

## Small Séances with a Great Nganasan Shaman

*Evgeny A. Helimsky and Nadezhda T. Kosterkina*

The characteristic features of Siberia – its vast, sparsely settled expanses, its small population and harsh climate – apply particularly to the region inhabited by the Nganasan people, the most northerly of Eurasia. Their language belongs to the Samoyed branch of the Uralian linguistic group. They live in isolation and in precarious living conditions on the Taimyr archipelago, dispersed over an immense territory (200,000 square kilometers) that they have settled extremely sparsely (the entire population seems to have hardly ever exceeded one thousand). This circumstance, which explains their relative social and economic stagnation, has also marked Nganasan culture, favoring the retention of specifically Siberian elements, notably the role of shamanism.

The Nganasan shaman, more than any other in Siberia, performs his duties to their maximum extent: the shaman here is a figure of authority<sup>1</sup>; simultaneously wiseman, priest, augur, physician, tutor, musician, singer, guardian of folklore, and improvisatory poet. Perhaps the smallness and dispersion of the Nganasan population has been compensated for by a concentration of traditions within a few persons (the ethnographic data suggest that at no time have there been more than five active shamans among the Nganasan). In addition, in their dealings with other groups the Nganasans are always represented by their shaman. Even in the years of greatest Soviet repression (1930–1960), when a good number of other Siberian peoples (Vogul, Ostiak, Selkup, Evenk, Nenets) resorted to concealing the identity and even existence of their shamans, the Nganasan shamans did not go into hiding and remained the principle informants for ethnographers working on

1. According to Middendorf's observations (1878: 670), the local population "was completely under the influence of the shaman."

2. Popov 1936, 1984; Dolgikh Fainberg 1960; Simchenko 1976; Gracheva 1981, 1983; and other works by the same authors.

the Taïmyr<sup>2</sup>, just as they had in the past.<sup>3</sup> The fact that it is no longer possible to assert that the shaman plays a central role in the villages of Ust'-Avam, Volotchanka, and Novaya is testimony to the profound changes undergone by the society as a whole (and unfortunately, these changes are probably irreversible).

In December 1989, Tubiaku Kosterkin, acknowledged by the Nganasans as their last true "great" shaman, died in an accident at the age of 68. Scion of the famous Kosterkin (Ngamtusue) shamanic dynasty,<sup>4</sup> Tubiaku openly led the life of a private cultivator of the tundra<sup>5</sup> (as a hunter, fisherman, and reindeer breeder) and also engaged in extensive shamanic activities. He was prosecuted by the local authorities for these activities and spent the end of the 1940s and early 1950s in prison. He was not directly accused of being a shaman but rather of receiving reindeer illegally as an honorarium for his services; however, by terming it an "ill use of a situation of service," the authorities acknowledged the social function of the shaman. And afterwards it seems that everyone – including the village's most prominent citizens – were careful to avoid being drawn into conflicts with him. In the last years of his life, after the death of his wife, Tubiaku ceased his public shamanic activities; he sold his costume (but only after removing the most important pendants, which he kept for himself) and his drum to the Dudinka Regional Museum, where they are now on display.<sup>6</sup> He retained several other objects that were important to him: an iron *ngoybidee* crown and a jacket from a Dolgan<sup>7</sup> shaman. These he used in séances conducted in his house in Ust'-Avam – the séances were of relatively short duration (lasting about two or three hours, while a true séance, especially for a very sick person, can last several days)

3. Tretiakov 1869, Middendorf 1878.

4. The works mentioned above extensively quote his father, Diukhode, who died at the beginning of the 1930s, his brother Deminime, who died in 1980, and Tubiaku himself. However, the purpose of this article is neither to repeat those works nor to analyze the shamanic tradition of the Kosterkin family.

5. Tubiaku never belonged to any collective economic structure, be it *kolkhoz* or *soukhoz*.

6. At the behest of the museum's director these accessories were on several occasions lent back to Tubiaku so that he could conduct demonstration séances – the last occurred in August 1988 when Tubiaku and several members of his family took part in The Folklore Festival of the Russian Peoples in Moscow. It is worth noting that these public demonstrations in no way constitute a profanation of the shamanic art in the eyes of the shaman or the other Nganasans: on the contrary, the presence of a large audience, even a foreign one, at a séance, only acts to reinforce the bonds linking this world with the world of supernatural forces.

7. A Tongus ethnic group that has been strongly influenced by Yakout culture.

and simple (without dancing or the beating of drums). Each year he held seasonal séances for family members (at the beginning and end of summer, and in midwinter); he also presided over special rites celebrating extraordinary events in the family or the arrival of guests from afar. Apparently, the aim of these small séances was more to preserve the shaman's ties to the spirits (that is to "drive" them) than to make them truly "work"; without his costume or drum, Tubiaku no longer tried to treat the seriously ill and even refused to satisfy the trivial requests of his entourage, such as finding a lost object. At the end of his life he frequently worked with ethnologists and philosophers who would travel to Ust'-Avam to talk with him (especially his daughter, co-author of this article). He preferred to exhibit his gift not in ritual duties but in his role as performer of epic *shitabi* tales, *dûrmi* myths and chants.<sup>8</sup>

In 1989 we were able to participate in two "small séances," recording and transcribing the words of the chants that are its essence.<sup>9</sup> We will limit ourselves here to defining the principle features of the séance and analyzing some of its elements.

*Shamanic spirits.* The heart of the small séance is the shaman's ability to embody various spirits. The small séance is without the theatrical elements that characterize the great séances – the solemn preparations, the drum beat, the dances and magic tricks. The spir-

8. In this connection he allowed the taping (sometimes in performance, sometimes in dictation) of a rich repertoire, performed with great mastery. It is a unique collection of Nganasan folklore. The recordings were made by N.T. Kosterkina, G.N. Gracheva (St. Petersburg), G.G. Grigorieva, N.V. Pluzhnikov and E.A. Helimsky (Moscow), O.E. Dobzhanskaya and Y. I. Sheykin (Novosibirsk). For a linguistic and musicological description of this original genre of euphemistic chant sung by Tubiaku Kosterkin, see, for example, Khelimsky 1988 and Dobzhanskaya 1988. This collection is the basis for a projected Nganasan volume in the series *Folkloric Monuments of Siberian and Far Eastern Peoples*, published in Novosibirsk. In addition, the recordings establish that Tubiaku was the bearer of a linguistic tradition that has never been studied and of great interest: a pidgin Russian, native to the Taimyr archipelago, that he used to narrate his Russian tales and Nganasan stories.

9. To our knowledge these are the only trustworthy and completely transcribed recordings of this type of event. What makes them even more valuable is the fact that until quite recently there had not been published a single shamanic séance in any Siberian language (in 1987, however, N. Y. Bulatova, A.N. Myreeva and G.I. Varlamova recorded, in the Yakout village of lengra, the full text of a séance – this one too a "small séance," in honor of guests – performed by a female Evenk shaman, M.P. Kurbel'tinova, who was ninety years of age). The transcription of this séance, along with a translation into Russian and a brief commentary, takes up seventy typewritten pages. After our recording, Tubiaku took part in only one more shamanic ritual before his death, and this in the intimacy of his family. In addition, there is a videotape of him, from which a film was made in Estonia.

its, speaking through the shaman's mouth, converse with the audience, predicting the future, entreating, hearing vows, and so forth. Each spirit is recognizable to the audience through a melody that corresponds to the spirit's identity, whether it introduces itself or is introduced by its predecessor. Everything the spirits "say" is chanted, and is generally subject to an exact meter; a form of non-poetic discourse would be inconceivable from a spirit.

As to the shaman himself, he is both the organizer of the séance and the medium through which the spirits express themselves. The transition from one role to another is signaled by the position of the fringe of the *seymidi* (a ritual headdress). When the fringe is lowered over the shaman's eyes, he is believed to be separated from the external world; he is turned into a "screen" that allows the spirits to make use of his corporeal envelope. When the chant of the spirits ends, the fringe is raised and the shaman then speaks once more in his own voice (no longer chanting); he gives the necessary orders and, if need be, lies down to rest.

Tubiaku, without his costume or drum, was only able to embody his most intimate spirits. Two of these spirits participated in the séances described in this article. The first was Nicholas Iron Horse (Mikulushka Basa Dindua), whom Tubiaku called "the Russian God."<sup>10</sup> In séance this personage is introduced with words that underscore his ties to the regime: "I am Iron Horse, and I represent Soviet power" (1/1/2-3).<sup>11</sup> "I bear the name of Soviet power as a whole (1/2/2)." In one case he calls himself The Shameless One and in another The Reliable One (Sharukaitüe), alluding to the fact that there is nothing to hide or to be ashamed of in his presence. After verse 8 the second spirit, Hoterie, speaks of him in the following terms: "Mikulushka Iron Horse – he's the one with a powerful passport and a life spawned (i.e., that happened to him)... He is a superior god to me, dominating all, governing today's breath and establishing equine power by the force of law" (2/29/3-9). He later notes that "there are thousands of iron men, thousands of iron

10. This personage combines elements of Nicholas-Ugodnik (an Orthodox saint who has earned a place in the pantheon of numerous Siberian peoples, see Lehtisalo 1924, 31-32) and the symbolism of the horse taken as "the Russian reindeer." According to G.N. Gracheva (1983, 128, 144) Mikulushka Iron Horse was a gift to Tubiaku from the God of the West. The Nganasan spelling of Nicholas oscillates between Mikulushka and Nikulushka.

11. This notation refers to the recording, in the following order: the séance number, the fragment number within the séance, and the verse number within the fragment.

Russians, the source of all machines" (2/30/10-12), at his disposition. There is a striking frequency of words of Russian origin here, and a predominance – in the pledges – of contemporary realities (the solidity and trustworthiness of the boat's engine, the long-lasting nature of the passport, intended as a metaphor for longevity).

The largest section of the text is attributed to the name of Hoterie. He is the principal supernatural auxiliary of Tubiaku and is described as an eight-legged male reindeer. This spirit maintains a special relationship to the shamanic dynasty of the Kosterkins<sup>12</sup>: The aim of most of his chants is to insure the prosperity of the entire family and each of its members in particular. When he announces his presence to the audience, Hoterie affixes a variety of sobriquets to his actual name, corresponding to various situations encountered in life: Water Stallion (*Bide Kuru*), Water Eagle (*Bide tangu*), Private Life (*Nguduliu*)<sup>13</sup>, Earth Nail (*Meu Tehe*).

In addition, during the séance, Hoterie calls on the help of three Hoshitele gods (from *hoshi*, a hit or blow, *hoshi-ta*, to beat or strike), whom he addresses in the following manner: "Three Hoshitele gods, draw near to me! Although I myself am a son of God, I cannot overcome this blow" (2/20/8–11). Upon their arrival the melody changes, although these gods do not act independently of Hoterie. According to Tubiaku, one of them, Seimibtimi (from *seimi*, eye), has no eyes but keen sight; another, Koubtumu (from *kou*, ear), has no ears but hears all ("His ear has heard, Koubtumu is like the radio" 2/3/3-4); and the last, Ngangabtumu (from the word *ngan*, mouth), has no mouth but talks about everything. In this way the three Hoshitele can be of service to Hoterie as informants.

Tubiaku has no trouble summoning Mikulushka and Hoterie; he claims that they are always at his beck and call and accompany him on his trips, whether to Novosibirsk or Moscow. He lodges Iron Horse on the roofs of buildings (Iron Horse shows up there by himself).

The chants mention other spirits as well (among whom are some auxiliaries of Tubiaku<sup>14</sup>) although none made themselves known during the séance. These include The Five Good Shamans (*Senghelangke Ngedimlemi*, which means the five shaman ancestors),

12. Hoterie is mentioned as one of the five shamanic ancestors of Diukhode and Tubiaku (Gracheva 1983, 134) and can be considered an ancestral spirit.

13. This nickname is possibly linked to Tubiaku himself, who was sometimes called "the private life of the tundra" [le privé de la tundra].

14. See the list in Gracheva 1983, 142, 144.

The God who Delimits the Earth (*Meu Tabetentu*, probably some kind of superior divinity), The God who Possesses the Day (*Dali Ngudatua Ngue*, the Sun God), and the Seven Daughters of the Sun (*Sajbe Kou Kobtua*). Various incantations are addressed to them, including the following from Hoterie:

<i>Emedali menengume</i>	Let my séance today
<i>Meu tabetentu ngue</i>	Reach the two ears
<i>Sidi koute ngehürngei</i>	Of the God who Delimits the Earth (2/22/58–60)
<i>Hengke ngarka, dengkededi</i>	Black bear, cast a glance around you
<i>Siir ngarka, denkededii</i>	White bear, cast a glance around you
<i>Bense maa sedeeme</i>	Gaze onto all my paths, wherever they may lead
<i>Nüektüne, beturane</i>	Gaze onto my children, onto all whom I raise (1/17/19–23)

Frequently the purpose of the incantation is to avert the deadly activities of Koture (from *kotu*, to kill) and Sirede (from *sirede*, frost, God of the frosty underworld, land of the dead), who are the two evil divinities:

<i>Nüene meneleke dali</i>	Don't allow the precious lives
<i>Koturende, Siredende</i>	Of my children to be cut short
<i>Nikiüide kahagelu.</i>	By Koture and Sirede (1/3/93–94)
<i>Eme meu ngutadiüide</i>	Let your Koture, your Sirede
<i>Koturere, Siredere</i>	Release to me a child
<i>Nüedeme ngutiüingee</i>	In pledge for this earth (1/17/29) <sup>15</sup>

*Séance of August 11, 1989.* The participants include the younger brother of Tubiaku, Boris (Biandimiaku), and his wife, Sandimiaku, who assist in the séance as his accompanists (the so-called *tuebtushi*),<sup>16</sup> his daughter, Nadezhda Dinimiaku, and her husband,

15. This traditional incantation of Nganasan shamanism was noted in Russian by A.A. Popov in 1931, during a séance performed by Ivan Gornok: "Let the Earth Demon release you" (Popov 1984, 82), the earth demon being Syrada - Sirede.

16. This task, performed by the *tuebtushi*, consists of repeating each verse that the shaman chants; the next verse begins immediately after the repetition has been completed. This is done to avoid any pause in the séance, which would be dangerous because it risks breaking the contact established with the spirits; equally essential here is the function of symbolic mediation between the people and the spirits.

Anatoly Bobkov; and a group of foreigners (Triinu Oyamaa, Ado Lintrop, and Hendrik Relve of Estonia, Oksana Dobzhanskaya and Yury Sheyikin of Novosibirsk, and Evgeny Helimsky of Moscow).

The objects necessary for the séance – the fur from the head of both a white bear and a brown bear (literally “black”), as well as the shaman’s headdress – are brought from the repository located next to the house in which all the ritual accessories are stored. Tubiaku instructs his helpers on how the objects are to be arranged and stations himself next to them. He dons the headdress (with the fringe raised) and the coat; he hangs the pendants and then takes hold of a birch cane on which the mask of a *shaitin* (spirit)<sup>17</sup> is carved. The bottle of vodka brought by the guests is opened; the shaman sprays some of it from his mouth onto the ritual objects. He himself drinks some and then serves his two assistants (this will be repeated several times during the séance, so that the bottle will be empty at the end).

For several minutes the participants shout *Neuk! Neuk!*,<sup>18</sup> trying to attract the attention of the spirits; then the assistants intone a wordless melody that summons them. The fringe is lowered over Tubiaku’s eyes. When he sees the spirits’ arrival with his “inner vision,” Tubiaku begins to sing their chant. The chant is composed of fragments of varying lengths. Between the fragments Tubiaku returns to his human role, hearing the vows of the participants and the answers they give to questions posed by the spirits. Each fragment begins with the obligatory chant *Temeeni! Temeeni!*, which is sung in the melody of the individual spirit, as if calling out to it.<sup>19</sup> The first two fragments are chanted in the name of Mikulushka Iron Horse, the others in Hoterie’s name (partially to the melody of The Three Hoshitele). Their content is the following:

1. Mikulushka is announced and greets the audience. He describes his worry over a recent incident: A. Bobkov, in anger, fired his rifle onto a village street, which may result in serious

17. This cane was made according to Tubiaku’s instructions by his son, in Moscow (during a visit Tubiaku made there in 1988). Among the ritual objects there are at least two more that come from Moscow: a small icon of the Virgin of Vladimir, and a cast-iron ash-tray in the form of a devil’s head, which Tubiaku made into a pendant that he wore around his neck.

18. His interjection is usually called for in connection with the pursuit of reindeer. Its use during the séance is linked to the zoomorphic representation of spirits.

19. The word *temeeni* is not used in ordinary discourse. It is the locative form of the root *te*, which indicates spatiality; one can therefore ascribe an etymological meaning to it of something like “here, right here.”

trouble for him.<sup>20</sup> Mikulushka suggests to Bobkov that he promise never to do it again; the other declares himself ready to do so.

2. Mikulushka asks the participants to make their requests. After tapping the ritual objects with a special stick, each one of them, some speaking in Ngansan, some in Russian, expresses his or her wishes in regards to life, work, and health.

3. Hoterie appears and asks to meet the guests (there follows a brief exchange of questions and replies). He promises to “release” Bobkov and to help him control his temper: “I will not allow the wrathful heart of Koture to spend the night here” (1/3/40–41). Then, in a long monologue, he intercedes on behalf of his protégés, trying to assure them prosperity in the coming year. He ends by promising to set the ritual objects back in order. He does so and then proceeds to the next element of the ritual: divination.

4. To Bobkov: “As to work, you hold three different jobs. If this is so, I will surely help you. If not, you will have to leave here within two years.” Bobkov confirms the accuracy of Tubiaku’s words; he enumerates the three activities in question. The third one, however, requires further elaboration.

5. To Bobkov: “You have a third job. If so, you will raise your children to maturity.”

6. To Dinimiaku: “When your husband shot the rifle you were terrified and confused. If this is so, I will make sure he isn’t sent to jail.”

7. To Biandimiaku: “There is something over which you are holding your tongue. If this is so, there will be no losses in your family.”

8. To Sandimiaku: “You had an argument with someone at work. If this is so, you will live to be a great grandmother.”

9. To Yury Sheyikin: “You were twice detained on the road from Novosibirsk to here. In addition, you are carrying an unusual document with you. If this is so, your future is bright.”

10. To E. Helimsky: “You’re still worrying about two matters left unresolved in Moscow. If this is so, you will be as strong as the law and will add to your current work.”

11. To O. Dobzhanskaya: “You quarreled with someone in Novosibirsk. If this is so, your descendants will continue until the end of the human race.”

12. Once again Hoterie appears (but this time as Earth Nail, who

20. Apparently it was the necessity of averting the consequences of this incident (more than the arrival of researchers to whom Tubiaku wanted to give a demonstration of his shamanic gift) that motivated the séance. And to anticipate, let us add that the goal was attained: there were no court proceedings.



binds human souls to the terrestrial world) and expresses his desire to speak with the Estonian guests, with whom he is already acquainted.

13. To the Estonians: "One of you is carrying an ancient document." It turns out that A. Lintrop has brought a book with ancient notations in it.

14. To T. Oyamaa: "You do two kinds of work. If this is so, we will have a fruitful collaboration."

15. To H. Relve: "You have come here in someone else's place."

16. Hoterie asserts that all his guesses were correct. He predicts that in the near future the shamanic tradition will disappear; its last representative will be Tubiaku's younger brother, Biandimiaku, who is himself not a shaman but an experienced *tuebtushi*. "The days of shamanism and of addressing the spirits will soon lose their wrinkles [disappear]; no child will go mad in my place.<sup>21</sup> I will gather in a ball [hide] all my auxiliary spirits; only Soviet law will remain. No one except my son Biandimiaku will remember what comes from the fathers and from the mothers." His father<sup>22</sup> adds: "As long as someone, whether it be the inhabitants of the seven earths or Biandimiaku himself, is left to keep up the living [active] practice of addressing the statuettes, you will see the eyes of Biandimiaku" (1/16/9–16).

17. As the séance nears its end Hoterie speaks proudly about its success. There are supplications for prosperity and a speech addressed to Koture and Sirede. Hoterie expresses his intention to rest until the next séance, having chosen for a "pillow" the bundle of papers next to Yury Sheyikin. He suggests that the audience go outside and look into the eastern sky. An extraordinary configuration of clouds appears there.

*Séance of August 18, 1989.* The audience is more or less the same as for the preceding séance; the only difference is that Nadezhda Kosterkina and her husband have been replaced by Tubiaku's son, Leonid (Labtimak), who will be the primary *tuebtushi*, and his wife, Svetlana. The preparations differ only in the minutiae. The first fragment and the last six (from 31-36) are chanted in the name of Mikulushka Iron Horse, the rest in the name of Hoterie. Here is their content:

21. An allusion to the spiritual disarray that, it is believed, the future shaman must experience in childhood.

22. The shaman Diukhode Kosterkin.

1. Mikulushka, seeing the statuettes, expresses his joy at their presence. Then he gives the floor to Hoterie.

2. Hoterie is unhappy over Leonid's absence at the last séance, since it thinned the ranks of *tuebtushi*: "The noise produced by your elder brother and sister<sup>23</sup> is not enough for the Gods" (2/2/7–8); this absence demands explanation.

3. To Leonid: "You didn't say you were going far away!" (Leonid is obliged to admit he went to Norilsk without his father's permission or knowledge.)

4. Hoterie applauds the honesty of his answer. The divination begins; this time the statuettes are not put in order.

5. To Leonid: "You changed your route (your itinerary). If this is so, your two sons will be without misfortune until adulthood."

6. Again to Leonid: "The reason you returned from your distant voyage was because of something you heard. If this is so, you will see your son Kataraku full grown and with a job."

7. And again: "Afterward you had an argument at home. If this is so, I will lead you through life like a father."

8. To Svetlana: "You saw something surprising on a trip. If this is so, you will continue to give birth until old age." (Svetlana, who does not fully understand his words, hesitates to confirm his statement.)

9. Again to Svetlana: "When you returned you heard something that troubled you." (Once more Svetlana refuses to confirm his statement.)

10. And again: "You have changed your clothes three times today. If this is so, you will live to see your three daughters grown."

11. To Biandimiaku: "It's been two days now that you've been agonizing over how to handle a difficult problem. If this is so, you will live to be a great grandfather."

12. To H. Relve: "It took you three attempts before you were able to procure the bottle of vodka you brought."

13. To Y. Sheyikin: "You found something you had lost. If this is so, you will remain in Novosibirsk for the rest of your life. If not, I will alter the path of your life in 1990."

14. To E. Helimsky: "You had an argument concerning the last séance."

15. To A. Lintrop: "Your machine has been altered [a video-camera]."

23. The younger brother of Leonid's father, Biandimiaku, and his wife, are equal to an older brother and sister in the Nganasan system of kinship.

16. To O. Dobzhanskaya: "You've made a mess of something at work."

17. To T. Oyamaa: "For two days you've been searching for a word you need." (Oyamaa denies it.)

18. Again to T. Oyamaa: "You hold two different jobs. If this is so, your good fortune will extend to people who are dear to me." (Notice how a similar prediction had been made to him during the preceding séance, no. 14.)

19. And again: "You have had lovers of three different nationalities. If this is so, the good fortune of our guests will foster the growth of families here."

20. To Leonid: "When you left the house today you said a single word. If this is so, I will give succor to the earth until next spring."

21. Hoterie is satisfied with the results of his divination.

22. In a long monologue Hoterie supplicates the earth and the moon, Koture and Sirede, the God who Delimits the Earth, Mother Goose, the Mother and Father of Wild Reindeer, the polar night, Lenin in his role of founder of the Soviet state, the God of Day, the Seven Daughters of the Sun, and the Mother and Father of Bears. The essential aim of these supplications and adjurations is to assure the safety of Leonid and Svetlana, who are soon to leave to hunt wild reindeer.<sup>24</sup> Hoterie suggests to his friends that they rely on the aquatic powers, to which he (as Water Stallion) is related by birth. His prediction is: "There is a black cloud to the west. If this is so, you will live through the bad years without tremendous suffering." (The participants go outside and, seeing the sky, confirm his prediction.)

23. Hoterie apprises them that, thanks to the accuracy of his divinations, any dangers that threaten them will be overcome.

24. Hoterie expresses his satisfaction over the performance of his *tuebtushi*. He advises Svetlana not to return from the hunt without her husband; he informs the audience of his intention to preside over another shamanic ritual in November, during the holidays; and he asks Leonid to talk with the statuettes and to promise them he'll fulfill their wishes. (After the conversation Hoterie continues the divination.)

25. To Leonid: "You know three places to fish. If this is so, you will have success with the reindeer."

26. To Biandimiaku: "You are aware of the contents of an important discussion. If this is so, I will not stumble [will make no mis-

24. This was certainly the principal purpose of the séance, since it was held only a week after the preceding one.

takes] in either summer or winter.”

27. To Svetlana: “You are afraid of something. If this is so, you will have another son.”

28. To all the participants: “During the course of the day tomorrow the weather will change radically. If this is so, you will all live until retirement age.”

29. Hoterie advises them to have a chat with Mikulushka. (Leonid addresses Mikulushka.)

30. Hoterie reproaches Leonid for not having offered Mikulushka any treat<sup>25</sup>. After detailing Mikulushka’s powers and abilities, Hoterie expresses his intention to go lie down and rest since he has fulfilled his task.

31. Mikulushka predicts that tomorrow’s winds will be different in the morning than in the evening (he in fact repeats Hoterie’s prediction, no. 28); if this happens, the participants will not have to endure failure and Leonid will be able to count on the good functioning of the motor on his boat.

32. To Leonid: “You have cast a heated glance at someone. If this is so, you will never be separated from your passport.”

33. Mikulushka summons the help of the five ancestral shamans.

34. From a description given by Leonid, Mikulushka recognizes an evil spell of Koture. To Leonid: “The motor of your fishing boat is made of four parts. If this is so, you will keep it forever.”

35. To Leonid: “Don’t forget to offer me a drink. On your way here you stopped twice. If this is so, we will rule over the future, over winter and summer.”

36. Mikulushka pronounces himself satisfied and, closing the séance, asks that the ritual accessories be put away.

*Poetic meter and discourse.* According to recent research, the northern Samoyed peoples utilize poetic meter to indicate sacred discourse, whether it be addressed to supernatural forces or is inspired by them (Khelimsky 1989, Helimsky 1990). The standard poetic line consists of eight syllables, accented on the odd-numbered ones, with caesura after the fourth syllable. This line differs not only from ordinary discourse, which is without metrical organization, but from the meter of all other poetic genres (epic, lyric, song, etc.), in which the hexasyllable prevails. The octosyllable is applied rigorously in the Nenets shamanic chants that have been studied (Castren and Lehtisalo 1940, 302–304, Lehtisalo 1947,

25. i.e., not to have poured Tubiaku a glass of vodka in the interval between fragments 29 and 30.

469–545). Its presence can also be discerned in our recordings, although less rigorously; alongside passages composed of regular octosyllabic lines (for example, the first two quotes from the séance of August 18), there are non-metrical verse lines that often exceed the normal eight syllables. For example:

<i>Labsekaku Dinimiaku</i>	Dinimiaku the younger,
<i>maada saüle huua nagemtu</i>	Why was your noise heard
<i>dali meltitenu sejbuleha?</i>	three days ago? (1/1/17–18)

Tubiaku does not ordinarily chant verse lines of this type from beginning to end. He pronounces the lines rapidly in order to fit them into the length of the musical phrase. In addition, there are quite a few musical phrases comprising two or three regular octosyllables (see the fourth quote from the séance of August 18). By shortening the lines, the singer is apparently trying to save time and keep the séance from dragging without, however, transgressing the rules governing sacred discourse. Nonetheless, octosyllabic lines make up about ninety percent of the chants. The supplicatory forms observe the greatest metrical rigor (in contrast to the divinatory statements and the judgments on problems of daily life attributed to the spirits). These supplicatory forms are indeed largely composed of set expressions, while the other parts of the chant are most often products of spontaneous poetic creativity, whose content is dictated by the concrete circumstances of the séance. Note the following fragments of verse that were often repeated in the course of the recordings:

<i>naagai buegumu</i>	come, let us truly speak (1/1/29, 1/1/32, 1/13/6)
<i>tende sebulaabüne</i>	if I was taken in [was deceived] (1/7/11, 2/13/9)
<i>neditasi mundi kiem</i>	I'm beginning to get it right (1/7/10, 3/22/192)
<i>senhelanka nedimlemi</i>	the five good shamans (1/1/30, 1/3/32, 2/1/8, 2/22/2)

The chants also demonstrate the art of poetic improvisation. For example: During the first séance we were interrupted by noises coming from a neighboring apartment that was being repaired. When the banging on the wall ceased, the séance resumed, with the following words (in almost entire conformity with metrical

rules): "When the day comes that the offspring of my children's offspring have grown to the divine level of today, please let that day not be accompanied by the noise of a hammer or iron ax banging against me. Please let it be that such a noise not rumble over the heads of any of my children!" (1/3/82–89). (These lines contain an allusion to the noise of a casket being nailed shut.) Thus out of an accidental circumstance the shaman has discovered a new metaphor through which he can express the hope for long life that is a necessary part of the ritual he performs for his audience.

In general, the words of the chants are laden with images. Abstract ideas, such as success, prosperity and joy, are suggested through natural and biological phenomena as well as events from daily life. For example: "I will find help somewhere along one of the paths used by the birds; either the one they follow to return here, or the one they take when they depart beyond the seas" (2/22/81–83). "Upon leaving I chose a path that resembled the exit from my mother's womb; the road seemed to right itself into a winter road and then a summer road and then an invisible road" (2/19/9–11). "When you fall asleep I will turn your problems into the pillow on which you rest" (2/27/2). The most characteristic feature of the language of the chants is the systematic utilization of unusual semantic transpositions (reserved only for sacred discourse?), especially verbs. Here are a few examples of the metaphors found in the chants: *temeri*, "to pursue," meaning "to pass (time)," *selkeme*, "to slap or flick off," meaning "to ignore," *simba*, "to become smooth or unwrinkled," meaning "to disappear," *simbarkuj*, "to flatten," meaning "to annihilate," *nenedemi*, "place of submersion," meaning "to suffer a defeat," etc. As for the rest: the language of the séance is quite close to ordinary discourse, and it even contains fewer archaisms than are to be found in the epic verse performed for us by Tubiaku himself (one ought not to consider the terminology of religion and shamanism archaic by definition, no matter what Nganasan youth – and for obvious reasons – might think). For still another characteristic of shamanic chant (the preference for grammatical forms that will guarantee the metrical norm), see Helimsky 1991.

*The real world and the world of the séance.*<sup>26</sup> The shaman acts as mediator between the human and supernatural worlds; the pur-

26. This concluding section was written by E.A. Helimsky alone, because of his greater dispassion in regard to the ritual described.

pose of the séance is to establish contact between the two worlds. This is why the narrative thread of the chants alternates between daily life and its magical correlates, and vice versa – which accounts for the originality and complex content of the chants. Yet how are we to interpret the numerous references to political and ideological concepts, and the digressions that result from them, such as: “Gorbachev’s situation, the one who created my existing Soviet [power], the population growth of the country delimited [founded] by Lenin, on a level with Lenin’s head” (1/3/76–81); or “The name of the Leninist party delimited [founded] by Lenin and still breathing [active] today; the Leninist Komsomol and the Soviet power are standing. Let no evil force think of challenging its strong law, its paternal and maternal law, delimited [established] by Lenin” (2/22/117–125). Surely this is not merely an expression of feelings of devotion to and of prayers for the health of the regime (as was to be seen later, all in vain); these references also embody an attitude of otherness toward the ideology and religion of a separate people – a people clearly distinct from the Nganasan but nevertheless deserving of attention and respect.

Of equal ambiguity are the relations between the shaman and the spirits that are believed to lodge in his body. The shaman appears to be completely abstracted from what he is chanting: The words “I” and “mine,” coming from his mouth, refer not to the shaman (he is referred to in the third person) but to the spirit that speaks through him: *nojbueme*, “my head”; *ngaangkume*, “my young friend”; *Nili desi*, “Nili’s father” (Nili being Tubiaku’s eldest son). Hoterie’s chants contain many phrases that might more naturally have been attributed to Tubiaku (for example, “a child will not go mad in my place” (1/16/10, line 16 of the séance of August 11). Evidently, what the spirits know depends on the shaman’s knowledge – thus the spirits do not call the Estonian researchers by their names, since Tubiaku did not know them before the séance. Tubiaku claims to be ignorant of the content of the chants of the spirits because of his deranged mental state during the séance; however, his actions and words during both the intervals between the chanted fragments (when the fringe is raised) and at the end of the séance, give cause for doubt.

Divination is the principal indication that supernatural forces are at work in the séance. And it must be admitted that the accuracy of Tubiaku’s statements, not only concerning the state of the sky and meteorological phenomena but also his knowledge of circum-

stances that he could not have known beforehand – such as the fact that H. Relve came in someone else's place (1/15), or that A. Lintrop was using an "altered" video-camera (2/15) (it was indeed equipped with parts from another camera) – made a strong impression. The spirits' statements in regard to the affairs of the Kosterkin family were equally accurate, although these could have been made on the basis of the personal observations of the shaman himself (for example, the fact that Svetlana had changed her clothes three times) or on an analysis of things he already knew. As to the other divinatory statements: they all concerned occurrences that can happen in anyone's life – disputes, setbacks on the job, trips that have to be put off, etc. – and were couched in such a way that the person to whom they were directed could find, in his or her recent experience, an event corresponding to it.

In brief, the progression and results of the "small" séances performed by Tubiaku Kosterkin illustrate the belief in the existence of supernatural forces capable of influencing both people and objects in the material world.

*Translated from the French by Thomas Epstein.*

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