

Nanai Shamans under Double Oppression. Was the Persecution by Soviet Power Stronger than the Power of Shamanistic Spirits?

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“Let us hope that this young man will not become a shaman, as there is a centre of cultural work organised by the Soviet power at the mouth of the Kochechumo River, which is able to deter the *ayami*, *khargi* and *khovon*,¹ who are trying to settle in him.”

Innokenty Suslov

The aim of the persecutions that were carried out at the end of the 1930s in the North in order to completely eradicate shamanism was not achieved. In spite of a remarkable decrease in the number of Nanai shamans, practising shamanism has survived in Nanai villages until nowadays. As the shamans themselves explain, one of the reasons for that, side by side with the persecution by the Soviet power, was that they were also oppressed by their own spirits-helpers who made them continue their shamanistic practice in spite of all prohibitions. Regardless of the harshness of the administrative measures taken against shamanism, the pressure exerted on shamans by their spirits-helpers was much stronger. The information published about these administrative measures is rather one-sided and has mainly been provided by the persecutors of shamanism and their disciples. During our fieldwork done in Nanai district, Khabarovsk Krai, in the years 1980–2002, we tried to find out about the attitude of the shamans themselves as well as their relatives towards the aforementioned measures.²

¹ *Ayami*, *khargi*, *khovon* – names of spirits.

² The material was recorded in the Nanai language from Alexander Khodzher, Lindza Beldy, Ivan Torokovich, Konstantin Beldy, Nikolay Beldy, Nesulta Geiker, Nyura Kile, Olga Kile.

Beginning of persecutions

The persecution of shamanism in the North and in Siberia started soon after establishing the Soviet power.³ Shamans were called “the restrainers of socialist construction work” and fight against shamanism was proclaimed to be “one of the spheres of class struggle in the North” (Suslov 1932: 17). In 1924 the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of Sakha adopted a special resolution “On the Measures in the Fight against Shamanism”, which cited as the main measure the elaboration of mass cultural-enlightening work, and for the fight against shamanistic blackmailing and point-blank deceit – also administrative-legal measures (*Ocherki...* 1957: 118). The first stage of the anti-shamanism repressions was quite peaceful. On the official level the events taking place at this time were interpreted in the way as if the shamans themselves, being under the power of the Soviets, in a spell of enthusiasm and, according to the words of V. Bogoraz, against the background of “an unprecedented cultural exaltation”, renounced their shamanistic practices. I. Suslov wrote, “In different places all over the territory of Siberia, shamans give up their practice, hand over their drums and robes to the local village soviets and renounce shamanism altogether” (1932: 157). Actually, it was only a few enthusiasts among the Nanais as well as the Ulchi (a nation close to them by their language and culture), who got carried away with the changes, and the drums were taken to the village soviets very unwillingly. “In the 1930s a universal process of eradicating shamanism took place,” Konstantin Maktovich recalls. “By the order of the regional committee the members of the Komsomol organised a meeting in the village of Ukhta, Ulchi district, where the number of shamans was especially great. They (the members of the Komsomol) gathered one day and went there – to the village of Ukhta – from Nizhniy Gavan and (the village of) Bogorodsk. Young people, members of the Komsomol! Let us go! They searched through all the attics of the houses where the Ulchi lived, and collected all the idols. Earlier on, when a shaman was buried, the *sewen*⁴ belonging to him was put on his tomb. They (the members of the Komsomol) collected everything also from there (from the tombs), then

³ The experiments made to merge the traditional power with the new one, which were conducted in the very first years after the revolution (when shamans could even be elected for leading positions), failed (Bogoraz 1932: 143).

⁴ *Sewen* – here it denotes an image of a shamanistic spirit.

piled them (all the *sewens*) up and set fire.” Alexander Sergeyeovich recalls an analogous case also in the village of Dzhuen. “People came to Dzhuen on a cutter. They convened a meeting, did not argue, did nothing. But after the meeting they started going from one house to another, collecting drums, *yangpans*,⁵ *sewens*. Everybody knew already beforehand that they were going to come and collect these things. The only things left were *edekhe* (metal images of the *sewens* worn hanging around the neck) – these were the only ones people were able to hide!” – “After the meeting they went around the houses,” the shaman-woman Nyura Sergejevna, wife of Alexander Sergeyeovich, also confirms, “they collected drums, *yangpans*, the chests for keeping *sewens*.” – “They were going around the village,” she recalls another time. “Wherever the lights were on, they entered and asked, “Are you practising shamanism here?” And then people hid from them the cock meant for a sacrificial ritual. They thrust it in the stove. Hid it this way...” A Nanai – member of the Komsomol – crushed the drum, completely, trampling on it! What can you do about it? Everybody kept silent.” Olga Yegorovna also remembers how in Naikhin *sewens* and *toros* (wooden poles with carved images of spirits) were set on fire in the street. Alexander Sergeyeovich recalls that in the village of Dokiada there was a big *saola*.⁶ Until the period of repressions, “people from all over the region came there with pigs” in order to offer sacrifice to these spirits. “The Executive Committee of the Nanai district decided,” says Alexander Sergeyeovich, “that it was necessary to fight against that. Down with it! We’ll liquidate all that! It is the Soviet power now! The Soviet power does not allow to practise shamanism! They did it. They did away with everything.”

The fact that the ritual requisites were taken away from shamans, exerted the least influence on maintaining the shamanic tradition. Practically immediately, not waiting for the end of repressions, the Nanais started to make new drums and *yangpans* (shaman’s belts), new images of spirits and, little by little, as Nyura Sergejevna put it, they again started practising shamanism. In some houses people practised shamanism even despite the fact that they had not decided to restore the drums. The practice of using pot lids instead of a drum that became known all over Siberia also dates back to this period. “Anyway, people

⁵ *Yangpan* – shaman’s belt with metal pendants.

⁶ *Saola* – a clay vessel in which, according to the belief, the spirits of a dead shaman lived.

practised shamanism at nights,” Ivan Torokovich says, “clanging the pot lids!” Anyway!” – “But where did you put the drums?” I asked. “What drums! They were all taken away! They are prohibited! If you happen to have a drum, you will be arrested!” The practice of replacing drums with pans that survived among the Yakuts until the 1990s was also described by Marjorie M. Balzer. According to the words of one of her friends-assistants, a true shaman was able to turn the drum-pan into a real drum during the shamanistic ritual (1995: 26).

The Nanais hid everything they could from the Komsomols; the rest of the things were restored after some time and taken into use covertly. So in the past all Nanais used to have *mio* (images of the names of deities called *endur* on cloth). “When people were prohibited to practise shamanism,” says Alexander Sergeyeovich, “they hid them, but after some time took them out in private, talked to them (performed a ritual), and then hid them again. Now everything has been liquidated, but it still exists! Only now it is not kept in a special outbuilding but right in the dwelling.” If the shamans maintained that the image of the spirit that had been thrown out and crushed in the course of the anti-shamanism campaign was not empty, but there was a spirit residing in there, it certainly had to be restored in secrecy. So in Dzhari a *saola* was restored little by little. If there is a *sewen* in it,” Alexander Sergeyeovich said, “the Nanais will never leave it (the *saola*).”

The administrative measures aimed at the eradication of shamanism resulted in the passive resistance of the population to the measures taken by the Soviet power: a low percentage of participants at pre-election meetings, systematic non-complete classes at indigenous schools due to parents’ refusal to send their children to boarding schools; refusal of any medical or veterinary help” (Suslov 1931: 128). After some time had passed, the initiators of repressions started to recognise the ineffectiveness of demolishing the shamanistic requisites as well as the prohibitions set on shamanism. I. Suslov wrote, “I have learned about a great number of cases when shamans have handed over their robes and drums to the medical doctors or instructors of the Soviet construction work, promising to give up their practice forever. The instructors described it in their reports as a victory on the anti-religious front. However, when checking on it later on, it turned out that as soon as the instructor had left, people made a new robe and a drum for the shaman, but they did it secretly (ibid.: 128–129).

Arresting of shamans

After a certain lapse of time, the authorities probably realised that the prohibitions and destruction of shamanistic requisites did not even decrease the dimensions of shamanistic activities. As a result, in spite of the slackening of warnings against “sheer administration” and “harmful administrative oppression” in the early 1930s, which only produced an outward effect and yielded no positive results, the next step in the fight against shamanism was taken. It was the time when the mass arrests of shamans (the so-called purge) began, which, as a rule, are not mentioned in literature. “They assaulted upon shamans,” says Ivan Torokovich. “They used to call it a troika (the representatives of the official power who did it usually acted in groups of three). They “purged” of shamans! Arrested them! Shot them! This is what they did. And now what! A shaman! How can you practise shamanism? Why did they do it? We had an old man in Dzhari – Sangila *mapa*. He had neither a daughter nor a son. Lived with his wife only. They came and took him, and they even did not put him in prison. They shot him somewhere. It is not good, is it? Many shamans were imprisoned. That’s why only a few (shamans) were left on the Amur River.” – “Shamans were arrested at that time,” shaman Lindza confirms. “Nobody needed shamans then, nobody was interested in them. Only now they become active again. But at that time it was prohibited.” Shamans were arrested, taken away and quite a few of them were reported missing. The relatives of the arrested shamans confirm that they were not even informed about their whereabouts. Elderly people say that, trying to provide proof to the authorities about their active and successful activities in liquidating shamanism, the members of these “troikas” did not strive for being very objective and, under the pretext of shamanism, sometimes arrested just any person they did not take a liking to. “In 1937 there was a “troika” working in each village,” Ivan Torokovich says. “They did what they wanted! They could write that a person was a shaman and a vermin, and that was that! People came after them from the NKVD, took them and that was that! Shot them!” – “A great many people were arrested at that time,” Lindza also confirms. “In Dzhari there were no elderly people left.” Nesulta Borisovna maintains that there was even a kind of plan, a task assigned to the local authorities to arrest a certain number of shamans. One of them was arrested right in the middle of performing a ritual called *kasa* (seeing the dead off to the beyond). “The plan was said to be big! It was necessary to fulfil the tasks! Somebody denounced us, and they found us (at the ritual).” – “It

happened during haymaking,” she recalls. “We were just making hay in the kolkhoz in summer. Then he performed the *kasa*.” – “I remember it as well,” Lindza, listening to her, confirms. “We were going through the *kasa*,” Nesulta continues, “it had not been completed yet, when people came and arrested the shaman.” – “And they took the old man away,” Lindza finishes her story. “I went into hiding and saw everything.” – “What monsters, aren’t they?” Maria Vasilyevna is getting indignant. “Why did they torment people like that?” Lindza adds. “They were mocking at people, torturing them, doing such horrible things!” – “Mocking!” Maria Vasilyevna echoes back. “They had a law for torturing people! “Purging” them!” Lindza continues. “In the summer some old men were taken away. After that some more followed. Sandil, father Kiachkan, Korka. How many of them were there? Four or five, perhaps? They were taken on horseback, two together, barely alive. They were put in prison in the village of Troitskoye. How we cried when they went on foot! They were hardly able to walk, they were so old! They had to walk as far as Khabarovsk. They were not able to do that. People were criticised and tortured at that time! Does any of the shamans torture anybody like that?”

Ivan Torokovich, another of our informants, also recalls his experiences related to the arrest of his grandfather. “My grandfather was also a shaman,” he says. “I was working in a lumbering camp far in the taiga. I came home. We finished work in April. We used to start in November and finish in August. The kolkhoz had sent us there. I arrived home, and my grandfather was not there. “Where is Grandpa?” – “Well,” they say, “we do not know if he is alive or already dead. They arrested him and took him to Khabarovsk.” But at that time, in Khabarovsk, the isolator was overcrowded. So whether you want it or not, you will plead yourself guilty. They beat them there! Sign it and that’s that! They present a written indictment and make you sign it. But he (the grandfather) says, “You can kill me, but I am not going to sign it! Because I did not do it!” A commission came from Moscow. They started working. They were sent specially from Moscow here, to Khabarovsk Krai. The isolator was overcrowded. And they let all of them go. And our grandpa also came home. “Well, how was it?” we asked him. “Oh,” he says, “if they had not come from Moscow, I would also have been... They drag somebody (from the interrogation), throw them down on the floor, and that’s that! They won’t stand up any more! Dead already!” So this was how it was! It was the work of the Central Committee, the NKVD, Yezhov! Beria, Yezhov – it is them! The things

they did!”

Other forms of fighting against shamanism

By the way, not all shamans were persecuted. Those who promised to give up practising shamanism, were not repressed, but actually they did it secretly from the authorities. “How did they take shamans?” Nikolay Petrovich says. “If you are not going to practise shamanism, we will not touch you. They also said it to my mother (shaman Dekhe, who was not arrested). Besides that, some shamans were given official permission to practise shamanism. Usually it was connected with a concrete situation, when a shaman was able to help a representative of the authorities or just make a strong impression on them. So, when Mikhail Sergeyeovich Beldy, the present leader of administration of the village of Naikhin, caught a dangerous disease and was about to die in his childhood, doctors were unable to help him and decided to send for Dekhe, the shaman-woman. They came to her together with the doctor. “My uncle told me that,” Nikolay Petrovich recalls. “The doctor was treating and treating Mikhail Sergeyeovich. Without avail. He was about to die. And he was brought home from hospital. And on this very night he (the uncle) came after my mother and (afterwards) took her back to Naikhin. It was her who saved Mikhail Sergeyeovich. We, children, we driven out of the house, windows were covered with blinds and a shamanistic ritual was performed. (Mikhail Sergeyeovich was cured.) After some time my mother was given a document certifying that she could help the doctor treat sick people. She received this document and started practising shamanism quietly; people also came to her.” As a result, Dekhe appeared to be working as if in unison with the new authorities, which made it possible for her to practise shamanism without being punished.

A more widespread means in the fight against shamanism (especially at the beginning of this campaign) was the force of word persuading people to change their world view. So quite a few communists who sincerely hoped to help those who under their very eyes caught the shamanistic disease, were naïve enough to believe that if you convinced such a person of changing their views, they would give up practising shamanism forever. I. Suslov offered the following recommendations for those fighting against shamanism, “In the period between nervous fits when the sick person (suffering from shamanism – TB) is conscious, the atheists and cultural-enlightening workers have to help them understand the reasons for this kind of diseases, and explain

the absurdity of animistic views which the sick person believes to have caused the illness” (1931: 126).

I. Gurvich has spoken, quoting the words of G. Naumov, a participant in the partisan movement, about still another original form of fighting against shamanism, a kind of spiritual session, where the members of the Komsomol participated, considering it as a means of fighting against the “religious narcotic”. “Romanova, a Yakutian woman, informed the others about the fact that she heard the voice of her late husband at nights, and even started organising public spiritual sessions for meeting him. Willing to disclose this miracle, the members of Komsomol from a partisan detachment asked the widow to have a session in their barracks. Vodka and snacks were put on the table and the lights were switched off. In complete silence people suddenly heard the rustle of a bird’s wings, and then a male voice asked if the snacks were good, and then they heard smacking. The widow started asking the “husband” questions, which he answered in a loud voice. Finally a person from the audience asked how long the Soviet power was going to last. The answer was – not long. This remark gave rise to anger in the audience. When the soldiers of the Red Army jumped to catch the deceased, they only caught one another.” In the end the widow had to (or was made to) confess that she was a ventriloquist. “The soldiers made her swear that she would not repeat these sessions, and then let her go” (Gurvich 1971: 83).

Arguments

The main argument of the authorities persecuting shamans was the accusation that they belonged to the class of exploiters against whom the revolution was directed. “Shamanism used to be the most faithful supporter of Tsarism, tribal chiefs and local tycoons, their most effective detachment in the fight for enslaving wide masses of working people in the Far East,” someone hiding behind the initials I. A. has written. “Shamanism was and has remained a reactionary force striving for decelerating the development of culture; it was and has remained a support for counter-revolution” (1938: 107). When finding excuses for repressions, their executors confirmed that shamanism, like any other religion, strengthens and consecrates slavery and exploitation”; that, being “a phenomenon of an especially reactionary order”, it fosters the “strengthening of animosity between tribes, the development of national hatred”, slowing down the process of “Sovietising the North, raising the cultural level of the Northern regions and, besides that, also

influences the wasting of social energy and social forces” (Suslov 1931: 26–27). Shamanism was declared to be the inhibitor of the socialist construction work, and, consequently, the fight against it was an inseparable part of the socialist construction work. Fight against shamanism consisted, as it was described at that time, in “disclosing the political and class role of shamanism”. It was indispensable, as it was said, to “show on living and concrete examples the damage caused by shamanism on the development of national economy in the North, what heavy load it constitutes on the budget of the native working people” (Suslov 1931: 132). “Shamans constitute a non-working element” (Kosokov 1931: 70). Besides all that, shamans were accused of counter-revolutionary anti-Soviet activities. “Shamans constitute a reactionary counter-revolutionary force” (ibid.). Reports about the killing of teachers, poor peasants and cultural workers by shamans can be found in literature (Budarin 1968: 192). So, in the village of Yandygan, a Chukchi shaman Tayungi shot dead Attungi, chairman of the National Council. “Shamans move against all the party and government activities both publicly and covertly. Shamans were and will be the worst enemies of the working people of the Far East. They tried to foil elections and persuade people not to join the kolkhoz” (I.A. 1938: 110). According to the words of I. Suslov, from a few “more advanced” regions of the North “signals” came from administrative workers “about the shamans’ attempts to foil one or another undertaking of the Soviet power” (1931: 128). “Shamans persuaded their fellow countrymen not to send their children to school, frightened with all kinds of horrors those who turned for medical assistance to hospitals, threatened with the revenge of the spirits those who followed the advice of veterinarians, visited the community centre, or went to the cinema. During rituals shamans often did direct anti-Soviet agitation work, /—/ spoke viciously and heatedly against schools, made use of the religious superstition of the backward and illiterate population, called people for not sending their children to boarding schools” (Gurvich 1971: 82). There also occurred really mean accusations against shamans. So, they were even accused of contributing to the spread of such “social diseases” as “syphilis, trachoma, tuberculosis, gonorrhoea and leprosy” (Kosokov 1931: 68). All this argumentation leaves a strange impression due to its forthright ungroundedness; it seems as if, quite deliberately, something important has been left unsaid. It can only be detected to a certain extent in I. Suslov’s remark stating that in order to consolidate the new order, we face “extensive work not only in the sphere of

economy, but also in the sphere of *transforming the people's minds* (my italics – TB)” (Suslov 1932: 16). I. Suslov is trying to explain this argument with vague words about a shaman “working out mystical ideology and contributing to the wasting of social energy” (ibid.: 17).

The arguments voiced against shamans caused a wave of disputes. The discussion was obviously so heated that until present shamans, the children and grandchildren of the people who suffered because of the repressions, continue arguing with the accusers from the past, most probably long dead by now. While doing it, they make use of the specific terminology of the political documents of that time, which has sunk into their minds. For example, one of the regulations denouncing shamanism determined it as “especially detrimental, hindering the cultural-national awakening and political development... equal to the *daze* created by all religious cults”. About seventy years later, Ivan Torokovich voices this accusation as follows, “Sick people would have gone to the doctor and got well, but you perform your rituals and *stupefy* people!” The Komsomols-enthusiasts probably so diligently repeated the arguments against shamanism learned by them that even many years later the informants remembering them, while speaking about the repressions, again and again start arguing with them, especially emphasising that shamans had not been well off and had not exploited other people’s labour. “What were the Nanais’ riches at that time?” Ivan Torokovich asks. “Nothing! They caught fish as much as they needed for their own food. They even did not know how to sell fish. How were they supposed to sell it? They did not have any horses! Why do that (why arrest shamans)? They were not kulaks, far from that! They were ordinary (poor) people!” Recalling the arrest of one of the shamans, Ivan Torokovich emphasises his poverty. “He was poor,” he says, “he did not take anything from people for the rituals. I was working in the taiga at that time, taking logs to the river on a sleigh drawn by horses. Once in the evening they brought this old man to us. I asked him, “Why did you come here?” He says, “They made me come here, to work here.” I tell him, “You are an old man, how can you work here, lift logs on the sleigh? They are heavy! Who sent you here?” – “The *predsedatel* (chief) of the kolkhoz, the village soviet. Work yourself, don’t speak much! It is difficult there!” – he says. Many people were arrested.”

Until now the Nanais continue confirming that shamans were actually not exploiters at all, living from the labour of other people, as they were shown to be in the 1930s. “Shamans were taken for nothing!”

Ivan Torokovich is indignant. “Shamans were really poor! If they had had at least ten dogs! But they had only one or two. But they were told, “You are a shaman, an exploiter, you take pigs from people” (for annual sacrificial ritual). Actually shamans never took much (for their service). A silver rouble or a coin (wrapped into a piece of cloth) is put round his neck when he plays his drum. (This money is for the shaman and is meant as a payment to his spirits.) And they pour a hundred grams of vodka. But anything else? In the autumn people bring him a pig for the *кэсиэ гэлэгүйч* (sacrificial ritual). But this pork is meant for treating everybody. Everybody eats it! But how he works! Performs the ritual, suffers torments! In the summer his robe is drenched with sweat. Try it yourself! To dance and sing for hours in such heat!”

As a result of the repressions, shamans were always afraid that someone can threaten their free activities,⁷ they also developed the habit of justifying their practice, intentionally emphasising the positive sides and not mentioning the dangers related to it. “What was the idea of persecuting shamans?” asks Lindza, pretending that shaman’s activities consist only in healing people and feasts. “Is it bad to get well?” she continues. “If you get well and slaughter a big or a small pig, if all people sit together at table and eat pork and drink vodka, what is bad about it? People cooked food, ate, stood up and left. Is it really bad?” Resuming the same topic another time, she protects shamanism in the following way, “Is it easy to be a shaman? Is it easy, is it good for a shaman? It is not simply that you repeat the things in *yay* (shaman’s chanting) that people tell you. Everything has to be correct! It is necessary to find out what the person’s problem is. You have to try hard! It is not as easy as to scold people. Scolding – this is bad! But is shamanism bad? Not at all! You only ask for grace for people! You want your friends to be well! If your friends are well, it means everything is all right! If all people are well – it is good! Isn’t it good that you get well, recover from the bad things that torture you? You become a shaman-woman and you can take leave of your senses, you can even die when you practise shamanism. If you perform rituals, you can catch a disease, you can fall ill and die. You ask for *кэсиэ* (luck) from different *dyakas* (creatures) and you do not know if they hear you or not. So you bow and ask for mercy, and you cannot be not sure if they hear you. So it

⁷ For example, having got acquainted with the researcher professor J. Pentikäinen, shaman-woman Lindza asked me if he was not going to arrest her.

was recently.”

Shamans’ persecutors

Recalling the years of the persecution of shamans, elderly people confirm that usually it was not the Russians but the indigenous people, Nanais themselves who carried out these repressions.⁸ This fact is also confirmed by the materials from the other regions of the North as well as Siberia. So, according to the words of Marjorie M. Balzer, in Yakutia “in the late 1920s and early 1930s hundreds of shamanic drums were burnt, first and foremost, by young enthusiasts-Komsomols who mainly came from among the indigenous people who had turned to communism, and not by the visiting Russian revolutionaries” (1995: 26). “My brother arrested shaman Bogdan Oninka,” confesses Nikolay Petrovich. “He was the first militiaman among Nanais.” /—/ “The Nanais themselves set afire the *mio* (the image of deity on fabric) and the *toro* (trees or poles with carved images of spirits)”, confirms Alexander Sergeevich. Harsh torturing sometimes resulting in the death of the victim, which the Nanais kept in prison together with Ivan Torokovich’s grandfather were subjected to, was carried out by their own fellow countrymen. Here is another story about this: “I came home, and grandpa was not there. I asked for him. My mother says, “He was taken away, to Khabarovsk.” And later on, in May, I went to Khabarovsk by boat to give away fish. (Arriving home), I enter the house. Grandpa is there. “What the hell!” I think. “I ask him. “Well, there, in Khabarovsk, in the isolator, my turn did not come yet. If it had come, I would not have endured it, I would have immediately...! There were two Nanais there. From Naikhin. They beat very hard! Want it or not, you have to sign! They beat you so hard that you could not get up any more, covered with blood all over! But then three men came from Moscow, started to look into the matter and release everybody. And so our grandpa was also released!”

The Nanais tried to defame and arrest even Ivan Torokovich himself,

⁸ The informants do not differentiate between the persecutors and victims as Russians and Nanais also because many Russians (above all, believers) also suffered from repressions. In pre-revolution time there were churches in some Nanai villages. “The Komsomols and pioneers took everything away from there (the churches). “The bell was big,” Maria Innokentyevna says. /—/ The priest vanished.” Actually the fighting atheists of these years did not care much which religion to fight against. “Neither a shaman nor a priest belongs in the socialist society, and they will both vanish forever,” Vladimir Bogoraz wrote. “The fight against shamanistic religion, i.e., shamanistic animism, has to be closely connected with the fight against Orthodoxy” (Bogoraz 1932: 157).

but not in connection with shamanism, but for his supposed belonging to the class of middle peasants. At that time he was engaged in logging works and was one of the most leading/advanced workers. One day he was asked to come to the settlement of Troitskoye,⁹ the centre of Nanai district. “Where do you work?” – “In Troitsk forestry enterprise, fulfil my plans.” – “What did you give to the kolkhoz?” – “Me and my father had two horses, we gave those. And four nets. Now I fulfil my plan with the horse we gave away.” – “All right, wait,” they say. Some time later the door opened. “Come in!” they say. And then the chief of the kolkhoz, the head of the village soviet and the economic director came. The entering chief asks them, “Why did you give him a note certifying that he is a middle peasant? Is he really a middle peasant? He is still young, he only started working. And he works well in the taiga. Why are you doing so? You gave a document to your fellow countryman certifying that he is a middle peasant. Is it correct that he gave two horses (to the kolkhoz)?” – “Yes, that’s right,” they say. “And four nets?” – “That’s right,” they say. “Don’t you dare do it again! There are no rich people among the Nanais!” And then they say to me, “You can go! They will take you back tomorrow!” He really said so, “Don’t you dare do it again! There are no rich people among the Nanais!” And I went back to the taiga. But that old man (the shaman) was there. Two days later he was taken away. They came from Troitsk with militiamen. We learned only later on that he had not returned home. First he was taken to Troitsk prison and then to Komsomolsk. He was a shaman, and, when performing rituals, he received different things people gave him; this is what was said in the documents. Later on we got to know that he was shot in Komsomolsk. The Nanais themselves betrayed him!”⁹

⁹ The respondents used name Troitsk.

¹⁰ Ivan Torokovich himself tells this story as follows, “We have Stakhanovist movement. (We are competing) for the first prize! (The kolkhoz) *Novyi Put* (New Way) and Dzhari are having a competition to find out who is the first to fulfil the plan. And I am keeping the flag (for shock work). The challenge flag. They allocated me a bonus of 40 roubles. 40 roubles – this used to be a lot of money! And then suddenly the head of the village soviet orders me to go to the district centre. (On the accusation) as if I were a middle peasant! What a middle peasant? (We had) a pair of horses. One of them we gave to the kolkhoz, the other I exchanged for a double-barrelled gun. What a middle peasant am I? And I am ordered to come specially from there, with an escort. I arrive there and say, “I will go to the district executive committee tomorrow, but now I’ll go home.” – “No, they say, “wait here!” They won’t let me go. I was sitting there, and then my father also came. And they called us. I was the first to go. “Tell us how it is there,” they say. “I don’t know anything,” I say. “We had a pair of horses. We gave one of them to the kolkhoz. We also had four pieces of seines. We gave them to the kolkhoz as well. I have

When Lindza tells me about the arrests of shamans, I try to specify, “Did the Russians arrest shamans?” – “No,” she says, “it was the Nanais themselves. I don’t know why these people were arrested.” Konstantin Maktovich is trying to explain why the Nanais took such an active part in the repressions against their own fellow countrymen. “They were members of the Komsomol. At that time it was considered as an expression of patriotism! /—/ Those who were registered members of the Komsomol, regarded themselves as heroes! So, I’ll go and commit/perform a heroic deed! Against my own people’s culture!” Besides that, the present informants who condemn the repressions now were also members of the Komsomol at that time. “I was a kid then, and I was for Stalin!” Nikolay Petrovich confesses, laughing. “It is very difficult to confess it now, but I have to. So it was! I cannot deny it!”¹¹

When telling us about the repressions, the informants oppose not the Russians and Nanais, but, as they put it, *the educated* and all the others. “It was the literated, “says Alexander Sergeyeovich in Russian, “who said that shamans were not needed any more. They were prohibited! They said that you had to go to the doctor, not the shaman! But we were born at such time! The educated people said that there

nothing left. Now I am working for a forestry enterprise, the kolkhoz sent me. I am the first in my unit. I am the keeper of the challenge flag at the moment. We have two horses and three men, and I am the first.” – “Are you a Komsomol?” – “A Komsomol.” The chief of the kolkhoz, the chairman of the executive committee and the first secretary of the district committee – all the three are there. And they call the head of the village soviet and the economic director and tell them, “What documents do you issue? He is not a middle peasant at all. He joined the kolkhoz, one horse gave away, and the other exchanged for a gun. Is he a middle peasant? He is the first in logging. The kolkhoz collects 20 percent of his wages. What are you doing? If you continue acting like that, you will soon have nobody in the kolkhoz. Stop doing it! You issue such documents to the members of your kolkhoz which confirm that they are middle peasants, so that they are taken away.” And then they say to me, “Go home, and don’t go anywhere tomorrow. Tomorrow we will send you a horse, and you can go back to your district.” Well, I left and went home. And then, in the morning, they sent me a horse and took me back to the taiga. We arrived at two in the afternoon... My comrades say, “Oh, you came back!”

¹¹ Nikolay Petrovich, who was a child during the years of repressions, recalls this period as follows, “I was a pioneer, I went to the pioneer camp twice. It was such a fun! Everything was so beautiful! It was so elating! I was brought up in such atmosphere...! I joined the Komsomol, and then the war started. It was all so elating! Do you understand? Sincerely! I was fighting for the party. I served seven years in the army, I was educated in the communist spirit. And, apart from that, I remembered my childhood and loved my mother (a shaman-woman). I had dreams about her. She did not speak to me in my dreams, only went past me, dancing like a shaman, and disappeared. I wake up and feel offended. What a mother! Appears only in my dreams and won’t even talk to me! I did not see any contradiction between these two things.”

would be no shamans any more! They will be liquidated!” The communists who arrived were regarded as educated people, and the people considered the Communist Party as the main initiator of these repressions. “These things were led by the party,” summarises Konstantin Maktovich his thoughts about the years of repressions. Actually during these years the Union of Fighting Atheists was founded, “the northern units of which defined as their main task ruthless disclosure of shamans’ anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary work, which they carry on, hiding behind shamanism and relying on it, in order to help the Soviet power to treat them as the enemies of revolution” (Suslov 1931: 135). In the first order, these units were organised in educational institutions (the Institute of the Peoples of the North in Leningrad, indigenous technical schools, workers’ faculties, teachers’ courses). At that time it was considered as necessary to conduct special teaching, special conversations, open special study rooms for anti-religious, especially anti-shamanism work, in order to educate the necessary propagandistic staff for fighting against shamanism. “Not a single student,” wrote I. Suslov, “can leave an educational institution without “the necessary atheistic steeling”” (1931: 148). It was these students with “atheistic steeling” who, in the eyes of the population became *the educated*, who actually persecuted the shamans. Vladimir G. Bogoraz confirmed that the representatives of the indigenous people acted not only as executors of the repressions, but also as initiators of the fight against shamanism. He wrote, “The basis for the critical approach towards the elements of religion was established, first and foremost, by the young indigenous activists, pupils of the northern schools as well as the students of the Institute of the Peoples of the North.” As a proof, he presents passages of an article written by a student called Anakakymylgin, who arrived in Leningrad from the settlement of Uelen in Chukotka. In this article the student repeats like an incantation one and the same thing for several times, “What deceitful shamans! There are no evil spirits! They do not have any spirits-helpers! They are only lying!” Vladimir G. Bogoraz comments on these words as follows, “He brought the spirit of his young contemporaries to Leningrad. He simultaneously expressed the sheer hatred towards the shaman as a deceiver, an exploiter of the helpless poor, a collector of fees for healing people” (Bogoraz 1932: 143). According to the way of thinking of the indigenous people, the shaman stands side by side with the evil spirit. They are both vermin, they can both cause

illnesses and death” (ibid: 146).¹² Educating the Nanai youth in the spirit of the new ideology resulted in a continuing and still persisting conflict between generations, in serious contradictions between the “indigenous active” (as it was called at that time) educated in the modern educational institutions, and the rest of the population. “Who remembers now how people survived these years!” recalls Ivan Torokovich. “Young people were taken to be taught in Leningrad. They came back absolutely different, changed. They denounced on their own people in the NKVD, in the GPU, spoke against shamans, “Let us do away with them!” they said. They did not pity old men and women! People were crying!” In the literature of that time the process is described differently, “Now the cultural class awareness and political literacy have increased enormously in the North... This resulted in the creation of their own national intelligentsia”, which, in its turn, “severely limited the enslaving strivings of the local kulaks and half-feudals and undermined the positions of their ideological weapon – shamanism” (I.A. 1938: 107).

Soviet power as the power of spirits

The bearers of the traditional culture interpreted the new world opening for them as a result of “socialist transformations” in their own way (the same way as communists understood, or, to be more exact, did not understand, shamans). For example, the ability of the communists to publicly deliver a speech from a rostrum they explained with their being overpowered by some communist spirits with which they had, similarly to shamans, concluded an agreement. Among those who went to Leningrad to continue their studies, there were young people of shamanistic origin. They also interpreted in their own way the new world opening up for them, evaluating it in the context of their familiar spiritual laws. The universal worshipping of J. Stalin, the abundance of his portraits everywhere they explained, for example, with the fact that J. Stalin was an *endur* (deity). In order to guarantee their safety and not to provoke the anger of an unfamiliar spirit hiding in the portraits of the great leader, the Nanai students, just in case, paid homage to the

¹² In the last statement Vladimir G. Bogoraz, a good expert of the traditional Chukchi culture and shamanism, although in an exaggerating manner but quite correctly presents the really existing traditional beliefs of a shaman, although in the case when the shaman is a stranger, representing the interests of another group. Unfortunately, he does not specify it.

portraits of J. Stalin and performed sacrificial rituals in front of them as if they were deities. “Semen Kile left for Leningrad together with other Nanais to study there,” Olga Sergeevna tells us. “They made a drum in Leningrad themselves. Although they were young, they were skilful. Grown-ups! Grown-up men and women! (Before leaving for Leningrad) they had already worked back at home, caught fish. Semen (before leaving) was already married. His wife returned to her father, and he was not able to get her back. Then people took him to Leningrad. He practised shamanism there. He was good at *meuri* (shamanistic dancing). He went (performing rituals) from Leningrad to his own territory (Nanai district, Khabarovsk Krai).” In Leningrad Semen Ivanovich also performed *undy*, i.e., a sacrificial ritual for the shamanistic spirits including a procession led by a shaman and accompanied by the members of his congregation. He also had one in Leningrad. “Many people – Russians, Nanais – interested in the event followed him. And the deity – Stalin – made from paper and put in the corner was given (a glass of) vodka (as a sacrifice). So he practised shamanism there.” Shamans are not able to manage even all the Nanai spirits; the more difficult is for them to gain victory over an unfamiliar spirit of another nation. Semen Ivanovich was obviously not able to manage the communist spirits he worshipped so faithfully. He was not able to graduate from the institute. He died of tuberculosis during his studies in Leningrad.

The mutual influence of the shamanistic and communist world views led to their peculiar synthesis, which resulted in the appearance of a new figure – a shaman-communist. In any case, five of my informants were shamans and communists simultaneously.

The power of shamanistic spirits

The anti-shamanism campaign turned out to enjoy only “quantitative” success. The number of shamans decreased, and those who continued practising shamanism did it covertly. The bearers of the tradition explain it with the influence exerted on them by their own native shamanistic spirits. Shamans were not only persecuted by the authorities, they were under double oppression. On the one hand, they were oppressed by the authorities, and, on the other, they were subjected to the influence of their own spirits-helpers, who insisted on the continuing of their practice. It is interesting to mention that this kind of treatment of the problem (the authorities fighting not with people but with shamanistic spirits) was expressed even in the articles written by

the fighting atheists. In one of his articles I. Suslov almost directly maintains that the Soviet power is stronger than the shamanistic spirits. Speaking about a young man suffering from a shamanistic disease, he writes, "Let us hope that this young man will not become a shaman, as there is a centre of cultural work organised by the Soviet power at the mouth of the Kochechumo River, which is able to deter the *ayami*, *khargi* and *khovon*,¹³ who are trying to settle in him" (1931: 126). The shamans, however, maintained that it is not the Soviet power with its prohibitions that is stronger, but it is spirits that they were not able to fight in spite of all their wishes. The period of repressions coincided with the time when Lindza became a shaman-woman. She was working in a fishing unit, and experienced seizures of shamanistic illness right at work. This was twice as dangerous for her. She was afraid not only of the management finding out about her being overcome by shamanism, but also, as shamanistic illness could not be diagnosed by medical means, of being accused of simulating the illness and finding excuses for shirking work, which, at that time, was a similarly serious accusation. "They tortured me as well!" she says. "They almost put me in prison! How long they tortured me! When I was lying in hospital, the chief called me, asking me why I was lying there, saying I had to go to work. So he was calling me. I can't understand how I survived!" – "This was before the war," she says another time. "Then they were "purging" people! I had a fit at work, I fell down and sang shamanistic songs. I don't know why I fell." – "During war-time I was nearly arrested. I had a fit, I fell on my back and started singing *yay* (shamanistic chants) right at work, in the unit where I worked," Lindza complains. "I started rolling myself over on the ground. However well I worked, at this moment I lost everything. Why did they (the authorities) consider shamans to be bad? Did I ask them for food or what?" Here is one more of her stories on the same subject, "How was it for me to become a shaman-woman when shamans were arrested all the time? I sang the shamanistic chants, I cried right at work! The things I did! When you become a shaman, you will fall ill, you cannot live any more if you don't sing these songs, if you don't do everything in the right way!" – "I come to work, I feel unwell, and I start chanting. I cannot keep silent! It is shaking me! Either a day or a night – it does not matter! When I fall ill, I'll sing these shamanistic songs! I thought I was going to get a medal

¹³ See footnote 1.

for good work. And I lost my medal. Who gives a shaman a medal? Only because of that, although I worked hard, I failed to get the medal. I sang these shamanistic songs right at work. People kept silent... There were many people there; everybody was sitting quietly, listening. Was somebody (a shamanistic spirit) torturing me, or what? I was not able to sit. They took me to hospital.” – “We arrived at the hospital, but the illness was gone. It had passed!” Nesulta, who knows this story, supports her words. “We reached the hospital,” confirms Lindza, “and I am all right! They say I am a malingerer. And they give me a typewritten note.” “We know how a person is ill, we have seen it,” they say. “But there’s no such illness as yours!”

Being afraid of the fact that the power of shamanistic spirits might still be stronger than the Soviet power, the Nanais offered passive resistance already during the repressions. It was not considered as dishonourable to pretend meeting the demands of the authorities and give up practising shamanism, and secretly still continue it. Alexander Sergeyeovich (1914–2000), who in the years of repressions was a young Komsomol, had to go round the village together with other activists, destroying the attributes of the shamanistic cult. While doing it, he was more careful than his comrades, which, in his opinion, helped him to save his life from the revenge of the shamanistic spirits and survive. “My father told me then, “You only keep quiet!”” says Alexander Sergeyeovich. “I followed his advice, although I was a Komsomol. But some of the zealous Komsomols shouted, “We don’t need *endurs* (spirits)! We don’t need anything!” And they all died. It all happened under my very eyes. No one of them survived! The heavenly *endur* (spirit) knows everything!” Nyura Sergejevna (b. 1907), granddaughter of a shaman-woman and a being one herself, did not go round the village with the Komsomols, but she remembers how the latter had come to their house, ordering them to hand over all the shaman’s attributes. “I told my grandma, “There they are! Give them, and that’s that!” I gave them everything myself when they came to our house and started demanding. We had been forewarned that they would come and demand these things. People kept only *edekhe*.¹⁴ These were the only things that they were able to hide. I myself gave them everything, and also made new ones for my grandma afterwards.”

The other Komsomols-Nanais were not so careful. Encouraged by

¹⁴ *Edekhe* – a metal image of a spirit worn around the neck.

the authority of the Soviet power, they were trying to get free from the power of the tribal shamanistic spirits who, as a rule, did not leave alone any of the representatives of the shamanistic descent; they sincerely believed that if they simply declared that spirits did not exist, and broke with the existing tradition of shamanistic rituals, they would really become unattainable for these spirits. But the shamanistic spirits themselves, as the tradition bearers assure, would not let them turn away from them. The repressions became the cause of the demonstration of this invisible spiritual force. Even if the Komsomols took away the ritual requisites from shamans, the latter (being, obviously, blamed for yielding them) were immediately subjected to the repressions of not the Soviet power, but much more dangerous, invisible spiritual “repressions”, and they died. “All the *sewens* of old Geiker were collected in one place and set to fire,” says Lindza. “The old man immediately fell ill and died. What for?” – “It was forbidden to practise shamanism,” she tells about another shaman-woman, “and the old woman (shaman) fell ill and died. They treated them like dogs! They yelled at them like dogs! (After that) the old woman was not able to perform *ningmachi* (a shamanistic ritual), or nothing else, either. And so she died.” Only those were doing quite well who were able to hide the things in a likeable place. Shaman Sergei Beldy “wrapped his *sewens* (images of spirits) in birch bark for the water not to get in, went into the woods, hewed out a hole in the trunk of a big tree and put the *sewens* into this hollow. This old man really survived. “Don’t take me,” he said to his spirits, “for leaving you forever!” He lived until the age of 115.” Another shaman Gogoli Kile (from the village of Dzhuen) had a chest (with the requisites) for *kasa*,” says Nyura Sergejevna. “When it was prohibited to practise shamanism, he dug it into the ground somewhere. And he died at once!” – “Why did he die?” – “He buried his own robe, that’s why he died!” A similar story happened to a shaman-woman from the village of Bolan. “She had such a robe, and a hat, and footwear, and gloves – all of them decorated with *sewens*, says Olga Yegorovna. “Once a year, in the autumn, she put it all on. When shamanism was prohibited, she put all these things into a bag, dug a hole and buried them. And she also died quite soon after that!”

But the ones to suffer most were not the shamans, but their persecutors, the young Nanais. Quite often after their “heroic” (as they themselves thought) deeds, the Komsomols fell ill and died. “Two or three people a day (died),” Nyura Sergejevna says. “They just fell ill and died immediately. The ones who persecuted shamans!” – “The

Komsomol who cut to pieces Kile's *toro* (a tree with a carved image of a spirit on its trunk) that stood at the end of their kitchen garden, died exactly a week after!" recalls Nikolay Petrovich. "When the Komsomols took from shamans the images of their spirits-helpers, they hang them on the walls in the community centre and laughed at them," says Olga Yegorovna. "They didn't live more than for a year after that, they all died. Only one of them survived. But he went mad and only laughed until the day he died. He suffered such torments! He laughed days and nights! Three years later he also died." Nanais-Komsomols, carried away by the spontaneity of demolitions, similar to the well-known Pavlik Morozov, denounced their own parents and destroyed shamanistic attributes in their own homes. Alexander Sergeevich told us that one of these Komsomols, having crushed his father's drum, fell ill. He was ill for a long time, became big-bellied. He died of dropsy. He was so young! And educated! His father took a knife with him, and at the grave cut his stomach open. Otherwise they could not have buried him. He had such a big belly. There was not enough space in the coffin! Much liquid flowed out of his stomach! All the people who said that shamans were not needed, they all died!" Here is one more story about the same person, told by Nyura Sergeevna, "His belly was like that! He fell ill with dropsy. The one who crushed the drum! And later on (when he died) his father – he was a clever man! – took him to the grave, put him down on the ground, and cut his stomach open. Yellow liquid flowed out of it. (Otherwise he was too big for the coffin.) It is not good to prohibit! Let them practise shamanism!"

The Russian persecutors of shamans were also avenged. So a Russian called Yevpakov, who, according to the story, did not believe in shamanism and, being, besides that, economically thinking, decided to make use in his household of the demolished wooden hut *дѣкан*, which had earlier been used for keeping the objects of the shamanistic cult.¹⁵ "He wanted to take this hut apart and use it for a cattle shed," says Konstantin Maktovich. "So he did it... He was young. Worked as a teacher. When he was pulling out the last piece from the soil, something happened to his head, as if he had gone mad. After that the logs were taken to Nizhniy Gavan. But he (Yevpakov) got worse and

¹⁵ The Nanais consider the shamanistic spirits dangerous, and therefore they try to keep them not in their dwellings, but in special outbuildings called *дѣкан*. These idols were brought inside only during special rituals.

worse year after year. Eventually he died. But before that all the people who participated in this undertaking, also died. Not in one year, of course, but one after another, all of them died of the same illness – insanity! All of them died of insanity. All (the Nanais) who participated in it! And the Russians who took part in the burning of the idols – they also died of insanity. Yevpakov, when he already had problems with his head, attacked his bull... went into the cattle-shed! He did not realise what he was doing! Took a knife and attacked the bull! Afterwards he also attacked his wife in the same way – with a knife, or a stick! Before these fits he became reticent, gloomy.” As a result of the repressions, it was not only the number of shamans that decreased, but also that of their persecutors who served the interests of the “cultural revolution” – “There are no persecutors any more, not even their children. All of them have died!” summarised Ivan Torokovich.

In the 1930s the “heroes”-Komsomols themselves also began to realise how dangerous it was to openly fight against shamanism. Scared of the idea that all the illnesses suddenly caught by them could be regarded as punishment imposed on them by the shamanistic spirits they had denied, the young Nanais regretted their activities and turned for help to the same shamans. “Many of them fell ill,” says Nikolay Petrovich. “They went to the same shaman (who they had persecuted) and said, “I had a dream of this or that. What if I die!” But he said, “How can I perform a ritual if I gave you a signature that I am never going to practise shamanism again?” “And those who were vicious enemies of shamanism, died. Those who violently attacked religion – died! I know three of them in Dada.” One of such activists, who destroyed the images of shamanistic spirits and cut down trees with carved images of spirits, and fell seriously ill and regretted what he had done, decided that the insulted shamanistic spirits had imprisoned his soul and locked it in a nasty place. According to the words of Nikolay Petrovich, he had come to the offended shaman and “begged him on his knees to get him out of it”. The ritual was performed and the spirits informed the victim through the shaman, “You cut us down, and you’ll die for that now!” This is exactly what they told him! He went down on his knees, but the shaman told him, “I don’t know what and how. You did it yourself. You have been told since your childhood that you must not chop and touch anything connected with shamanism.” When we were growing up, we were afraid of even going near the places where people used to worship,” Nikolay Petrovich comments on his story. Those few Komsomols who had fallen ill after the repressions, but whose lives

shamans still helped to preserve, were transformed from members of the Komsomol into active shamans. “Their parents told them, “Don’t do it again if you get well!” And they prayed to God or maybe somebody else, came to my mother (a shaman)”, says Nikolay Petrovich. “Gradually the sick person got better. And you couldn’t make him do this kind of things again!” All this often nullified the progress the authorities had made in the fight against shamanism.

Conspiratorial shamanistic practice

The policy of repression that so clearly demonstrated the riskiness of the open fight against shamanism, even at present serve as a warning to be remembered. Recalling them, the present shamans threaten, “You must not touch God! You must not touch the shaman! You will become paralyzed, and then...!” Nowadays, as Lindza says, “nobody believes (in shamanism)! But all those who do not believe, are not going to do well! Even if you don’t believe, better keep silent! Now they think that you can tread it underfoot, and do whatever you like!” It was partly inertia that played a certain role in the preservation of shamanism among the Nanais. The tradition that had been maintained for centuries, presented such a remarkable force in itself that it was not possible to destroy it in the course of one campaign. Besides that, the illnesses, insanity and death, which struck the activists who fought against shamanism, exerted influence on those who were ready to break with this tradition and become the bearers of the new materialist ideology. As a result, it led to the secret passive opposition to the authorities. Only the mass rituals that attracted crowds were eradicated, for example, *undy* – offering sacrifice to shamanistic spirits, which also included a procession led by a shaman around the whole village, as well as *kasa*, which used to continue for several days and where people gathered from several villages.¹⁶ But other rituals, in spite of all prohibitions, were continued secretly at night. The fact that some

¹⁶ As a result of the new policy, it was not only the mass shamanistic rituals but also other non-shamanistic mass rituals that disappeared. So, in these years the traditional Nanai weddings stopped to be performed. As an answer to the question if the authorities had prohibited this kind of weddings, Ivan Torokovich said, “No, the wedding were not prohibited, but it was forbidden to get drunk. When they caught a drunk person, they sentenced him to labour camp. They drew up a document stating: fighting here and there – and in the morning they took him away, and that was that! People were doomed for no reason! So weddings were not performed any more. People sat at home for a while, having a booze, and that’s that! Now they have again started to perform weddings, but not according to our tradition! But until the 1930s the Nanais had everything. They went by boats, made two or three

Nanais became communists and members of Komsomol and even representatives of the Soviet power, did not keep them from turning to shamans upon necessity. "I joined the Komsomol, but I still prayed to God," Alexander Sergeyeovich confesses. In the course of many years I was a leading worker, and then a communist and the chief of a kolkhoz. From the early years the shamanistic skills Nikolay Petrovich had inherited put up a fight with the communist world view he had acquired. He was a member of the krai committee, member of the Bureau of the Troitsk Forestry Enterprise, and also a member of the District Committee of the CPSU! "How could I become a shaman the way I was?" he laughs. "You can tear yourself apart, but you have to go to the district committee, and then a plenum gathers in (the village of) Troitskoye, and now, well – some kind of shamanism!" Despite that, he experienced a spell of shamanistic disease, knew the peculiarities of shamanistic rituals in detail and was, as he put it himself, a disguised shaman (he had not gone through the inauguration ritual) and a *tudin*.¹⁷ Actually, as P. Smidovich put it, it was the most peculiar mixture of an obstinate and fervent wish to build up the life on a new, Soviet foundation, and a sympathy and blind trust in shamans" (1930: 7).

Some consequences of the cultural transformation

The cultural innovations carried out by the Soviet power resulted in a cleavage in the Nanai society. Some young Nanais were "recruited" into the process of cultural transformation and became its advertisers. The rest of the Nanais offered passive resistance to the alien for the traditional culture innovations actively spread among them, and remained the bearers of their native language and culture for a long time. This opposition ceases to be topical only now when those people, who had already developed a traditional world view by the 1930s, the time of the most radical transformations in Nanai society, start disappearing. Yet, during all these decades, from the moment of the cleavage until the present time, the bearers of the traditional culture were actually in

rounds at the village, and then started saluting. They sailed and fired guns. Stood on the bank and also fired guns. You know how it was! Afterwards the boats came ashore. People on the bank stood like a corridor, and the ones who came by boats went through this corridor. The bride was the first to go. They came and treated everybody to vodka. And you couldn't refuse it! When those arriving had reached the house, everybody was already chatting, they were getting into a good mood! But under the Soviet power people stopped doing all that. They were afraid!"

¹⁷ *Tudin* – a person possessing spirits-helpers and supernatural abilities like a shaman.

cultural separation, which was intensified by the linguistic isolation. In many Nanai families it was a customary situation in recent years that, for example, the grandmother who did not know Russian, could not speak with her grandchildren, who did not know the Nanai language. In order for them to communicate an interpreter was needed, i.e., the grandmother's daughter, as it was only one generation that was bilingual. "Our children don't know the Nanai language, they can speak only in Russian," Lindza bitterly says. "All right, let them live like that! Our children are going to be like people from another nation!"

Referring to the aforementioned, it would not be correct to say that the transformations carried out by the Soviet power were accepted by the population only in the negative key. The tragic opposition between the representatives of the traditional and innovative culture was mainly applied to shamanistic practice. Many other innovations were accepted by people, and this can be proved mainly by the appearance of a great number of lyrical songs extolling the Communist Party and the Soviet power. It was neither a show nor play-acting, but it was for themselves that people sincerely sang about the marvellous boats running on the earth (cars and trucks) and even fly in the air (aircraft) that had appeared in their lives together with the Soviet power, wondered about refrigerators and TV-sets, and were grateful for all that to the Communist Party. This kind of songs was so widespread among many peoples of the North that researches started to speak about a new song genre called "lauds to the new life". Here is an example of the songs of this genre expressing loyalty to the authorities; it was recorded by the author from Ulyana Beldy (1909–1986) in the village of Iskra, Nanai district, Khabarovsk Krai, in 1981:

Friends, how joyful life has become now!
How interesting it is to think about the (communist) party!
Life is interesting now!
People used to live in the past knowing nothing!
Now life is so good! So good!
If we get weak, somebody will take care of us.
We will thank and respect the people who lived before us and es-
tablished the new order.
Friends, my friends, I tell you: little children are so delighted
And old people feel so good!
When you get old, other people will support you,
When you lose your strength, they will take care of you.

Now you can live long!
 (Only) a bad, lazy woman suffers torments,
 Only a lazy woman cannot find anything.
 If we follow the same route in our lives, we will be so rich!
 Friends, it would be nice if we were younger,
 As we used to be until the time we already lived!
 I am weaker now, and older.
 (But) people won't forget even the aged,
 and they take care of those who are getting weaker.
 Friends, people have done everything!
 The whole (communist) party has arranged it this way
 That the living people would live
 And the growing people would grow!

As regards shamanism, in spite of the efforts made by the authorities to eradicate it, even in 1971, decades after the beginning of the period of repressions, Taras Mikhailov had to admit that atheists have to “manifest more activeness, fighting spirit and perseverance” in order to “stop in places underestimating and indifference towards shamanistic survivals” (1971: 68). At present there are no fighting atheists in the North any more. They arrived and left, but shamans have continued practising until now.

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