement unmasks not only a tourists' concern but also the anthropologists' search for the authentic shaman. In the following, I first recapitulate how in Mongolia itself similar processes of authentication are at work and then I discuss the parallels found in scholarly discourses.

Local and national discourses concerned with the "genuineness" of shamans primarily associate authenticity with the shamans' magical capacities – or with its absence. I have shown in Chapter 5 that the shaman's trance is a crucial point in the production of a shaman's power. By performing the seance and in particular by falling into the cataleptic trance – when being knocked down to the floor, lying motionless and without consciousness (*uhaangüi*) for a while – the shaman achieves (or fails) to persuade her audience of her capability to interact with powerful spirits. Nevertheless, even after a successful, impressive performance, clients and other participants may doubt the efficiency of the treatment; they may question whether there had really been spirits revealing their insights or whether the shaman had only been role-playing. Similarly, scholars often consider whether a shaman undergoes a "genuine" or a "deep" trance to assess a person as a culturally authentic shaman (for example Eliade 1974 [1951]). In the scholarly discourses, it is less the presence of spirits than the state of consciousness that marks the shaman's authenticity.

In Chapters 6 and 7 I discussed how Darhad shamans establish their reputation in the context of controversial discourses praising their power as well as questioning them as "market economy" shamans. With the general reassessment of presocialist traditions during the 1990s, shamans became celebrated as part of the national cultural heritage. This opened opportunities and still encourages Darhad persons to perform as shamans and to accumulate clients, in particular in the urban centers. To dispute the "genuineness" of shamans, local people in the Shishget depression question whether contemporary shamans are really in contact with powerful spirits, they deny that shamans resume the tradition, and they criticize shamans for their travels to town insinuating that they pursue economic interests only. The overall denigration of contemporary shamans nevertheless allows Darhad people to select an individual as a "genuine" shaman and to request their services. Similar rumors judging the magical power of individual shamans spread among (potential) urban clients; sometimes these assessments are published in journals. Furthermore, I have shown how the past is used to constitute and contest the shamans' legitimacy. Shamans use



the reference to ancestors who are remembered as shamans to support their claim to shamanism. In turn, neighbors tell legends invoking the magical capabilities of the shamans of old to question the contemporary ones (Chapter 8).

Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (2007) discusses similar processes of doubting the capacities of Buryat shamans in Bayan Uul in Dornod province in northeastern Mongolia. She argues that the skepticism is related to the socialist state’s repression and disruption of the shamanic tradition and, recently, to the introduction of the market economy: “Most Buryats are convinced that the socialist suppression of religion undermined the tradition and eliminated ‘real’ shamans and that the market economy has produced shamans who are not chosen by their origin spirits but are motivated by money” (Buyandelgeriyn 2007: 133). The people’s distrust of the shamans’ capabilities and the consequent testing of several shamans contributes to the increase in the number of shamans, which at the same time is criticized as an outcome of the market economy. The author concludes that the state violence of socialist days still shapes the politics of shamanic practice today.

Among both the Buryat and the Darhad, there is widespread doubt whether contemporary shamans are able to properly perpetuate the tradition and to incorporate the magical power of shamans of olden days. In similar ways, scholarly discourses distinguish contemporary practitioners from “traditional shamanism” – usually located prior to socialist antireligious policy in the early twentieth century. The “new shamans” emerging in shamans’ centers in the midst of capital cities are contrasted with historical shamans or with those in remote areas, who are perceived as being more traditional. Ulla Johansen (2001b; 2004), for example, compares present-day urban practitioners in Kyzyl not only with presocialist shamans but furthermore cites the Tuva shamans in the Shishget taiga mountains as a very rare example of “classic” shamanism. The author stresses that present-day “neoshamans” have developed international networks, go to international shamanistic conferences, and are influenced by a Michael Harner-style New Age shamanism as well as by anthropologists’ accounts and museum exhibits of traditional shamans’ paraphernalia. The new shamans in Kyzyl, she criticizes, stage “public folklore festivals with persons dancing, drumming and singing in the daytime amidst a crowd of tourists and not-too-critical anthropologists busy making their photos and films” (Johansen 2001b: 299). She portrays Tuva shamans in the taiga borderlands of northern Mongolia as a rare example of “classic” shamanism because she imagines them as isolated from international contacts and as holding their seances at night and only for the members of their group. Johansen assigns “authentic shamanism” to the remote periphery – even though, as she regrets, she has not visited the shamans in the Shishget taiga herself. Three decades after Dean MacCannell’s *“The Tourist”* (1976), such an anthropological quest for the authentic still assumes a distinction between a front-stage with performances for tourists and a hidden back stage where “authentic culture” is lived. This perspective relegates tourists, the anthropologists’

“naïve other”, to the confines of the front stage and claims the “authentic” backstage for the anthropological self – revealing the old anthropological romantic “longing for a lost authenticity” (Gable and Handler 1996: 568).

During the Cold War, shamanism in Siberia and Inner Asia was represented by Soviet field studies as an “archaic tradition of the past”. Expelled from the field and from the contact with shamans, Eliade (1974 [1951]) and, at the end of the very period, Hamayon (1990), authoritatively defined the essence of “shamanism”. Hamayon replaced Eliade’s spiritual “technique of ecstasy” with a sociological approach, associating the shaman with the symbolic reproduction of the traditional community. Eliade has in the meantime become the main authorizing source for the New Age popularizations of a “universal” shamanism, while Hamayon has become one of the exponents of the “purist faction” which opposes the appropriation and extension of the term by “shamanologists” and esoteric New Age movements (Kocku von Stuckrad 2003: 123; 2005: 123).

The new shamans emerging on public stages in the areas of “classical shamanism” in Siberia and Inner Asia during the 1990s confound the disciplinary delimitations. The postsocialist shamans present themselves as followers of an old tradition, but they have also completed secular educations and careers, have read the earlier ethnographic accounts, and present their own concepts of shamanism in publications and at scholarly conferences (see for example Balzer 1993a; Zhukovskaya 2000). Moreover, the postsocialist shamans operate with models proposed by the universalized New Age shamanism and talk about their spirits as “bio-energies” or “auras”. As Piers Vitebsky (1995: 184) recognized early on, the new shamans blur the distinctions between “traditional” shamanistic societies and neo-shamanist movements: “For shamanism, as with any other kind of local knowledge, the essence of globality today is that it belongs both in the past of remote tribes, and in the present of industrial subcultures. But there are further twists: the shamanic revival is now reappearing in the *present* of some of these remote tribes – only now these are neither remote nor tribal” (emphasis in the original).

By referring to old traditions and integrating New Age ideas, the new shamans in the “traditional” areas of Siberia and Inner Asia distort not only the delineation between “traditional” shamanism and “neo-shamanism”, they moreover challenge the disciplinary boundaries that anthropology established against New Age, tourism, and “shaman-ology”. Thereby, the new shamans in Siberia and Inner Asia deprive anthropology of the privileged access to the “object” of shamanism. The cooperation of the postsocialist shamans’ associations in Kyzyl, headed by the former museum curator Kenin-Lopsan, with the shamanistic foundation of Michael Harner (who was once an anthropologist), is only one prominent example of the redrawing of the boundaries. The new shamans’ integration into the performances of ethnicity and nationality may irritate some anthropologists; however, these performances only reflect the long history of scholarly imaginations of Siberia as

“shamanistic landscape” and the distinction of ethnic shamanistic traditions throughout the twentieth-century literature. Whereas the “not-too-critical” scholars (Johansen 2001b) celebrate the recent flowering of shamans’ practices, others disapprove of the present-day practices as no longer representing “traditional shamanism” and subsume them under the term “neo-shamanism”, which is usually applied to the universal New Age shamanism. A distinct approach views the new shamans’ “invention of tradition” as a field worth studying (Hoppál 1992b; Merli 2006).

### **Questioning of shamans’ magical capabilities in the past**

It is no surprise that several decades of socialist antireligious policy and modernization and, further, the recent marketization have boosted skepticism among local people as well as among scholars. However, I seriously doubt whether the questioning of shamans’ authenticity is a new phenomenon characterizing contemporary shamans’ practices and “shamanism”. If one blames socialist antireligious policy for undermining the legitimation of shamans, one has to ask how the social status of shamans was before socialism. How was the authenticity of shamans perceived during the centuries-long Buddhist and Orthodox Christian proselytization and antagonization of shamans? The following brief summary of presocialist accounts shows that also in the period of what we today call “traditional shamanism”, locals questioned the “genuineness” and power of shamans.

In the description of a shaman’s ritual among the Alar Buryat conducted in summer 1926, Sanjeev (Sandschejew 1928: 547) called many of the guests “antishamanistically minded”, participating in a shaman’s ceremony out of curiosity and for amusement only. Znamenski (1999: 227-8) discusses how in the southwestern Altai at the turn to the twentieth century the shamans lost their social power due to the influx of the Russians and their missionaries; locals complained at that time that there were no “more strong shamans” left and denigrated those shamans still practicing as deceivers. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Banzarov (1981 [1846]) distinguished in his outline of Mongol shamanism between “genuine” and “false” shamans, or “charlatans”, accusing the latter of shamanizing for their own benefit without being qualified. Although he belittled shamans’ practices from a rationalist point of view as self-deluding superstitions of the past, Banzarov (1981 [1846]: 82) assessed that “there [are] today too real and false shamans”. This reference to his present of the mid-nineteenth century is interesting because the general perspective of the article is a historical one and Banzarov concluded his article by claiming that “shamanism was eradicated in the seventeenth century” (ibid.: 89).

Bawden (1987: 190) discussed a report of an English missionary attending a seance among the Xori Buryat in 1822. The missionary estimated in his report that the locals showed an ambivalent attitude towards shamans. He was told that some local people no

longer believed in the shamans' "comedy" and that they had no respect at all for the shamans amongst them. In particular the local population only reluctantly submitted livestock for the shamans' sacrifices; nevertheless, they were afraid of being disobedient to the orders of old shamans.

In contrast to these reports which mention the denigration of shamans in brief remarks only, Shirokogoroff (1935: 376-402) discussed in length the ambiguous economy of reputation of the shamans he encountered in the early twentieth century. He described shamans among different Tungus and Manchu groups as being in a precarious social position that depended on the continuous appreciation of the clan members. Although shamans were respectfully addressed by their contemporaries, they often lived in social isolation and were exposed to suspicion and a generally hostile attitude. According to Shirokogoroff, recognition depended on the shaman's individuality and their personal success in reinforcing the connections to clients, the impressiveness of the shaman's performance, and the effectiveness of their treatment. Although some shamans obtained influential positions and the reputation of a shaman could even extend beyond their own clan, shamans could not become leaders of clans. Shirokogoroff cited examples of people assessing a shaman's seance in negative terms, and he commented that when a shaman's work was assessed as being inefficient, he lost his position gradually because people no longer asked for the shaman's services. Among the Manchu, Shirokogoroff reported, shamanism was considered as nonsense, as a great expenditure without effect, a sign of backwardness. Shirokogoroff (1935: 383, 379) emphasized "the almost tragic figure of this important member of Tungus society" and considered the shaman's profession as "martyrdom": executing a difficult task without certainty, burdened with responsibility, exposed to poverty and continuously fighting against the hostility of clan members and outsiders. The author related the opposition and hostility towards shamans to the groups' internal dynamics, to a general disintegration of the clans, and to external influences of Chinese, Russians and Mongols and the Buddhist and Christian doctrines favored by them.

The prevailing perception among the groups visited by Shirokogoroff was that shamanism was in a state of decline: "In all these groups there is a strong belief, that formerly the shamans were much more skilful than at present", he (1935: 392) reported. Shirokogoroff (*ibid.*: 282) who – by referring to the example of the Darhad – hypothesized that shamanism was stimulated by Buddhism, showed an ambivalent stance towards the trajectory of decline. He rejected the view that earlier shamans had been more powerful and that shamanism was in decline during the time of his fieldwork. He interpreted the skeptical attitude towards shamans as a "natural phenomenon functioning as one of the elements of the mechanism for preservation of the existing ethnographical complex [...] and as an explanation of the natural dissatisfaction of the people with the existing state of the groups" (*ibid.*: 392). Shirokogoroff assessed shamanism as a living phenomenon that was

constantly adapting to new circumstances. Nevertheless, he predicted that shamanism might disappear in some areas, as a result of the general disintegration of some groups in the future. Even though he rejected the claim of general decline at the time of his presence, Shirokogoroff expected that with the increasing influence of neighboring peoples and particularly due to communist education, antireligious policy, and modern medicine, the culture of the Tungus would increasingly disintegrate and shamanism would vanish.

### **Doubts about shamans’ authenticity as a constituting feature**

The cited historical sources demonstrate that the questioning of shamans’ practices as “genuine” or “authentic” is not at all a new phenomenon characteristic of postsocialism. Shirokogoroff’s detailed report reveals processes of authentication and contestation similar to those I describe for the present-day Darhad shamans. This means that the reference to the accounts of the early twentieth century as examples of a “traditional” or “classical” shamanism is exposed as nostalgia by a careful reading of the same sources. Instead of presuming historical shamanism as being “more authentic”, I argue that the doubts over the shamans’ magical capabilities and their cultural authenticity, both by locals and scholars, is a constituting feature of shamanism – at least in the historical contexts of overarching state rule, the presence of institutionalized religions, science, and professions competing in overcoming human suffering.

The present-day questioning of the authenticity of shamans can be conceptualized as a reconfiguration of the old paradigm of “degeneration”. Presocialist accounts already produced models of “shamanism” against the backdrop of their own perception of the “decline” of shamans’ practices (Stuckrad 2003). Today, it is no longer Buddhist and Orthodox Christian proselytization but rather socialist repression, the appropriation by esoteric “neo-shamanism”, and the recent marketization of shamans’ practices which are blamed for undermining the authenticity of shamanism. As before, skeptical perspectives questioning the “genuineness” of present-day practitioners intermingle with enthusiastic ones praising the resurgence of an “archaic” tradition. Although contradictory, the two perspectives are intertwined and reinforce each other. The identification of persons as shamans together with the expression of doubts over their genuineness produces manifold opportunities for the imagination of “shamanism”, while inopportune practices can be displaced as non-authentic. It is through the questioning of the authenticity of actual individual practitioners that shamanism as an “archaic thus authentic” tradition is constructed: encountered practitioners are viewed as “survivals” or “commodified” representatives of an earlier “genuine shamanism”. “Authentic shamanism” is identified as always being somewhere else, associated with the “traditional” past or the remote periphery. This conviction was most openly declared by Vilmos Diószegi in the introduction to his account about his journey “*Tracing Shamans in Siberia*” (1968 [1960]: 11):

My task explains also why have I always tried to reach the farthest, most hidden, secluded places, why have I hurried to the shelters and settlements concealed in the virgin forest. Therefore, the picture that this book may reflect is necessarily incomplete and does not characterize the Siberia of today, enlisting the forces of nature into its service, but partially. I am the chronicler of the ancient, disappearing or already extinct past life of this area.

Similarly to Diószegi, anthropologists today often seek the “genuine shamans” in the wild borderlands of the periphery. For an international and national audience, the “authentic” Mongolian shamanism is found in the periphery of northern Hövsgöl, among the Darhad and the Tsaatan/Dukha reindeer herders. In the Darhad area itself however, the “powerful” shamans are not found among their neighboring pastoralists in the Shishget depression but instead, more remotely, in the bordering taiga mountains or in the past. Thus, both scholarly and local discourses displace “genuine shamanism” to the premodern past or to the geographical margins.

I believe that I have made clear by my dissertation that I call for inverting the perspective from the concern with authenticity to the *analysis* of this concern: to study shamans’ practices in relation to the social, political, and historical contexts in which shamans interact and in which “shamanism” is made. Or, as Kocku von Stuckrad (2005: 124) puts it: “Consequently, modern shamanism should be addressed with a discursive model that integrates academic theorizing, the invention of tradition, the dynamics of contact, and the rhetoric of purity.”

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