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The Shaman's Drum: Eurocentric Interpretations of Non-European Sonic Worlds

Summary

In this contribution, I will focus on the history and meaning construction of the term “shamanism” and its implications for the music that is attached to this concept. “Shamanism” was brought to Europe from Russian Siberia in the 17th century and then, until the 20th century was re-interpreted as an epitome of the exotic and diabolic. During the last third of the 20th century, however, the term and concept were transformed and romanticised in alternative and New Age contexts of modern societies. The music associated with Indigenous ritual was likewise transformed and adapted so that anyone could play it, such as monotonous drumming for instance. Both processes, i. e. the historical construction of the exotic and contemporary appropriations of the romantic, are based on highly colonial prejudices against what was considered as “primitive” and are ignorant of the Indigenous historical and contemporary realities.

In diesem Beitrag werde ich mich auf die Geschichte und Bedeutungskonstruktion des Begriffs „Schamanismus“ und seine Auswirkungen auf die Musik, die mit diesem Konzept verbunden ist, konzentrieren. Der Begriff „Schamanismus“ wurde im 17. Jahrhundert aus Russisch-Sibirien nach Europa gebracht und bis ins 20. Jahrhundert als Inbegriff des Exotischen und Diabolischen umgedeutet. Im letzten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts wurden Begriff und Konzept jedoch in alternativen und New-Age-Kontexten moderner Gesellschaften transformiert und romantisiert. Die mit indigenen Ritualen verbundene Musik wurde ebenfalls transformiert und angepasst, so dass jeder sie spielen konnte, wie z. B. monotones Trommeln. Beide Prozesse, die historische Konstruktion des Exotischen als auch die zeitgenössische Aneignung des Romantischen, beruhen auf stark kolonial geprägten Vorurteilen gegenüber dem „Primitiven“ und ignorieren die historischen und zeitgenössischen Realitäten der Indigenen.

Keywords

Shamanism, colonialism, ritual, health practices, ritual music, Indigenous music

Introduction

In this report I will focus on an aspect of my current research project in development called “Cosmologies of Musical Health Practices”, which in general aims to understand the use of sound and music in contemporary Central European health practices including music therapy as well as freelance sound healing. The aspect in focus here is concerned with the historical construction of musical health practices that were “discovered” among non-European societies during colonial times and that still form part of many discourses about music and health today. Although similar histories can be told about “possession trance” and its music in African, Afro-American, or South Asian traditions, or “meditation” including “meditative music”, the most compelling example is found within the term and concept of “shamanism”.

“Shamanism” today refers to any form of ritual that applies “altered states of consciousness” and references some Indigenous or traditional cultural heritage. More precisely, “shamanism” is derived from Indigenous techniques of divination, sorcery and healing among Eastern Siberian people. The term and concept became known in Europe during the 17th to 19th centuries and achieved vast popularity among Moderns¹ during last third of the 20th century. Today, both in certified music therapy and in freelance practice, “shamanism” is often referred to when using drumming or rattling, among other instruments in monotonous musical forms in order to induce “trance” states or enable patients to freely associate, or to “mentally travel” in thoughts and visualisations while listening to the music. “Shamanism” is therefore used to refer to “ancient”, and specifically “pre-modern” or “non-Western” sound techniques that should put the listener into direct contact with what is – more or less seriously – conceived as a parallel world, a spirit world, the realm of psychological archetypes, or similar. Especially in New Age spirituality, “shamanism” is one of the key concepts of getting in contact with the beings of “nature”. In scholarly terms, these latter concepts are often referred to as “neo-shamanism”, in contrast to vernacular Indigenous forms of “shamanism”.

Regardless of whether or not diagnostical accuracy and therapeutic efficacy of contemporary adaptations of (neo-)shamanism can be observed or confirmed, I will in the following show that most basic assumptions in neo-shamanism about the fundamentals of shamanism are the result of its own construction during colonial times and that Indigenous musical health techniques are based on very different ideas about the world, the human, and the sonic. Therefore, I argue, contemporary neo-shamanic techniques should be assessed for their efficacy and accuracy in practice and should be conceived as part of the modern world instead of exploiting Indigenous techniques that rely on entirely different ontological premises. By referring to “ancient”, “Indigenous”, or “natural” categories when talking about or applying neo-shamanic practice, we perpetuate a problematic colonial appropriation that should rather be questioned for its prejudices and discriminatory elements against Indigenous peoples.

1 I use the denomination “modern people” for those who adhere to a certain naturalist ontology and live in a mostly urban milieu rather than e. g. in “the West”. See Bruno LATOUR, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge 1993).

Shamanism and Colonialism

The term “shaman” probably stems from Evenk, a Tungus language of people who have been living in the Amur river region in today's Russian-Chinese border area. It is most probably derived from the proto-Tungus root “sā”, to know. The first mention of the term “shaman” dates from 1661 and is attributed to Avvakum Petrovich, a Russian Orthodox patriarch who was temporarily exiled to Siberia:

“[Fellow traveller] Paskov obliged a native to do the shaman, that is to say the diviner: will the expedition be successful, and will they [a war party against the Mongols] return victorious? That evening, this villain of a magician brought a living ram over near my hut and started to practice his magic on it: Having turned it over, he wrung its neck and cast off its head. Then he started to jump and dance and call the demons; finally, making piercing screams, he threw himself on the ground and foam came out of his mouth. The demons pressed him, and he asked them: ‘Will the expedition be successful?’ And the demons replied: ‘You will return with a great victory and great wealth’.”²

Avvakum then goes on to state that he was so repelled by this devilish rite that he prayed to his Christian God that He may destroy his own fellows' war party of ninety men just in order to prove the shaman wrong. This happened, and only two survivors returned. Avvakum was glad, as he could trust in his “true faith” to be stronger than the shaman's devil.

Although Avvakum, in this initial report, mentions “jump and dance”, “piercing screams” and a literal conversation with “the demons”, he does not mention the shaman's drum. The use of a drum and most often also singing or chanting in such cases of divination is, however, unanimously confirmed by later reports, and a drum is also to be seen in Nicolaes Witsen's first known European depiction of a shaman, which he defines as “a priest of the devil”.³ “Recognition of the drum's importance explains the vast numbers of drums that missionaries confiscated and often destroyed in all parts of the north including Alaska, Canada, and Siberia”.⁴

Subsequently, shamans are reported to Europe (including Moscow) as diabolical worshippers of false faiths, conjurers, and charlatans. Thomas Alberts writes that

“in 1786 Catherine II (‘The Great’; b.1729 d.1796) wrote a play *Komediia Shaman Sibirskoi* in which she portrayed the fictional shaman Amban-Lai as a greedy charlatan who uses trickery to deceive gullible audiences”.⁵

Marilyn Walker explains that although later reports became more detailed in description, their derogatory style did not wither, for example in Anatolii Kamenski's book on the Tlingit people he visited in 1895 to 1898. Kamenskii actively “attacked shamanism, belief in witchcraft, or

2 Avvakum PETROVICH as cit. in Jeremy Narby / Francis Huxley, eds., *Shamans through Time. 500 Years on the Path to Knowledge* (New York 2001), here 30.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaes_Witsen#/media/File:Witsen's_Shaman.JPG (last accessed: 30.06.2022).

4 Marilyn WALKER, *Music as Knowledge in Shamanism and Other Healing Traditions of Siberia*, in: *Arctic Anthropology* 40/2 (2006), 40–48, here 44.

5 Thomas Karl ALBERTS, *Shamanism. History, Discourse and Modernity*, PhD Thesis (SOAS, University of London 2013), here 31.

memorial feasts for the dead”.⁶ This even worsened in the Soviet Union, when Siberian people were subjected to violent assimilation, including a boarding-school system, marginalisation and genocide, and specifically shamans were persecuted during Stalin’s rule.

Although resistance and perseverance were a hidden part of said history, open revival of Siberian, Mongolian, and Northern Chinese shamanic practices could only surface from the 1990s onwards, and a historical continuity of Indigenous traditions from Avvakum to today is very unlikely. Remember his portrayal of an animal sacrifice and of theatrical performance. We have to be aware of many processes of re-interpretation and re-construction that Siberian Indigenous People themselves had to apply in order to be able to maintain or reinvent any tradition, shamanic included. Paradoxically, it is more likely that a historical continuity can be traced in the European, or modern perception, interpretation, and appropriation of shamanism: Avvakum’s report still stands in its description of what was later called “trance” (or “altered states of consciousness”), and also in his characterisation of the shaman as an antagonist of the conservative Orthodox Christianity.

In the European imagination, shamans became the epitome of the exotic, of magic, and charlatanism, and the term was often applied to any “savage” or “primitive” ritualist regardless of their providence. Just in 1950, Mircea Eliade’s highly influential and heavily criticised book introduced the idea that shamanism was a universal trait of human kind (in prehistory, history, and present).⁷ Roberte Hamayon notes that the historical reception of shamans passed from “devilisation”, to “medicalisation” (the shaman as a psychotic), to “idealisation”.⁸ The latter refers to the immense popularisation “shamanism” experienced since the 1960s in alternative and New Age circles as well as in anthropological research, ecological idealism, and among vast audiences in the general public. Here, the antagonist to conservative Christianity is still active, but now situated on the other side: the abovementioned movements tend to view conservative Christianity as something to be overcome – the enemy of my enemy is my friend.⁹

6 WALKER, Music 42.

7 Mircea ELIADE, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l’extase* (Paris 1950). Eliade’s politically right-wing “archaic” universalism, universalism was based even on some false interpretations. Cf. Andrei ZNAMENSKI, Mircea Eliade. Shamanism, Traditionalism and the Ideology of the Archaic, in: *Siberian Historical Research* 21/1 (2021), 13–39, doi.org/10.17223/2312461X/31/3. It has been perpetuated by many contemporary writers who rather seem to rely on idealistic premises like the universal importance of hallucinogenic drugs than on archaeological and anthropological scrutiny, as for example Michael J. WINKELMAN, A Cross-Cultural Study of the Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Shamanistic Healers, Priests, and Witches, in: *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 11/1 (2020), 27–45, doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2020.1770845; Manvir SINGH, The Cultural Evolution of Shamanism, in: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 41 (2018), e66, doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X17001893.

8 Roberte HAMAYON, History of the Study of Shamanism, in: Mariko N. Walter / Eva J. N. Fridman, eds., *Shamanism. An Encyclopaedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, vol.1 (Santa Barbara–Denver–Oxford 2004), 142–147.

9 The revival and idealisation of shamanism constitute a complex and broad field I cannot treat exhaustively here, but cf. ALBERTS, *Shamanism*. Alberts bases his analysis on three main tropes: Indigenism – the exogenous idealisation of Indigenous People during the 20th Century; Environmentalism – the assumption that Indigenous people would in general live in harmony with nature; and Neoliberalism – the transition from the marginalised healer-sorcerer figure to a commercial entrepreneur and the commodification of tradition.

Altered States and the Sound of the Drum

Drumming, screaming, dancing and chanting are historically continuous elements in outsiders' reports about Siberian shamans.¹⁰ While former descriptions collectively disregard the whole performance as e. g. "rites of the devil", later analyses find the drumming and music specifically interesting in its relation to "trance". Michael Harner's work stands out here:¹¹ After conducting some hallucinogen-focused anthropological research, in 1979 he created the "Foundation for Shamanic Studies" for commercialising "core shamanism". He defined the drum-sound as a vehicle for shamanic journeys,¹² a vehicle that anyone could use. The idea of drumming being the main inductor of "trance" for shamans is older, but with Harner, it found its way into modern esoteric as well as therapeutic praxes.

Therefore, in contemporary moderns' (neo-)shamanism and adaptations, the be-all and end-all of its practice is the induction of these "altered states", preferably by listening to music or sounds, but with a significant particularity: the induction of trance states is not intended on the drummer/rattler/musician (the "shaman") but decidedly on the patient. In modernist ontology, the idea that a patient would be helped by witnessing a therapist entering trance is as weird as imagining a medical doctor relieving a patient's pain by swallowing an aspirin themselves. Thus, "shamanic ritual" had to silently be restructured as a ritual where not the therapist/guide but the client/patient would fall into trance.¹³ We witness the first full-blown contradiction between Indigenous shamanism or ritual healing and contemporary adaptations: Indigenous ritualists get in contact with non-human entities (with or without "trance" states) in order to make them effect healing (or doom) on the "sober" client –vs.– the "sober" ritualist/therapist tries to induce "trance" states in the client who should then experience catharsis.

And still, all contemporary definitions of both shamanism and neo-shamanism highlight the induction, application and primary importance of "trance", "ecstasy", or "altered states of consciousness"; or as Alberts writes, they "generally emphasise three elements: A shaman is someone who 1) enters a trace-state [sic] in which they 2) journey into a spirit world 3) on behalf of or in service to a community".¹⁴ This is interesting, as in my own experience with Indigenous ritual specialists, I found that the most esteemed specialists would interact with the spirits without entering altered states. Here's the next contradiction: most often, Indigenous ritualists do not even themselves go into "trance". Hamayon and Martínez¹⁵ go as far as to suggest to "erase" the notions of trance or altered states from the study of shamanism. Their

10 WALKER, *Music*, 44–48.

11 Michael HARNER, *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing* (New York 1980).

12 HARNER, *Way*, 64–68.

13 I assume that this was caused by a confusion in what Hamayon calls "medicalisation": The idea that a shaman would be a psychotic or schizophrenic (being ill instead of the client!) is as old as the mid-eighteenth-century quote by Vasilii Zuev, "I would rather classify his [the shaman's] behaviour as a sort of illness" (Zuev in ALBERTS, *Shamanism*, 32) and became popular since the late 19th century. It is not yet resolved, see Richard NOLL, *Shamanism and Schizophrenia. A State-Specific Approach to the "Schizophrenia Metaphor" of Shamanic States*, in: *American Ethnologist* 10 (1983), 443–459, doi.org/10.1525/ae.1983.10.3.02a00030.

14 ALBERTS, *Shamanism*, 13.

15 See Roberte HAMAYON, "Ecstasy" or the West-Dreamt Siberian Shaman, in: Helmut Wautischer, ed., *Tribal Epistemologies. Essays in the Philosophy of Anthropology* (Aldershot 1998), 175–187; Roberto MARTÍNEZ GONZALEZ, *El chamanismo y la corporalización del chamán: argumentos para la deconstrucción de una falsa categoría antropológica*, in: *Cuicuilco* 16/46 (2009), 197–220.

initiative to change this definition, however, could not overcome the prolific and reproductive popular and scholarly writings on (neo-)shamanism, and thus had the effect of one drop of water on a hot stone. Shamanism and altered states still stand like a marriage made in heaven. A possible historical process underlying this second contradiction and conflation of concepts may be found in the psychedelic movement between ca. 1950 and 1975. Psychiatrists, psychologists, anthropologists, writers and their students experimented with mescaline, psilocybin, LSD, DMT, and other substances. At latest with Gordon Wasson's and Carlos Castaneda's "discoveries" of Indigenous drug use, the Western psychedelic projects by Stanislav Grof, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, Aldous Huxley, William Burroughs, and many others, were revealed to be "related" to Indigenous traditions of psychoactive plant use. A generalised "shamanism" was instantly imposed on all Indigenous people who used plants, and those who used hallucinogens became the focus of research of a whole generation of anthropologists, as evidenced for example with the title of Harner's most influential edited volume *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*.¹⁶

Neo-Shamanic and Indigenous Sound Ontologies

Now let us turn to the function of the sonic, to sound ontology and sound efficacy. Three famous adaptations of "shamanism" will do for our purpose of juxtaposing them with Indigenous ontologies: along with Michael Harner's "core shamanism", I will briefly introduce Felicitas Goodman's "body posture trance", and Wolfgang Strobel's "sound-guided trance [klanggeleitete Trance]".¹⁷

Harner, as mentioned above, based his ideas on his experience with hallucinogens he had taken with Indigenous people in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian lowlands during and after his doctoral fieldwork as an anthropologist. Felicitas Goodman was a linguist who focused on glossolalia in Christian sects and congregations before developing her specific technique and founding the Cuyamungue Institute in 1977. Medical doctor Wolfgang Strobel, somewhat later in the mid-eighties combined Jungian depth psychology with what he calls "monochrome sounds" played by "archaic" instruments like the drum, rattle, didgeridoo, Tibetan bowls, or gongs, in order to initiate and interpret trance states.

It is never clearly stated why all of them (and the many streams of neo-shamanic trance techniques following them) explicitly make use of monotonous sounds. Here is the third contradiction with Indigenous techniques: Avvakum's shaman did not drum along for ages but leapt into agitated performance, and so do most Siberian shamans. There are, however, Indigenous methods of using sound in ritual that consist of repetitive structures with almost infinitesimal variation, but meaning is constituted exactly by shifts and transformations of sound

16 Michael HARNER, ed., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (Oxford 1973).

17 See HARNER, Way; as well as Felicitas GOODMAN, *Body Posture and Religious Altered States of Consciousness. An Experimental Investigation*, in: *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 26 (1986), 81–118, doi.org/10.1177/0022167886263006; Wolfgang STROBEL, *Klang – Trance – Heilung. Die archetypische Welt der Klänge in der Psychotherapie*, in: *Musiktherapeutische Umschau* 9/2 (1988), 119–139.

qualities like microtonal rising or subtle motif variation¹⁸ and not by monotony, which is usually avoided everywhere.¹⁹

Needless to say, it is easy to state that something is “similar” or “the same” when generalising for modern adaptations. Harner literally said that

“In about 90% of the world, the altered states of consciousness used in shamanism are attained through consciousness-changing techniques involving a monotonous percussion sound, most typically done with a drum, but also with sticks, rattles, and other instruments. In perhaps 10% of the cultures, shamans use psychedelic drugs to change their state of consciousness.”²⁰

Goodman, in her concept of “ritual body postures”, repeatedly claims that only rhythmic stimulation is necessary for obtaining trance states, achieved by monotonous rattling: “for rhythmic stimulation, I chose a gourd rattle of the kind that I had seen during Indian dances in New Mexico”.²¹ While in Harner’s “core shamanism” subjects would lie down or silently sit while listening to monotonous drumming, in Goodman’s version, subjects would silently maintain a certain body posture intended to shape the in-trance experience while listening to rattling. Wolfgang Strobel likewise declares that his “klanggeleitete Trance” was based on shamanism²² and that shamanism was an archaic system of achieving trance through monotonous playing of “archaic [urtümliche]” instruments. Here, subjects would also lie down, obtain certain postures, or move while listening.

Especially Harner and Goodman refer to “auditory driving” as their main trance-inducing principle. This is a definitely non-shamanic term coined by Andrew Neher who claims that certain rhythmic stimulation of ca. 8 to 13 Hz (beats per second) would trigger certain brain wave patterns that would result in trance states.²³ This hypothesis, however, was soon refuted.²⁴ Remarkably, in all these adaptations of “shamanic” drumming or rattling (and in all others I know of), authors intend to explain the “shamanic” technique in scientific or other modern

18 For microtonal rising see Anthony SEEGER, *Why Suyá Sing. A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People* (Cambridge 1987); for motif variation, e. g. Acácio Tadeu de Camargo PIEDADE, *Flutes, Songs and Dreams. Cycles of Creation and Musical Performance among the Wauja of the Upper Xingu (Brazil)*, in: *Ethnomusicology Forum* 22/3 (2013), 306–322, doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2013.844441.

19 I speculate that the source of this contradiction lies in the cultural ignorance of modern listeners to Indigenous sound. Various anthropologists told me that they would not try to analyse sound structures because they were not musicologists, or because they would not “hear well”. Therefore, to uneducated listeners, gong-playing in Balinese gamelan, valiha-zither patterns in Malagasy tromba, drumming in Tanzanian ngoma rituals, or flute playing in northwestern Amazonia, may sound “monotonous”, due to the Moderns’ incapability to perceive the detailed and complex structures, variations, and timbres played and considered significant by the Indigenous specialists.

20 Michael HARNER, *Shamanic Healing. We Are Not Alone*, <https://www.shamanism.org/articles/article01page3.html> (last accessed: 30.06.2022).

21 Felicitas GOODMAN, *Where the Spirits Ride the Wind. Trance Journeys and Other Ecstatic Experiences* (Bloomington 1990), 16.

22 See STROBEL, *Klang*, and his official personal website, Wolfgang STROBEL, *Grundgedanke*, <http://wolfgang-strobel.de/kurse-201617/grundgedanke/> (last accessed: 30.06.2022); Wolfgang STROBEL, *Inhaltliche Elemente*, <http://wolfgang-strobel.de/inhaltliche-elemente/> (last accessed: 30.06.2022).

23 Andrew NEHER, *A Physiological Explanation of Unusual Behavior in Ceremonies Involving Drums*, in: *Human Biology* 34/2 (1962), 151–160.

24 There are many studies that confirm brain waves responding to external auditory stimuli, but these are not related to so-called trance states, cf. e. g. Udo WILL / Eric BERG, *Brain wave synchronisation and entrainment to periodic acoustic stimuli*, in: *Neuroscience Letters* 424/1 (2007), 55–60.

terms.²⁵ The ontology of sound as conceived in Modern application thus indicates that sound consists of vibrations and pulsations that cause direct physical effects on the listening client. Here is the fourth contradiction: in Indigenous ritual, the effect of sound on human states is unimportant, because sonic utterance involving invocations, chanting, singing, shouting, sometimes combined with more or less repetitive instrument playing is not directed towards the human audience but towards the non-human, “spirit” audience.

I worked most intensely with Indigenous experts in the Western Amazon, where rhythmic rattling (with plant branches) or drumming is sometimes used, but conceptually marginal. The main interaction of the ritual specialist with non-human entities is achieved by singing elaborate lyrics, and sometimes by whistling or humming melodies.²⁶ Contemporary anthropological fieldwork in Central Asia and elsewhere confirms the complexity of such interactions,²⁷ and that these sounds are almost always directed towards the non-humans, while direct sonic or trance effects on the human specialist or audience are not considered central.

Therefore, most Indigenous ritual songs and sounds are directed towards a non-human audience. These non-human beings, though, are conceived as perceiving the world differently.²⁸ Many “spirits”, it is said, perceive sound as a form of matter, and singing styles define bodily shapes in their perception. That is, when a human ritual singer changes their way of performing, e. g. by altering their voice timbre, a non-human entity would perceive a bodily transformation of the singer – within the “spirit world”.²⁹ Lewy suggests that the magical act of manipulating the world is mainly aimed at altering the Other’s perception.³⁰ For example, a jaguar sees a human as prey. If the human utters the appropriate magical formula (*tarén*), the jaguar’s perception is betrayed and presents the human in the form of fire. As jaguars are afraid of fire, the animal will flee instead of attacking.

Shamanic music, or more precisely Indigenous ritual music, is therefore played for non-human animal, plant, river, mountain, or “spirit” beings. In their own perception of the world, these beings listen and adapt to the music’s changing qualities so that their behaviour turns beneficial as conceived by the ritualist. Sounds therefore exist between beings and worlds, and are perceived differently by human and non-human utterers and audiences. Sophisticated variations in sound utterance result in subtle manipulation of the non-human’s perceptions and in turn, their actions or reactions towards the humans.

25 Strobel explains it in terms of Jungian psychology. Harner, in addition, mentions operant conditioning: “The shaman generally restricts use of his drum and rattle to evoking and maintaining the SSC [shamanic state of consciousness], and thus his unconscious mind comes automatically to associate their use with serious shamanic work. [...] a signal to his brain to return to the SSC”, HARNER, Way, 64.

26 Bernd BRABEC DE MORI, “The Inka’s Song Emanates from my Tongue”. Learning and Performing Shipibo Curing Songs, in: Coriun Aharonián, ed., *La música y los pueblos indígenas* (Montevideo 2018), 73–107.

27 See Charles STÉPANOFF, *Dark Tent and Light Tent. Two Ways of Travelling in the Invisible*, in: *Inner Asia* 21 (2019), 199–215 for Central Asia and North America, or for examples from Indonesia, cf. Giorgio SCALICI, *Music and the Invisible World. Music as a Bridge Between Different Realms*, in: *Approaches. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy* 11/1, <https://approaches.gr/scalici-a20191124/> (last accessed: 30.06.2022).

28 Matthias LEWY, *Different “seeing” – Similar “hearing”*. Ritual and Sound Among the Pemón (Gran Sabana/Venezuela), in: *Indiana* 29 (2012), 53–71.

29 Bernd BRABEC DE MORI, *Sonic Substances and Silent Sounds. An Auditory Anthropology of Ritual Songs*, in: *Tipiti* 13/2 (2015), 25–43.

30 Matthias LEWY, *About Indigenous Perspectivism, Indigenous Sonorism and the Audible Stance. Approach to a Symmetrical Auditory Anthropology*, in: *El oído pensante* 5/2 (2017), <http://ppct.caicyt.gov.ar/index.php/oído-pensante> (last accessed: 30.06.2022).

Recommendation: Abandon “Shamanism”

In conclusion, I recommend to generally look out for terms that more precisely describe whatever you want to say when you say “shamanism”. The construction of the term is historically and ethnographically problematic. All scholars with experience in the field tend to stress the particularities and differences of certain practices against the universalists who always again can only rely on Eliade's initial claim, based on armchair anthropology, of a universal (and, by the way, generically “archaic”) shamanism. The idea of prehistoric, present, and globally distributed similar techniques of entering altered states of consciousness as a general trait of “shamanism” has been ethnographically falsified many times.³¹

1. If Indigenous ritual specialists work with trance, they go into trance by themselves, and only very rarely their clients.
2. Ritualists worldwide only to a very small extent really go into trance or use forms of “mental travelling”.
3. Alleged universal techniques of entering trance, especially by monotonous drumming or rattling were, and are, almost nowhere in use.³²
4. Indigenous ritualists are usually not concerned with playing sounds that affect themselves or their clients, but they direct songs and sounds to non-human beings.

Although I fear that the inflationary use of “shamanism” in scholarly as well as popular literature and media has grown far too strong, I suggest to abandon it, with the possible exception of certain Inner Asian traditions. The colonial legacy and powerful imposition of the term onto Indigenous specialists and traditions everywhere still stamps them as the exoticised Other, as the primitivist opposition to conservative Christianity as constructed by Avvakum Petrovich. By calling some Indigenous healer or knowledgeable person a “shaman”, we superimpose all these historically and ethnographically false assumptions. The use of “shamanism” repeatedly colonises the people and stigmatises their ritualists although they most often work very differently from the modern imagination of the shaman. I perceive this as an act of epistemic violence. “Shamanism” is an overtly colonial concept, and it serves as a good example on how, during European and modern history, achievements of Others, Non-moderns, were interpreted, generalised, exoticised and stamped into false categories.

As for modern applications of drumming, rattling, or other sonic forms for achieving well-being or personal growth, I suggest to relate these concepts and explanations to modern science or, if preferred, to modern mythology (like Neher's auditory driving, or Goodman's EEG studies) instead of exploiting the Indigenous with ever again referring to a romanticised Indigeneity. I see that many of these modern techniques are beneficial and have much potential to help ill people or to steer seekers towards a comprehensive cosmology. We should, however, keep in mind that when making all that “shamanic”, we perpetuate the colonial exploitation of the “primitive”.

31 Bruce GRANT, Slippage. *An Anthropology of Shamanism*, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50 (2021), 9–22, doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110350.

32 For debunking Neher's auditory driving and universal music-induced trance, see the classic by Gilbert ROUGET, *Music and Trance. A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession* (Chicago 1985).

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