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CONTEMPORARY RITUAL LANDSCAPES

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers of this special issue of the Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics were presented at the Ethnography of Contemporary Ritual Landscapes panel organised at the Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society at the University of Helsinki, October 21–22, 2015. The theme of the conference was Landscapes, Sociality and Materiality. The conveners of the panel were Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen and Eleonora Lundell, with discussant Marja-Liisa Honkasalo. The aim of the panel was to examine how rituals organise the production and perception of landscape and how landscape produces ritual.

We would also like to thank the organisers of the Landscapes, Sociality and Materiality conference in Helsinki, especially Anu Lounela and Katja Uusihakala. We are grateful to the editors of JEF to their final editorial work, to chief editor Ergo-Hart Västrik, and to the reviewers of the manuscripts for their valuable comments. In addition we would like to thank the University of Helsinki and the Academy of Finland for funding that contributed to our research.

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INTRODUCTION: ENQUIRIES INTO CONTEMPORARY RITUAL LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT
‘Landscape’ and ‘ritual’ have been largely discussed in the social and human sciences, although their inter-relatedness has gained little scholarly attention. Drawing on earlier studies of ritual and landscape, as well as the authors’ own ethnographic works, ‘ritual landscape’ is suggested here as a useful analytical tool with which to understand how landscapes are produced, and how they, in their turn, produce certain types of being. ‘Ritual landscape’ recognises different modalities of agency, power-relation, knowledge, emotion, and movement. The article* shows how the subjectivity of other-than-human beings such as ancestors, earth

* Our research has been funded by the Research Funds of the University of Helsinki and the Academy of Finland (project entitled Mind and the Other: An Interdisciplinary Study on the Interactions of Multiple Realities, SA 266573).
formations, land, animals, plants and, in general, materiality of ritual contexts, shape landscapes. We argue that ways of perceiving landscape includes a number of material and immaterial aspects indicated by ways of moving through landscapes and interacting with different human and non-human subjects that come to inhabit the world, creating relations and producing agentive ensembles and complexes.

KEYWORDS: ritual landscape • non-human agency • materiality • immateriality • belonging • relationality

‘Ritual landscape’ as a concept emerged in archaeology in the 1980s to conceptualise sacred archaeological complexes where the artefacts found are mainly ceremonial, and where material evidence of other human activity is absent or sparse (Robb 1998). A variety of ontological notions involved in ritual practice affect how landscapes are created, transformed, perceived, and experienced, both in urban and rural areas, and from this understanding the idea of landscape as produced as a consequence of the thought and values related to so-called sacred or social orders has emerged (Morphy 1991; Moore 2004).

This special issue invites authors to discuss ritual landscape through the medium of contemporary ethnography. Our questions initiate exploration in two directions: firstly, the ways in which ritual (re)produces and organises landscape and the kinds of ritual agency that intertwine with this process. How is landscape perceived in the ritual process? What are the methods of creating ritual landscapes? This special issue examines specific knowledge, sounds, smells, and visual elements as ways of engaging with certain places and spaces or thinking about its human and non-human actors. What do these factors indicate?

The second direction attends to how landscape, in its turn, shapes and modifies ritual. The ethnographies presented in this special issue discuss the different ideas relating to subjectivity, the personhood of spirits, objects, earth formations, land, ancestors, plants, and animals that act in ritual contexts in relation to landscape. We especially focus on interactions between human and non-human actors in the making of ritual landscapes. Thus, we not only address the acts of humans, but also the role of non-humans as we consider their agency in terms of materiality and movement crucial in the production of ritual landscapes.

We also ask how ritual landscapes are embedded and produced in politics and economics and how these, in their turn, produce landscapes. And how do specific historicities shape ritual landscapes? Furthermore, what can we say about landscapes in places where different religious ontologies coexist and merge, such as in the context of the urban areas? These landscapes can even become battlefields when different actors aim to use the same places for their ritual purposes. Indeed, landscapes can have overlapping meanings in terms of lived space, cognitive schemas, sensorial emphases, and religious socio-cosmologies.

Taking this into consideration, the articles look at the ways contemporary ritual landscapes are employed in Western Siberia (among the Khanty), among Buddhist initiates in Burma, in the course of making community-based, documentary, video art in indigenous Mexico (among the Wixárika), during the weekly rituals performed at the Israeli-Palestinian Wall on the West Bank, and in global digital mediascapes. On the one
hand, rituals are addressed in everyday settings as ritualisation, while on the other they are also considered as set apart from everyday life.

LANDSCAPES PRODUCED BY HUMANS AND LANDSCAPE PRODUCING HUMANS

In asking these landscape-related questions we join a long discussion in anthropology and philosophy about space and spatiality. The books A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments by Christopher Tilley (1994) and Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space by Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon (1995) have been seminal in anthropological studies of landscape. Both discussed lived engagements with surroundings through embodiment, as well as collective and personal histories inscribed in the landscape. Following Hirsch, Philippe Descola (2013) has presented the idea of landscape as transfiguration, which effectively encapsulates how landscape is both material mediation, in situ, and includes sensory-aesthetic elements, in visu. Humans fashion the landscape via transfiguration. It is a process of actualisation because by acts, such as creating swidden gardens, people produce iconic elements that are in fact signs standing for something else. This is a cultural process similar to Hirsch’s and O’Hanlon’s idea (1995) as it underlines individual management, tastes, and differences although Descola emphasises the role that humans play in activating indexical relations between actors, such as regarding plants as children who are cared for and treated as kin by their caretakers. A swidden garden can thus be an ecosystem transfigured by people.

Scholars have made use of a variety of spatial concepts, such as place, space, and landscape. A methodological dividing line runs between assumptions of the primacy of ‘objective’ place – or locus – that exists independently, without or before our perception or agency, and that of space as lived, remembered, and engaged. The relationship between ritual and space – or landscape – has been portrayed from both angles. Research on holy places with ceremonial rituals can serve as an example of the first: what is primary is the place that is ‘there’, changeless and immutable. The second has been debated by Doreen Massey (1994; 2005), Edward Casey (1993; 1997), Tim Ingold (2000; 2009), and Peter Wynn Kirby (2009), among others; the writers for this special issue take the same approach when we address landscape.

Place, space, and landscape have been portrayed as perspectival, shaped by the views – from various positions – of those who participated in shaping it. Landscape is not only for seeing; it also provides those agents who live and dwell within it elements for signifying and meaning making (Casey 1993). Ethnography is a key to understanding different senses of place, as people have different engagements with the world around them. It has also been argued that for the one who dwells and sees, or participates, the relationship is mutual and intersubjective: space – and landscape – affects actors, and therefore some places may feel more homelike. Both landscape and its participants are in history and memory, which they have created together. Yet in addition to landscape as lived, Kirsten Hastrup (1998) – examining Iceland and its people – stresses discursive relationships with the landscape, for instance with land and water, which make people conceptualise themselves as certain types of being. Therefore, landscape also shapes humans differently, as well as their histories.
The relation between landscape, history, and myth has been discussed by Robin Wright (2013), among others. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958), myths express oppositions, but also resolve them. Different opposing structures, such as this world and the other world, and their further various levels, can be engaged with in ritual space, as well as other incompatible aspects of human lives, including gender and age cohort (Houseman and Severi 1998). Myths and oral histories can thereby create ritual landscapes. This special issue opens with an article by Art Leete on the structural space of the Khanty, which they divide between the living and the dead, the Upper and Lower part of the world, both of which include further different levels. Rituals taking place in Khanty landscape, shared by different actors, such as Khanty people, reindeer, and gods, unite the different levels. Leete’s article discusses ways of seeing the sacred topography, so prominent in the studies of vernacular religion, as something constant and ‘out there’. Yet he also demonstrates how the dimensions of the world, and consequently its spatial conceptualisations, alter according to modalities of the ritual process.

Lea and Pekka Kantonen then describe how the Wixárika people in Mexico, during their pilgrimage, walk in the footsteps of their ancestors; spatial organisation of the landscape, therefore, is crucially founded in ancestral time and the cardinal directions. This is similar to the practices of many other indigenous peoples. Landscape can operate as a mnemonic device with certain places becoming iconic because they stand for past events and the acts of past generations. Fernando Santos-Granero (1998), who has worked in Peru, has used the term topographic writing to refer to the way in which the oral history of the Yanesha people is expressed in certain landscape features and retold by community members. For the Yanesha, living in the Peruvian Amazon, specific geographical landmarks and places (topographs) are associated with past events that are units of longer narratives. Landscape can obtain its meaningful place as a result of ancestors moving through it and living in it, thereby producing it (see, for example, Morphy 1991; Pérez 2012 on the Hopi). The Kantonens’ article adds to this discussion by focusing on transformations in ritual landscapes, arguing that today local school and museum projects also make the Wixárika move around. The Kantonens suggest that the ancestors are now deeply intertwined with these new ritual spaces and ritual acts related to the school and local museum.

RITUAL THROUGH LANDSCAPE

Rituals have been much debated in anthropology, religious studies, linguistics, sociology, and many other fields of the social sciences, although there have also been periods when the concept of ritual has been avoided or has not attracted attention as a category. Ritual can be a tool because it can serve to reorganise social context. It has its functional aspects, but it can also be approached from ontological perspectives on beings and being. Aesthetics also play a crucial role in the formal aspects of rituals. Lastly, rituals have a pragmatic level, as rituals say something about actions and interactions in the course of events. These issues between ritual and landscape have remained largely unexplored.

Since Gregory Bateson’s (1972) classic study, *Steps to the Ecology of Mind*, the relation-building character of ritual has been a much discussed topic. The ritual that enacts relationships, and the relationality of rituals, have also been addressed by Michael House-
man (2006), who has emphasised that exceptional relationships reorganise into a totality, for instance between ritual participants orchestrated by emotionally meaningful ritual acts. We have been interested in how these repetitive relationships between actors are activated towards landscape, creating a totality. The activating of relationships as management of landscape can be done by moving through and organising the space, the use of speech in certain places, and by addressing different aspects of landscape, as pointed out by Tilley (1994) in his phenomenological studies of movement, body, and landscape.

As rituals have been considered ways to relate and as ways to establish relations between ritual participants, they often also actualise a diversity of non-humans inhabiting the world. Landscape can configure and attune these relationships in different ways and several methods of configuration are addressed in the articles that follow. For example, different visualisation skills may be essential in order to master methods of transfiguration (Virtanen 2011, see also Virtanen and Saunaluoma forthcoming). Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen (2011) has suggested that precolonial geometric earthworks in south-western Amazonia are closely related to the practices of dreaming and having visions, for which several indigenous groups in lowland South America learn and train from an early age. The study of geometric earthworks in lowland South America, which has altered outsiders’ perceptions of Pre-Columbian societies in the region, essentially materialise the world of other-than-human beings that has been collectively addressed, interacted with and shared during rituals. The ways of moving designed by the places of certain is also central among several Amazonian indigenous groups (Virtanen 2015; see also Myers 2013 on Australia).

The material representations are in fact doors to the world of spirits, which can also be understood as macrocosmos. People can connect to landscape, as it can be used as a map for participants in rituals who feel special relationships between here and what is imagined. Landscapes can thus have indexical connections and reify something that is merely indicated. Christopher Ball (2014), for example, in his work on dicentisation as semiotic action has looked at different worlds of perception, referring to ethnographic examples by other researchers. In one of these, referring to the work of Allan Grapard, Ball showed how Japanese mountain landscapes formed by Buddhist practitioners could, through ascetic practices of perception, allow one to see beyond them and connect with the truth of the teachings of Buddha.

Ingold (1993: 152–153) has stated that the landscape tells a story:

To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.

Land can even have its own songs and sounds, as pointed out by Fred Myers (2013) in his study with the Warlpiri in Australia in which he focused on how they learn their ties to the land and its beings in social relations with others. The temporality of landscape is social, as landscape can be created by certain activities, auditory emphases, movements, and paths that give specific rhythms to landscape, and finally its form (Ingold 1993; see also Tilley 1994). Moreover, temporality is present in the landscape in the sense that the past actions of humans and non-humans are embedded in it. Interaction with the land-
scape is, however, contextual engagement, and therefore landscape can be perceived and related to differently at different times – and when it comes to ritual behaviour, there are different rules of engagement.

In rituals specific knowledge is acted upon that often is not widely shared or official. Ritual knowledge is frequently gained through personal experiences that are collectively shared amongst those at the same level, while ritual acts shed light on specific features of the world. The relationship between ritual and structure has been debated by a number of scholars, with Victor Turner (1967) prominent among them, and it has been argued that rituals are “vehicles for all forms of authority”; at the same time their socially transformative potential has also been acknowledged (Kelly and Kaplan 1990: 141). Thus in this special issue we address questions of authority, discussing how both humans and non-humans can act as authority and how this is reflected in ritual landscapes. Humans such as ritual leaders have greater control over the relationships created during ritual, but non-human agencies also play a crucial role in shaping both ritual forms and how landscape is produced and managed through interactions between different actors. In ritual landscapes other-than-human beings can be constantly ‘acting back’, as the world is populated by different types of being who are created through the relations between other beings. Kantonens’ article also discusses the active role of the spirits in controlling and affecting the contemporary use of the camera, which they as researchers brought to the ritual landscape.

Non-human agents can be ancestors who are frequently consulted in a variety of healing rituals. The ancestor spirits are thought of as living beings, and may be activated during rituals. They are often also authorities on ritual who play prominent roles in ceremonial consultations, while actors in the healing ceremonies can also become possessed by them (see also Obeyesekere 1981; Lambek 1999). Kantonens’ and Leete’s articles underline the intimate ties to ancestors and emotions generated by mythical images in an ontological thinking shared across the generations.

It has been suggested that rituals can deal with existing emotions or create new ones, something that has been a much debated theme in anthropology (see Bateson 1963; Metcalf 1991). In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Émile Durkheim (1947 [1912]) emphasises the enormous power of ritual to produce effervescence. What ritual does emotionally is to energise people and make them feel larger than themselves. According to François Berthomé and Michael Houseman (2010), connections between ritual and emotion can be considered from two angles: as emergent properties and integral components of the ritual process, and as relational, as sensate, qualities of a relationship. Bereavement rituals include both: they are capable of creating sadness, sorrow, pain, and tears for the ritual participants. Emerging emotions and intense relationships are badly needed in the ritual context (for example, Caraveli-Chaves 1980). Bereavement rituals include emotions in landscape – and belonging – in different ways because the ritual person, the deceased, is being detached from the present landscape in order to travel to the place of the ancestors. Healing rituals are emotionally loaded, and in extreme bodily states, such as possession, shared emotions between the participants, and even the generations, coordinate and result in what is called the efficacy of the ritual practice (Obeyesekere 1981).

This volume contains articles in which lived space is a core issue. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière’s article looks at individual embodiments of Buddha’s teachings and how
initiations in Buddhist monasticism, Buddhist esotericism and spirit worship distinguish categories of actions according to their religiosity in a Buddhist landscape. The article by Kantonens indicates that devotion and feeling responsible are crucial emotional responses among the Wixárika. Johanna Sumiala’s article addresses mourning in a digital ritual landscape, a mode of sharing emotions that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the contemporary world.

MATERIALITY OF NON-HUMANS, AND ONTOLOGICAL MODALITIES, IN RITUAL LANDSCAPES

This special issue, through different ethnographic examples, also mirrors the diversity of ways in which people relate to the materiality of landscapes in ritual contexts. One of our aims is to argue that the materiality of landscapes cannot be separated from people. Following recent cross-disciplinary approaches known as the new materialism, posthumanism, and the ontological turn in anthropology, we emphasise the importance of non-human agency in the processes of producing, interpreting, and perceiving contemporary ritual landscapes. Among others, we take the groupings produced by the interactions of humans and certain non-humans to be “biosocial assemblages”, a term that Ingold and Gisli Pálsson (2013) have suggested for relations between humans and other life forms. We also look at the existence, grounded in materiality of experience (see Coole and Frost 2010). Thus, looking at how people relate to and interact with material objects within diverse ritual scenarios may deepen our understanding of different virtualities and actualities of lived experiences. By giving emphasis to materiality in ritual landscapes we want to stress that analysing the encounters of people and objects within different rituals may open up new perspectives on how things (material and immaterial, human and non-human) participate in the making of everyday lives in the contemporary world.

The role of sacrifice is crucial in many rituals (see Leete’s article) and has been regarded as a core issue by scholars since the works of Durkheim (1947 [1912]) and Henry Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1964 [1899]). According to Victor Turner (1977), sacrifice is a quintessential process as it is necessary for the successful consultation of the oracle or divinity, or for an answer. In the ritual context, the landscape of sacrifice is one of mediation between this world and the otherworld. Of all sacrifices in ritual processes, blood sacrifice is the most powerful in protecting and securing the promise of human life in the face of human malice or evil from the external world. Based on exchange between the sacred and the profane, on a gift to the divine beings in order to get effective protection, animal sacrifice is performed by order of the respective god from whom a response is expected. The question of sacrifice as a material object playing a central role in the ritual can be conceptualised as an assemblage, and thus a part of the actor network that is widely in motion in society beyond the ritual process. Drawing on Bruno Latour’s (2005) actor-network theory, a methodology for understanding society as consisting of networks assembling humans, non-humans and technologies, sacrifice becomes meaningful through an assemblage with other actors: material, immaterial, human and non-human. What is social for Latour is the network of associations between movement, displacement, transformation, translation, and enrolment (ibid.: 64–65). In this context,
even sacrifice can be analysed as an actor par excellence that induces the other actors to create new assemblages and monetary associations, which gather together ritual actors into new shapes. This kind of an analysis deserves to be carried out. We think it can put forward new associations between different societal networks, and is also important for comprehending ritual sacrifice in its full meaning.

Sacrifice is also a necessary actor in the healing rituals, which have a specific landscape consisting of colour, movement, and smell (Taussig 2009). In her study (in the context of West African healing ritual) Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (2016) analyses the efficacy of ritual by examining a variety of different healing practices. For the purpose of efficacy, everything that is usable seems to matter when people deal with sick children, family members, or neighbours. In the challenging situation of poverty and hunger in the developing countries people demonstrate unbelievable creativity in shaping ritual objects out of pieces of what we call trash – metal, rope, chains, or calabash – and in planning dance, music, clothes, and instruments. In her ethnography, in what she calls “ritual plenitude”, Honkasalo follows ritual practices in a diasporic setting. The same creativity of building ritual practices continues in an unexpected synchrony with transnational resources. This is also what they do as ‘missionaries’ as the people of West African origin call themselves as immigrants in Northern European cities.

Human–non-human relations in a ritual landscape simultaneously produce and are produced by different forms of power relation: socio-political, religious, economic, and so forth. In fact the understanding of the ontological status and effects of things in different ritual landscapes brings us closer to contextual modes of power. For instance, one manifestation of the violent conflict between Afro-Brazilian religions and Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil is the appropriation of the ritual objects of Afro-Brazilian religions (such as sea salt, roses, the arruda herb, religious bodies) in neo-Pentecostal ceremony carried out in hundreds of Iurd churches (Igreja Universal de Reino de Deus) in Southeast Brazilian metropolitan areas (Benedito 2006; Lundell 2010). The neo-Pentecostal logic in the ritual of exorcism (aimed at freeing people from the influence of Afro-Brazilian spirits) is based on knowledge of the agency of these specific material things. This particular church is one of the most lucrative business corporations in Brazil and, like many big Pentecostal churches in the country, participates strongly in national politics. Thus, the analytical emphasis on the materiality of religious experience within ritual landscapes may enable new perspectives on, and increased understanding of, for example, the considerable societal changes due to Pentecostal expansion in contemporary Brazil.

Focusing on materiality within ritual landscapes benefits many of the ideas presented recently by scholars of the ‘ontological’ approach in anthropology (see Henare et al. 2007). Some studies, especially those concerning Afro-Brazilian (Goldman 2011; Halloy 2013; Sansi 2013) and Cuban religious worlds (Holbraad 2011; 2012; Blanes and Espírito Santo 2014) have criticised the ‘representationalist’ tendency within earlier studies of religious rituals. In other words, these studies have shown that the Cartesian dualistic divisions between nature and culture, material and immaterial do not always correspond with the knowledge of the ritual participants, yet this is the model that has been largely used as the foundation for the theoretical concepts in analysing religious phenomena such as ‘spirit’, ‘god’, ‘religion’, ‘sacred’, and ‘profane’. Moreover, the ontological critique has suggested that the notion and experience of subjectivity, agency, and materiality can emerge through totally different ontological modalities (see
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Holbraad 2012). For example, in Afro-Brazilian (religious) experience different things and beings are ontologically connected with each other through the notions of *axé* (a single force that all things in the world are modulations of), *orixás* (vital forces of nature which manifest in people and in things, such as in elements of nature, colours, gestures) and spirit entities (portug. *entidade*; ancestor beings which manifest and materialise in people and things). This specific “vitalism” (Goldman 2011: 116; Lundell 2016: 53–59) penetrates the ritual landscape and its human and non-human actors in such a way that in a ritual work of Umbanda and Candomblé the material objects can become subjects (in processes of knowledge production and healing), while people are seen as objects or tools of the spiritual work carried out by the non-human spirit entities (*entidade*, *guia*) through materialisation in ritualised bodies. Furthermore, the ontological status and agency of ritual objects (including different material things as well as the human body) in rituals carried out in the Umbanda houses of São Paulo, is not merely representative but can be thought of as primarily transformative and re-configurative (Lundell 2016).

The work of Latour especially has brought new perspectives to life through things. In this special issue Elisa Farinacci presents a Latourian theory of assemblages and analyses the formations of a specific ritual landscape in a well known conflict zone: the Christian shrine known as Our Lady of the Wall, located in the wall built by the Israeli government to assure the safety of Israeli citizens from Palestinian occupation. Farinacci’s ethnography demonstrates that the ritual landscape emerges as a process of entanglement with the wall, in which, in opposition to its political existence, Roman Catholic nuns decided to found a shrine with an icon of the Virgin Mary.

Using the actor-network approach Farinacci argues that the ritual as an assemblage develops its agency through an interplay between a vast number of human and non-human actants. In addition, a spatial concept – the border/boundary – is of importance in her analysis. The idea of a boundary, the Wall, provides another new view on the question of the relationship between landscape and ritual. What the border does is to separate two groups of ritual participants, leaving one on either side of it, separating agency and splitting it into two. The built border, a space, separates not only people with different religious backgrounds but also actuality and virtuality, both of which are necessary dimensions of a chain of action: of play, phantasy, and ritual (Bateson 1972). Ritual, however, is able to bring them together into a landscape where both – virtuality and actuality – exist simultaneously (Latour 2012).

**ALTERING RITUAL LANDSCAPES**

When thinking about ritual landscapes we must also pay attention to the question of transformation. Thus, as we have seen, changes (political, cultural, religious, social, and so forth) constantly affect the intersubjective relations between the actors and assemblages that produce ritual landscapes. Leete’s article in this special issue provides an interesting ethnographic perspective by showing how changes in dwelling and subsistence effect changes in ritual landscapes. His study demonstrates that among the Khanty the rituals of death and rituals of reindeer offerings are carried out according to different, seemingly contradictory, topographic orientations – mythical and non-mythical. Thus, as Leete shows, the notion of landscapes can also be flexible because people,
as well as landscapes, experience constant changes, and controversies of orientation towards the ritual landscape may emerge. Leete suggests that this controversy (which for the Khanty is no controversy) indicates that certain patterns, or the contextual logic of change itself, can be detected within specific ritual landscapes that are spaces of meaning-making where different knowledges and agency enact in flexible ways.

Finally, thinking about ritual landscapes in the age of digitisation and the digital mediascape, Johanna Sumiala’s article makes an interesting ethnographic contribution to this special issue by discussing the ritualisation of death in the virtual landscape of social media. Sumiala analyses the ritual mourning within the digital mediascapes of people killed in the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Following Arjun Appadurai’s definition, Sumiala understands that mediascape refers both to the “technological capabilities that produce and disseminate information” as well as to “the images of the world created by these media” (p. 112). As Sumiala states, the division between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘actual’ world is very challenging as the physical and the digital are tightly intertwined in events such as the Charlie Hebdo tragedy. Including the digital world in the analysis of ritual is highly important as the internet and the expansion of social media have enabled new forms of sociality (ritual and non-ritual) in the contemporary world by both breaking and creating boundaries between people interacting, producing knowledge, and exercising agency within the global society. In contemporary ritual landscapes, where the virtual ‘digital’ is not even in fact separate from the ‘actual’ we could perhaps develop further the idea of how the materiality of these technologies and images, which form the mediascape, according to Appadurai and Sumiala, are internalised parts of our new subject positions in the ‘glocal’ totalities in which we now live.

Ritual as a concept has been criticised in studies of modern, plural societies. In sociological studies, it has sometimes been considered an old-fashioned concept that applies only to non-modern societies. Anthropologist Joel Robbins has developed two important elements to this discussion, however: first, based on his studies of global Pentecostal movements, he writes about ritual as a mode of sociality (2009), emphasising the enormous institution-building capacity that the movement has, and noting that it is precisely the fundamental role of ritual that makes it possible. The Pentecostals make use of the association-building capacity of ritual and operationalise the understanding that social life is dense with rituals the performance of which may lead to success. Second, Robbins and Sumiala (2016) present another theme that makes ritual important in modern social life by emphasising the role of ritual in modern society as being both private and public. Ritual produces intimacy, which is an extremely important issue in modern, globalising society with its increasing exclusion, marginalisation, and failing sense of belonging. In this context, through current social media and the politics of representation more generally, the ritual landscape can also become larger and shared worldwide.

Meanwhile, as the articles in this issue demonstrate, the new ritual landscapes that emerge make people connect in novel ways, offering and promoting a sense of belonging. In contemporary studies of ritual we find that emotions, belonging and relationality are important themes, especially in the context of post-secular movements, as well as in the recent expansion of immigrant or refugee situations. Moreover, with this introduction we have shed light on the importance of non-human agency in the processes of perceiving, interpreting and producing contemporary ritual landscapes. The notion of
‘ritual landscape’ presented and debated in this special issue – as the locus of relationships between different human and non-human actors – might serve as a useful analytical concept for ethnographies carried out within many different ritual locations. We argue that ways of perceiving landscapes include a number of material and immaterial aspects indicated by ways of moving through landscapes and interacting with different subjects that come to inhabit the world, creating relations and producing agentive ensembles and complexes.

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to examine Khanty spatial ritual behaviour in the context of the simultaneous application of different ideas about sacred landscape. I aim to demonstrate the functional pattern behind handling seemingly ambivalent characteristics of cosmological models in the tangible ritual performance of the Khanty, an indigenous people inhabiting the taiga and forest taiga zone of Western Siberia. I explore three cases in which the concept of sacred topography is applied among the Khanty by exploring two public ceremonies of reindeer sacrifice and one episode of a post-funeral rite. It appeared that the spatial conceptualisation is different in different rituals. During sacrificial ceremonies, the Khanty position the Upper World in the southern direction, while in the case of death rituals, the Upper World is projected towards upstream of a river, even if it remains in the north. Studying different spatial orientations during rituals provides a methodological key for approaching other concepts of vernacular belief among Siberian indigenous communities.

KEYWORDS: the Khanty • reindeer • sacrifice • ritual • landscape • sacred topography • worldview

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars argue that (folk) beliefs have ambivalent effects on people’s social life and narrative practices. The contradictory nature of religion can appear, for example, in the course of social change (Appleby 2000; Gottowik 2014) but it can also be revealed in mythological narratives (Lunaček 2004) or in connection to the environment (Taringa 2006). In addition, it has been claimed that folk religion as a whole is heterogenic, illogical and contradictory (Valk 2008: 381) in its approach to the sacred landscape (Anttonen 1996: 108–125, 135–137).

In this paper I aim to discuss the ways in which the Khanty, the indigenous people of Western Siberia, manage their spatial ritual behaviour. The need for ritual management of space appears both in everyday life and rituals. The Khanty always keep in their mind the cardinal directions and the qualities of the landscape as this awareness ena-
bles them to manifest and apply simultaneously practical and spiritual topographical frames. In structuring space, myths and everyday deeds meet in very general attitudes and particular situations, in vague feelings and particular rules.

Myths codify worldview by being structural manifestations of distinguished archaic layers of culture. Myths represent tenacious cultural representations while at the same time also changing under pressure of dynamic social context. Myths constitute basic identity, a symbolic model of cultural totality, an integrated whole of visions of the world and meaningful elements of culture. (Siikala 2002: 15–17; 2012: 17–19)

For Claude Lévi-Strauss, myth is “a form of language” that directs people to comprehend dialectics and dichotomies of the surrounding world (Doniger 1995: viii). At the same time, Lévi-Strauss used myths in order to illuminate metaphorically human ambivalence and existential paradoxes (ibid.: x). According to Lévi-Strauss (1995 [1979]: 3), illiterate people grasp the meanings of myths intuitively in their lived experience. Indigenous people attempt to reach overall and complete understanding of the world by myths that enable the shortest way to comprehend the universe in a holistic mode (ibid.: 17, 44–45). Departing from the ideas of Lévi-Strauss, one can argue that myths relate to landscape as all-inclusive spatial experience.

Anna-Leena Siikala claims that myths not only manifest the core of culture in an abstract way. Certain social mechanisms enable myths to constitute actual cultural practices:

Their meanings emerge from a process of interpretation in which the symbolism of the cosmos, and the nature of the otherworld and human kind, is filtered through an individual culture, the reality subsiding within the consciousness of the community and of the person, and its flip-side, a second reality. (Siikala 2012: 19)

This discussion resembles Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1954 [1926]: 100) functional approach, which says that a myth is “reality lived” and continuously influences human destinies in indigenous communities. Siikala stresses ambivalent rationality behind the functioning of myths. The actuality of ancient myths persists only in certain conditions and is based on “the logic of the impossible”. This dialectic of reason and unfeasibility makes them comprehensible and influential. (Siikala 2012: 19)

The modern Khanty rather commonly accept mythical world perception. The dialogue between daily conduct and ritual actions reflects the functionality of the mythic world order in tangible cultural practices. “In codifying the structures of a worldview, myths carry the thought patterns of the past” (Siikala 2012: 22). Mythic imagination helps the Khanty to bridge experiential conflict between the traditional and modern realities of life.

Emphasising existential features of the myth enables a synthesis of Lévi-Strauss’ approach to myth and functional tactic, as advocated by Malinowski (Harwood 1976: 784). Malinowski argues that myths are closely connected to understanding of the world and sacred tales, rituals and everyday actions. Myth enriches and arranges belief, thus empowering human existence. (Malinowski 1954 [1926]: 96–101; see also Harwood 1976: 784–785)

Malinowski also addresses the issue of the “enlivening influence of myth upon the landscape” (Malinowski 1922: 330). Landscape testifies the truth of the myth, makes it tangible and durable because the myth is fixed in it. Loaded with sacred connotations,
landscape embodies a meaningful scene of actions. Tim Ingold (2002: 42) suggests that hunters take “the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world.” In Ingold’s view, hunters apprehend the world through engagement, dwelling and “taking up a view in it” (ibid.).

Philippe Descola maintains that in order to reveal the indigenous mode of constructing representations of the environment, local concepts about cosmologies, ontologies, spatial representations and rituals must be taken into account. At the same time, Descola (2004: 85–86) admits that there is no “coherent and systematic corpus of ideas” available for discovery. Many members of observed native communities are not aware of the underlying doctrines of their cultural rules. Anthropologists reconstruct indigenous spatial models of ritual practice from fragments of narratives and seemingly trivial acts “which they weave together so as to produce meaningful patterns” (ibid.).

Dialogic association between the environment and humans, i.e. the practice of generalised reciprocity, is often metaphorically exemplified in terms of close, personal interaction (Pálsson 2004: 65, 72, 77). Embracing the dialogic perspective on ritual and the environment indicates a realistic existential position (ibid.: 78). Established practices of environmental interaction produce a sacred spatial dialogue, while collective ideologies enable it to be maintained (Ellen 2004: 103). But that coherent conceptual space cannot be adequately constructed on the basis of individual representations. People generate vague, irregular and ambiguous concepts of environment at the levels of individual practice and collective representations. (Ibid.: 104)

The understanding of myths, rituals and the landscape connects big cosmological schemes and people’s everyday lives. Mythical images, intimate feelings and cultural practices meet at this existential and conceptual crossroads. Overall understanding of the world is shaped by cultural habits, although at the same time this understanding directs these practices in accordance with sacred rules. There is no undisputed understanding inside indigenous groups concerning the way in which sacred rules must be managed. This makes it rather complicated to draw general cultural schemes of the relationships between people, ritual and landscape.

Khanty rituals as well as sacred topography have been described multiple times in scholarly literature. Scholars have noted that for local spirits the Khanty have special sacred places where they can make sacrifices. Rituals of honouring the main gods can be made in different sacred places all over Western Siberia (Karjalainen 1900: 31, 35–38; Sirelius 1900: 23–24; Kulemzin 1984: 48–51; Rombandeyeva 1993: 60–64; Sokolova 2009: 594–607). The intimate connection between people, ritual and the landscape has been especially rarely discussed.

During the 1990s I performed ethnographic fieldwork among the Khanty annually. Even without specific enquiry, the topic of sacred topography popped up frequently. The Khanty must continually consider cardinal directions when moving around in a seasonal forest camp (in order not to anger gods or spirits), but more particularly, during performance of sacrificial rituals. Already during my first field trip it became quickly clear that Khanty life is constantly guided by considerations related to this sacred geography. Daily life illustrates the holistic effect of sacred rules among the Khanty, although the few collective sacrificial rituals I have conducted have been decisive in understanding the principal importance of sacred topography for the Khanty.
In addition, while studying other topics, seemingly unrelated to these questions of ritual landscape, connections between the Khanty world models, gods and people’s behaviour continued to emerge as factors that influence any practice among the Khanty people. I have documented these pieces of information in different contexts and now I aim to analyse the understanding of ritual landscape of the Khanty in a more concentrated way.

The method for my analysis is based on thick interpretation of my field experience (observation and interviews). In the context of my own empirical data, as well as comparative descriptions from other scholars, I test theoretical claims about the ambivalent relationship between mythic imagination in folk religion and people’s actual ritual behaviour. In general, I apply the method of hermeneutic interpretation, which enables me to neglect understanding of inconsistencies in data that are the results of irrationality or fundamental cultural ambivalence but as reflections of structural principles of folk religion.

I intend to examine my fieldwork experience and discuss the ways in which the Khanty manage the complicated prescriptions of sacred topography both during rituals and in everyday practice. I argue that the actualisation of different versions of Khanty sacred topography depends on ritual practice. Rituals relating to death are modelled according to a more archaic spatial perception that is linked to tangible environmental objects (most prominently, rivers). At the same time, during reindeer offerings the Khanty switch to the concept of ritual space, which relates to cardinal directions. By dwelling on my field data, I demonstrate how distinctive indigenous spatial approaches dominate on different occasions. A comparative look at various Khanty rituals reveals several peculiarities in the spatial arrangements of these ceremonies. I intend to demonstrate that, despite this impression of ambivalence, the Khanty always apply sacred topography coherently, according to a clearly articulated approach to the relationship between the physical landscape and the mythological world understanding.

MYTHS AND LANDSCAPE

In the Khanty worldview, landscape is structured and managed by gods and spirits. According to Khanty belief, the world is divided vertically into several layers. Good, white gods rule the Upper World; the black gods of diseases and death inhabit the Lower World. It has been proposed that this mythical model of the structure of space is an archaic shared feature of Uralic cosmology. In addition, many other groups in the northern Eurasia and North America also recognise this basic model of the Universe (Karjalainen 1918: 296–298, 307; Kulemzin 1984: 170–171; Ajkhenvald et al. 1989: 157–159; Gračeva 1989; Schmidt 1989: 187; Lukina 1990: 14–16; Napolskikh 1992; 2012; Siikala 2002: 20–24; 2012: 22–24; Pyatnikova 2008: 63).

Vladislav Kulemzin (1984: 170) argues that the Khanty possibly also recognise a two-layer world model that consists of only the middle and lower worlds, thus keeping good gods (together with humans) and evil spirits in direct confrontation. The third option is to see all three worlds as self-sufficient, each one containing both good and evil spirits and gods. Valeri Chernetsov (1987: 154) and Evdokiya Rombandeyeva (1993: 19–21) propose a Mansi world model (the closest neighbours and language relatives to
the Khanty) that includes seven layers, combined into three clusters, roughly parallel to the simpler three-level world structure. Similar data has been reported concerning the Khanty (Balalajeva and Wiget 2004: 72; Pyatnikova 2008: 63). Furthermore, in their mythical songs the Khanty sometimes describe only the Upper World as a seven-layered spatial structure (Lukina 1990: 16; Kulemzin and Lukina 1992). The most complicated ideas about the structure of the world are documented among the Vasyugan River Khanty, who consider only the lowest level of the Upper World as having seven layers (Lukina 1990: 16).

If the world is envisioned as multi-layered, parts of the Universe that stay closer to humans are inhabited by creatures that have potentially closer connections with living beings. The lower layers of the Upper World are reserved for helping spirits who serve as negotiators and messengers between gods and humans. At the same time the spirits of deceased people dwell in the upper parts of the Lower World. As a rule, people are not supposed to communicate with the main god Numi Torum directly during their prayers but turn towards these lower level messenger gods and spirits. Only in the case of a really serious crisis can prayers be sent directly to Numi Torum. At the same time, the main god does not live at the highest level of the Upper World as two layers in the top of the Upper World are reserved for Numi Torum’s father Num Kurys and grandfather Num Sives. According to Khanty belief, people have no contact with these creatures, it is enough to know that somebody superior is also watching over the deeds of the supreme god. (Lukina 1990: 16)

The vertical structure of the world is experienced in a tangible way, at least in some parts of space closer to the scene of human action. The Khanty define these worlds through objects or subjects of the environment that are visible or touchable to humans. For example, the lower layers of the Upper World are labelled “the top of the birch-covered hill in the middle of the sky” or “the pine tree bog in the middle of the sky” (ibid.: 16). Analogues between the life-worlds of gods and humans are also emphasised in the Khanty myth that tells that the main god Numi Torum lives simply in “the heavenly forest” (ibid.: 73).

This vertical model of the world is also projected horizontally on to the actual landscape. The horizontal mode of sacred landscape makes ritual practices intriguing and complicated to interpret in scholarly discourse. Humans stand always in the middle point of the world. But different modes of structuring space may seemingly contradict each other. This is to be expected if we think about a variety of options for conceptualising space according to Khanty vernacular religion.

For the Khanty, forest landscapes with a multitude of waterways represent probably the most archaic layer of religious imagery (Kulemzin 1984: 171; Lukina 1990: 16; Siikala 2002: 19). Everything that is situated towards the upper streams of rivers belongs to the domain of the white gods of the Upper World and territories remaining downstream constitute the arena for the Lower World’s black gods’ actions. Entrance to the Lower World is situated at the mouth of the River Ob, in the Arctic Ocean. This frame of the world is intertwined with another way of structuring the space around people. Simultaneously to the up- and downstream system gods are divided in space according to the trajectory of the Sun. In this way, white gods live in the southern or eastern part of the world and the black gods of death and disease in the north or west (see overview of relevant approaches in Kulemzin 1984: 170–172; Siikala 2002: 21–22). This double sys-
The system of categorising space is even more complicated as a result of migrations and shifts in religious ideas:

Regional world-concepts were projected horizontally onto specific geographical locations – and they clearly constituted a system of specified cult centres. During the reconstructions, two contrasting principles of the changes caused by the migrations are to be taken into account. On the one hand, the migrating sections of the people took with them their guardian spirits; on the other hand, the geographically outstanding sacred places remained, with only the character of the spirits residing over them changing in the course of the migrations. (Schmidt 1989: 226)

It appears that the Khanty treat the relationship between gods and landscape differently depending on the rank of various gods. The tendency to relate higher, sky gods to particular locations is important both from general and regional perspectives. Spiritually structured landscape enables the Khanty to specify the presence of gods and actualise their mythic world order. But this spatial connection of gods and humans also shapes ritual behaviour during everyday practices and sacred feasts. (Schmidt 1989: 223–227; Siikala 2012: 33)

Landscape is given to the Khanty by the gods (see Karjalainen 1918: 298–307; Lukina 1990: 14). The overall structure of space is designed according to the total set of divine relationships. Local sacred places are shaped by gods' particular actions. Everything around people is a result of some sacred action, conducted by gods and spirits. Although this general scheme is shared by different Khanty groups and distributed widely among the peoples of the north, specific ritual practices, related to landscape, may be more challenging to analyse in a unanimously comprehensive way.

Myths can be approached as cultural discourse but also as cultural practice. In the latter case, a myth serves “as a tool of people’s social action” (Siikala 2012: 34–35). In the course of human lives, relevance in the context of everyday actions justifies the existence of myths and gods. There is a multitude of rules for ritually shaped behaviour that people feel are almost natural. Most of the Khanty are used to some basic set of sacred spatial arrangements. The vertical model of the world is good to think and sing about, while during rituals, the horizontal structure of sacred space enables the Khanty to arrange communication with gods and spirits.

The double approach to the gods’ landscape (as related simultaneously to rivers and the sun) has a potential for causing some confusion. Rivers flow in different directions and upper places are not always situated to the south. Syllogistic logic says that there must be a few problems with arranging ritual behaviour in some situations. In fact, this twofold arrangement of sacred landscape never obstructs ritual actions.

Sometimes, the Khanty gods and spirits behave unpredictably. They do not always react properly to people’s requests but, at the same time, can be negotiated, even manipulated. One must consider the possibility that gods can also manipulate humans. As I learned during my field trips, the Khanty occasionally complain that gods play tricks on them by pretending not to be available. The Khanty imagine the Upper World as the office of a director of a huge corporation where nobody actually cares about the needs of the common people (FM 1992; see also Karjalainen 1918: 37).

Not only do gods have the right to interpret people’s prayers by disregarding the idea of a request or reacting to them selectively, but humans too are allowed to treat
gods and spirits creatively. The relationships between inhabitants of different worlds are open-ended on every occasion. Siikala (2002: 30) advocates an idea about a fluid set of mythic rules:

The continuing negotiative process concerning the mythic-historical tradition leaves room for the creative imagination, which uses doubt and deviation as well as stereotypic reproduction, borrowed elements and their assimilation and adaptation to produce unique performances and new forms of art relevant to the present day.

In post-Soviet social settings, this communication with the gods starts to touch upon wider social processes and a range of political actors. Siikala, again, refers to this transformation of an intimate traditional ritual sphere into the space of public political manifestations. According to Siikala (2012: 35), people connect themselves with mythical events from the past through narratives and sacred sites that “possess power to unite communities and to act as a tool for national self-determination and for political interests”. This myth-based flexibility reflects the adaptive functions of the Khanty worldview and makes it possible for people to modify their survival strategies. For example, negotiations with gods serve as a model for managing problems that people encounter when communicating with legislative, administrative and economic agents.

The national and political agendas of the Khanty leaders when arranging sacrificial ceremonies are usually rather vague, although not absent. The fact is that some of the Khanty rituals become public and more advertised, as well as connected to contemporary economic and social problems (see Leete 1997; 1999; 2004; 2014). At the same time, even rituals arranged for show consist of coherent authentic structure of actions and take into account the landscape of the gods.

In order to delve more deeply into the problems of the application of concepts related to sacred topography, I present three case studies from my own ethnographic field experience. These cases involve a couple of public collective sacrificial rituals with a rather different frame of arrangements, and thirdly, I am going to discuss an example of using the three-component world model in more commonplace circumstances.

**Sacred Topography of Num-to Lake**

In April of 1996, a collective sacrificial ceremony was organised at Num-to Lake in the middle of Western Siberia. The Khanty and Forest Nenets consider Num-to the most holy place and sacrifice reindeer there regularly. This time, the ritual was arranged within a more political framework as part of protests against oil company developments in the region. Three reindeer were sacrificed to the gods of the Upper World in order to ask for divine support against oil drilling in the area. In order to give more publicity to the event, local TV Company Yughoria recorded the event and later broadcasted it nationwide. (For a more detailed description of the ritual, see Leete 1997; 1999.)

After the ritual, I interviewed local Khanty Stepan Randymov (1941–2005). I chose him as a key informant for the case because during the ritual I got the impression that Stepan was observing very carefully the course of action and seemed to have a rather precise idea of the different elements of the ritual. He brought up the topic of local
sacred topography in several contexts. I got the impression that his views on details of the sacrifice were rather elaborate and suitable for generating discussion concerning the relationship between the ritual and landscape. Firstly, he discussed the shape of the sacred lake as being meaningful for the religious imagination of the local people:

On that lake there is an isthmus that looks like a human or animal neck with a head on it. On the head part there are two sacred sites. No women has ever been there. It has two eyes, two islands with six birches on them, there are two eyes on the sacred lake. In the lake, at a distance of four kilometres from the village, there is an island that is considered the heart of the lake. Women have never been to it: only men go there.\(^5\) When one sees it from a bird’s eye view, from a plane or helicopter, it resembles an animal, with a heart, head, and eyes. Over there one can see plaits: small rivers go like plaits. (FM 1996)

This kind of anthropo- or zoomorphic vision empowers the vernacular feeling of the exceptional sacredness of the place, reflecting perception of landscape as a living creature on its own. In addition, it may be that these human- and animal-like qualities help to establish smooth contact with the gods, or that the location embodies a heavenly being.

Another issue, rather central to the success of the ritual, was the way in which everything was positioned during the sacrificial ceremony. Stepan addressed this topic of directing sacrificial animals and people very carefully. According to him, during any ritual related to the Upper World, reindeer and people must stand with their faces toward the sun and white heavenly gods. If anybody chooses to make a sacrifice to the black gods, everything has to be arranged in the opposite way to face the dawn.

As Stepan revealed, one can communicate with the Lower World everywhere, but the Upper World can be reached only at certain locations where access to the white gods is closer. One cannot pray to white gods in a village in mundane conditions. Stepan seemed to consider the relationship between different gods delicate to handle for humans. It is easy to make a mistake and direct your ritual message to the wrong part of the cosmic landscape. A wrong action (misdirecting a sacrificial animal during a ritual) can change the character of a ceremony completely, despite the place where the offering is made. From Stepan’s discussion it appeared that the details of the offering ritual are rather similar in the case of white and black gods. One simply needs to consider the difference in the colour symbolism. Stepan emphasised that collective rituals to the white gods can be performed in special places where women must be kept away:

There are also some sites where only men are allowed to go. These are high places. They climb to some hill, and – Oh! There is a sacred site over there above the forest. However, when riding a reindeer sledge, the sacred site may be at a distance of 40–50 kilometres. In most cases such places are near the upper courses of rivers or between rivers. There are such places near here, by the Kazym River, and some other places, where it is taboo for women to go.\(^6\) (FM 1996)

The Num-to Lake area is widely recognised as a sacred location. Khanty and Forest Nenets people from other regions also go to this area to perform reindeer sacrifices (Leete 1997: 39–40; Sokolova 2009: 596; Moldanov 2010: 48–51). In addition to the overall sacredness of the area, the ritual was connected to the topography of the Khanty
and Forest Nenets worldview through the positioning of food, people and sacrificial animals during the ceremony. Scholars commonly assume that the Khanty always orient reindeer sacrifices toward the sun, a practice that is framed by understanding of the Higher and Lower Worlds (see, for example, Karjalainen 1900: 48, 445; Balzer 1999: 188; Wiget and Balalaeva 2011: 127–133). This setting imitates indigenous approach to the structure of the world as it appears on the actual landscape – the Upper World is in the southern direction and the Lower World in the northern.

SACRIFICIAL RITUAL IN RUSSKINSKAYA VILLAGE

In June 1993, I participated in another Khanty public sacrificial ritual in Russkinskaya village on the Tromyugan River. The reindeer offering ceremony took place during the fourth International Finno-Ugric Peoples’ Folklore Festival and was labelled The Party of Torum. Hundreds of tourists participated in the event as guests, an international audience that consisted primarily of Hungarians, Finns and Estonians. (Leete 2004: 128)

The ceremony was held as a show-off event as there was no particular reason for the Khanty to sacrifice reindeer that day, but as regional administrators forced the Khanty to celebrate, they could not escape the event. In addition, the ritual site was not genuine but constructed near the village especially for the festival. A brand new sacred storehouse and a conical tent were assembled, and a fireplace and wooden frame for drying fish had been built in order to give us the impression of an authentic Khanty forest camp (Russkinskaya itself is a Soviet-style modern village without the looked-for aura of authenticity).

Seven reindeer were brought to the village from the taiga by helicopter and three shamans were captured and required to perform the ritual (one of these shamans, Sergey Kechimov, managed to escape and a random Khanty man was put into the line of shamans). Next day some policemen beat up these shamans and unknown persons destroyed the short-lived sacred site during the same night. This was revenge, demanded by the Surgutneftegaz Oil Company because the shamans had refused to sign licenses for oil exploration on their tribal territories (Balzer 1999: 153). Although the Khanty did not initiate the ritual, it was necessary for shamans to perform it. Among the Khanty, shamans must carry out collective sacrificial ceremonies (see Georgi 2007 [1799]: 115; Karjalainen 1900: 31; 1918: 163, 236–242, 440–441; Kulemzin 1984: 113; Barkalaja 1999: 59; Balalajeva and Wiget 2004: 81–82; Nakova 2008: 82–83; Sokolova 2009: 596; Wiget and Balalaeva 2011: 126). At the same time, between the Eastern Khanty (to whom the Tromyugan River Khanty also belong), most sacrificial rituals have nevertheless been performed without a shaman (Kulemzin 1984: 113); elders of collective sacrificial ceremonies can be elected amongst the most honoured members of a local community (Barkalaja 1997: 63; 1999: 60).

Guests left the scene after the attractive part of the ritual (the prayers and reindeer sacrifice) was over, although the Khanty had still carried out the several-hour-long ritual as correctly as they could under the circumstances. Through prayers the Khanty asked for very general support from the upper gods. As my Khanty friend explained, they requested the gods to “protect life”. (Leete 2004: 128)
The sacred topography of the ceremony was arranged in the way that seven reindeer and shamans stood near a small stream with their faces to the east. The audience stood behind the shamans and a passage, following the same direction, was created in the middle of the crowd. Prayers were pronounced and the reindeer souls sent eastward where the sun rises. According to Khanty spiritual geography, east is equated with the southern direction as the space for the Upper World and the heavenly gods. (Leete 2004: 128–129, 133)

Despite the rather awkward situation, the Khanty attempted to keep the ritual as close to a real one as possible. Among the other elements of a genuine sacrificial ceremony, spatial rules were followed. Although the random location of the ritual site put the Khanty in a complicated situation, they managed to arrange the event according to normative cultural prescriptions. So the spatial setting of the ceremony was one of many elements of the sacrifice that was meant to avoid any possible harm that a senseless ritual could cause to participants, among them, the audience.

This Russkinskaya case indicates that the sacred world structure must be manifested during any ritual, even if culturally distant officials initiate it for political reasons and the randomly chosen part of the landscape where the sacrifice happens is not especially sacred to the Khanty. Human ritual action can thus add a temporary sacred value to a landscape and enable manifestation of the Upper World in any spot of land. This conclusion contradicts Stepan Randymov’s claim that the Upper World can be reached only in specific locations, while the Lower World’s gods can be reached everywhere (see above). This may indicate variations in individual or group cosmological views. However, this seeming ambivalence can also be a manifestation of the obscure relationship between gods and humans that leaves, as the Khanty suppose, some space for negotiation and thus enables ad hoc changes in sacred topography.

**FINDING A FOREST CAMP**

I encountered a rather different experience of Khanty sacred topography in a more mundane situation. In the summer of 1995, I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Surgut region, on the Pim River near the town of Lyantorsk. Our team’s plan was to leave the town and spend some time in a Khanty forest camp on the Ai Pim River, the tributary of the main Pim River. I missed my fieldwork companions Auli Valta and Anzori Barkalaja and was supposed to reach our Khanty friends’ summer camp on my own. The next day I found the driver who had taken my friends to the forest and asked him to drop me at the same spot where he left them. When we approached the place, a rather indefinite location in the taiga, night was already approaching. The driver left with his truck and I was supposed to get to the camp. I found a path and walked until I reached an old house belonging to our Khanty friends, which I had visited a few years earlier. Unexpectedly, the whole forest camp area appeared to be abandoned.

I realized that, perhaps, the Khanty grandfather had died recently and his family moved away. According to the Khanty worldview, a forest camp where somebody dies will be taken over by the spirits of the Lower World and people must leave the place. Staying overnight in these places might be dangerous for living creatures.
I could not stay there because Anzori had left with my sleeping bag and that night promised to be rather cold. Besides, our Khanty friends could later easily establish my whereabouts during that night. I thought they would consider me contaminated or possessed by Lower World spirits. But my problem was that I had no idea about the location of the new forest camp. It was complete darkness and totally quiet around me by that time. I attempted to listen for the Khanty dogs’ barking from a new camp but there was nothing to hear. The whole forest was completely silent. I decided to follow the river and reached the new campsite six hundred meters from the former one.

Everyone in the new camp was already sleeping (including dogs) but when I arrived, the Khanty friends’ family got up and we started to drink tea. After consuming three huge cups (that is a minimum for one-time tea drinking episode for the Khanty), I was supposed to tell everybody how I managed to reach the new summer camp. Eventually, I got the impression that I succeeded in earning a few credits in the eyes of the Khanty because I avoided the dead man’s residence and indicated some skills in way finding.

The Khanty explained that a dead man takes his house with him and continues to live there among spirits of the Lower World. In such cases a family must move further upstream. If a women dies, it is not necessary to abandon a camp. But until there is a figures of gods and spirits of death in the house, the spirits are not able to occupy the building. Until then, it is considered to be the people’s domain. In fact, our Khanty friends laughed on my stupidity during that tea session. They had not moved their kin spirits out from the old house and actually it would have been all right to stay there overnight.

The idea about spirits of the Lower World inhabiting houses of the deceased and forcing people to move upstream is widespread among the Khanty (Kulemzin 1984: 54). This custom is one among numerous practices of taking into account sacred topography in more everyday arrangements. The Khanty traditional houses and conical tents are always positioned according to directions of space. Rules that constitute gender-specific areas inside a living room and movements around campsites also take into consideration the way in which landscape is divided between different mythological worlds. The Khanty’s intimate living space is penetrated and structured by the gods’ landscape (Kulemzin and Lukina 1992). This close connection with sacred topography orchestrates everyday Khanty practice and gives them a persuasive rhythm of living in accord with the gods’ spatial arrangements in every situation of their lives.

In the Pim River region moving a forest camp upstream away from the Lower World, in the case of a camp master’s departure, means that during the death ritual, the Upper World is projected to the north and the Lower World to the south. This ritual behaviour seems to indicate an existent controversy between application of the Lower and Upper World models on landscape. According to syllogistic logic, the Upper World should not be assigned simultaneously to the south (as in the case of sacrificial ceremonies) and to the north (while performing the moving ritual after somebody dies). But our evidence seems to indicate exactly this. Apparently ambivalent ideas about situating the Lower and Upper worlds need to be discussed within the larger framework of the Khanty religion.
DISCUSSION

The relationship between ritual and landscape can be analysed in the context of different aspects of the Khanty worldview. A few researchers have envisioned the overall representation of the Khanty religion as rather chaotic. Karjalainen (1918) noticed that nobody would ever be able to count correctly all the Ob-Ugrian gods and spirits because the data is enormous and disorganised. In addition, Kulemzin (1984: 174) deduced from a large body of evidence that the Khanty worldview is a rather “amorphous mass of religious ideas”. Several scholars have expressed similar doubts about the logic of different areas of Ob-Ugrian vernacular religion. Éva Schmidt (personal communication, 1992) argued that the Khanty report different numbers of human souls and explain the functions of these souls in a variety of ways, without coherence between various views. Chernetsov claimed in the preface to his classical study of the Ob-Ugrian soul concept (1959) how the Khanty people recounted that a human consists from two to seven souls. Chernetsov proposed that, in a way these variations (between two and seven) might be simultaneously true. Kulemzin (1984: 59) notes that imagination of local spirits is rather diverse among the Khanty. For example, when analysing other-than-human beings, a scholar cannot be completely sure if the Khanty are talking about animals, objects or spirits that appear in a specific form. If the Khanty understanding of gods, spirits and souls varies open-endedly, does it make the whole vernacular religion and ritual behaviour relative and nothing can be said definitely about the Khanty worldview?

Known prototypes of the Khanty sacred landscape (the vertical and the two horizontal modes of space) seem to have a potential to contribute to this conceptual confusion in the framework of ritual practice. If the Khanty feel no contradiction here, it can be assigned to the vernacular tendency to ignore ambivalences that strike the syllogistically trained scholarly mind. I propose that the Khanty make perfect sense when applying different versions of sacred topography in their ritual action.

We can take discussions concerning the soul or other-than-human beings as a key to interpreting the relationship between landscape and ritual. Places are polyphonic “as complex as voice” and enable the localisation of concepts (Rodman 1992: 640–643). The Khanty landscape with its river flow directions and overall north-south orientation can be treated as a heterotopic “simultaneously mythic and real contestation” (see Foucault 1986 [1967]) of a meaning-making space. Although logical paradoxes seem inevitable, the Khanty manage to arrange landscape-bound rituals without hesitation. Somehow, every opinion can be correct or, at least, tolerated, and the will of gods constantly reinterpreted. But there is still an underlying cultural ideology that makes the topographical background of rituals coherent.

There is a significant difference in how presented examples of rituals illuminate the relationship between sun- and river-bounded sacred topography. Num-to Lake is situated in a higher area, several rivers flow from the region in different directions and this fact prevents the sacred topography from becoming obscure. The absence of a dominant river makes the Num-to area’s divine geography clear and pure. Rituals can be oriented here only according to the directions of the world.

But the Middle Ob area presents a particularly interesting case for discussing the relationship between landscape-embodied cosmology and ritual action. In this region the Ob flows westwards and the right-hand tributaries of Ob to the south (as with the
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Pim and Tromyugan rivers). This means, paradoxically, that ritual orientation, related to rivers, places the Upper World to the north, in areas designated to the Lower World in regard of south-north axis of the cosmological world design. The indigenous people of this region orientate their ritual behaviour on some occasions according to rivers, ignoring the darkness-and-light paradigm of space. Therefore, ritual orientation, as relating to rivers, dominates in certain contexts the south-north sacred rule. In everyday life, one simply cannot ignore rivers, with which the gods are closely connected. This relationship between simultaneously applied seemingly ambivalent cosmological laws appears hazy, although, actually, the Khanty are pretty sure about these ritual orientations. The Khanty of Pim and Tromyugan rivers place the Upper World to the south during sacrificial ceremonies, but to north when performing movement to a new campsite after the master of a forest settlement dies.

Nevertheless, at some points it may be difficult to establish the accuracy of following sacred topographical and ritual rules, rooted in Khanty mythological narratives. We can take another look at the relationship between rivers and sacrificial rituals among the Khanty. Uuno Taavi Sirelius (1900: 22–26), Karjalainen (1918: 187), Rombandeyeva (1993: 64), Wiget and Balalaeva (2011: 126) assert that the Khanty and Mansi sacrificial places for gods and spirits are always situated near water. Siikala (2002: 22) argues that sacrificial rituals must be conducted near water as it carries the souls of deceased people and slaughtered animals to the other world. The last argument can be easily challenged, as, for example, there is no way this rule remains valid in the case of the Num-to ritual. Stepan Randymov (FM 1996) particularly stressed that the souls of reindeer go to the Upper World in the southern direction. The course of the ritual substantially confirmed this argument. However, rivers can take souls only to the Lower World (see Schmidt 1989). Even more clearly, the insufficiency of this claim about the specific role of rivers in sacrificial ceremonies is illustrated by data, offered by Wiget and Balalaeva. When describing a particular reindeer sacrifice on the ice of Tromyugan River in 1992, Wiget and Balalaeva (Balalajeva and Wiget 2004: 91) provide evidence that, despite the proximity of the south-flowing river, sacrificial reindeer were oriented eastward. But if reindeer were not directed according to the river flow, how can animal souls go with it? If the reindeer souls go to the Lower World, what was then left for the Upper World gods, to whom the Khanty prayed?

Khanty beliefs allow additional argumentation to explaining this apparent contradiction. The Khanty believe that all living beings have at least two souls, one of which moves to the Upper World and the other to the underworld in the course of a sacrificial ritual (Karjalainen 1918: 19–36, 448–462; Kulemzin 1984: 21; Balalajeva and Wiget 2004: 91). This view makes perfect sense when praying to gods of both worlds (see Barkalaja 1997: 60; Wiget and Balalaeva 2011: 131). But this reason does not hold up in the case of the Num-to ritual as people were praying there only to the Upper World gods and there was no river or stream nearby that could possibly take one of the reindeer’s souls to the Lower World. Perhaps Num-to Lake could do the soul-carrying job as well.

In the Middle Ob region this appears to be more confusing. Barkalaja reports some cases of reindeer sacrifice on the Pim River from 1994, 1995 and 1997. During the 1994 and 1995 ceremonies the sacrificial reindeer were made to stand facing the north. At the same time white textile was wrapped around their necks. Later, many participants in the 1995 ceremony fell ill, something that was interpreted by some local Khanty as the
result of giving too much credit to the gods of the Lower World (Barkalaja 1997: 60–65; 1999: 58). The sacrificial ritual in 1995 was a collective ceremony for all the Pim River Khanty. These large rituals had not been performed here for decades. Consequently, the organisers of the ceremony lacked experience in arranging such an event. Lost knowledge was given as an argument when people discussed the ambivalent results of the sacrifice (ibid.: 65–66). As far as I can understand Barkalaja’s field data, there was no unanimous agreement among the Khanty about any mistake in the direction of the reindeer during the ceremony. A short conclusion in this respect may still be that on the Pim River, one is supposed to project the Upper World to the north (upstream) when moving a forest camp, but to the south if reindeer are sacrificed.

After the sacrificial rituals at Russkinskaya and Num-to, some of my Khanty friends expressed the opinion that these ceremonies were not real because of their political agenda and the doubtful attitude of many participants (who took part in these rituals as an excuse for alcohol consumption). However, my interviews and observations confirm that at least some of the participants took these rituals seriously. They supervised the overall correctness of the ceremonies and checked the details of ritual conduct.

One may argue that the three case studies (and randomly available comparative evidence) presented in this paper are not representative and cannot serve as the basis for adequate generalisation. Certainly, analysis of just a few episodes does not prove any overall law; however, even these few events are good enough to illuminate evident ambivalences (demonstrating that overall rules can be challenged on particular occasions) and enable a inductive hypothesis that can be tested on a larger body of data, or in other circumstances. At the same time, these cases are not all just random incidents. The Num-to and Russkinskaya rituals serve as extreme examples of post-Soviet public sacrificial ceremonies, and evidence about these cannot be extensive. The most prominent treatments of sacred topography (during public rituals) and the most trivial example (about changing the location of a forest camp) enable significant discussion on the relationship between landscape and ritual in a more general vein.

I maintain that in the case of Khanty sacrificial rituals, the model of sacred topography that relates to the directions of space dominates the cosmology of a river. One cannot kill a reindeer without making a sacrifice (Niglas 1997: 25–26; Nagy 2011: 80). In addition, one cannot always kill a reindeer near water. This makes the argument about the compulsory relationship between sacrifice and a water body unjustified. At the same time, cardinal directions are treated in a consistent way according to south–north orientation during sacrificial rituals. But in the course of some other ritual activities, the world model represented through landscape and by rivers, can dominate the day and night pattern of cosmology.

World models structure the perception of space but are not simply varieties of intellectual exercise for the Khanty. Grand mythological narratives influence people’s worldview and ritual action, although everyday discourse and communication also have an effect. Different versions of cosmological models have distinctive functions and domains in Khanty ritual practice. Coherent theoretical frameworks for constituting cultural space are frequently misleading (Ellen 2004: 104), although at least in the Khanty case there is the possibility that sacred topography is consistent and that different models of space are actualised on particular ritual occasions.
Every episode of reindeer sacrifice is autonomous to a certain extent. Any sacrificial ritual involves a unique and self-sufficient combination of actions and meanings. A comparison of different cases and attempts to deduce general rules leads to logical contradictions. This comes about because documented empirical evidence is detailed to a different degree or appears ambivalent because different people interpret particular episodes of sacrificial ritual differently. But, also, the Khanty do not care too much about perfect abstract coherence between the spatial arrangements of different reindeer sacrifices.

A detailed examination of particular cases of ritual practice illuminate ways in which available mythic imaginations are used during specific rituals and how rituals influence understanding of mythic space. Moreover, this analysis can be used in order to reveal a shared logic of manipulating religious ideas and practices among the Khanty. Consequently, this methodological guideline, although rather vague and conditional, can be used when examining other domains of indigenous belief and ritual.

As we can see, ambivalences in understanding sacrificial rituals occur between descriptions of different authors (due to fragmentary evidence concerning distinctive case studies). In addition, discrepancies in the reports of indigenous informants cause some confusion. Informants may have a different role in these rituals and their level of indigenous knowledge may vary. But as my experience shows, for those Khanty who had active functions in rituals and who were informed enough about the rules of sacrifice, there was no disarray in these events.

Among the Khanty, therefore, there is genuine knowledge about the rules of sacrificial ceremonies. By itself this core knowledge is harmonic. Ambivalences appear during attempts to find general rules by using information obtained from informants who have different access to knowledge and while trying to deduct abstract canons from rather diverse evidence. In the case of mapping sacred Khanty topography, rituals and everyday arrangements make perfect sense if we admit the logic of the different models of cosmological order. Although Descola argues that indigenous ideas lack coherence, the Khanty’s sacred topography is intrinsically systematic and not just because of a scholarly approach that searches for regularities. It may well be that this functional integrity is related to tangible qualities of landscape (as Malinowski suggests). By following Ingold’s statement, I assert that the Khanty are born into sacred topography. The Khanty imitate mythic landscape during their rituals and reproduce it in the same process. In other areas of folk religion with less tangible qualities, variations and discrepancies of vernacular interpretations may be more substantial.

Following on from this, one must be rather cautious when arguing about ambivalences in folk religious practice. Consistent interpretation of data sometimes reveals cultural rules behind seemingly contradictory empirical data. Of course, similar discretion must be applied regarding arguments in favour of harmony between views on sacred topography and actual ritual practice. In general, arguments favouring fragmentarity and ambivalence stand, but in the specific case of Khanty sacred topography, evidence supports cultural arrangements having a coherent logic.
NOTES

1 I use ‘worldview’ as the basic term and ‘mythic world perception’ and ‘mythic imagination’ as synonyms for it. As regards the problems discussed in this paper, the topic is always related to the mythic component of worldview. One can also find the term ‘beliefs’ here, by which I mean particular conceptual manifestations of the Khanty worldview.

2 By the term ‘sacred topography’ I mean a particular myth-based mode the Khanty people have of imagining plots of land. ‘Spatial representations’, ‘spatial models’, ‘sacred landscape’ and ‘ritual landscape’ designate similar concepts but in a more tangible context. At the other end of the scale, ‘sacred geography’ and the ‘mythical model of the structure of space’ have a wider and more abstract meaning, referring to a general relationship between the understanding of space and the physical landscape among the Khanty. Even more general are notions of the ‘cosmological model’, ‘cosmological scheme’ and ‘mythic world order’ that mark the overall conception of the structure of space that provides content to the sacred landscape.

3 During my fieldwork trips, I worked among the Eastern Khanty in Surgut rayon (Pim River), as well as among the Northern Khanty in Beloyarsk rayon (the Kazym River and Num-to regions) and Priuralsk rayon (the lower course of the Ob River).

4 Num-to – ‘heavenly lake’ or ‘Lake of God’ in Nenets; in the Khanty language Torum lor.

5 In December of 1933 a Russian woman, Polina Shnaider, a representative of the Ob-Irtysh oblast party committee, went there and was killed (with other officials) by local Khanty and Forest Nenets. This action was among the main reasons for the armed uprising undertaken by the local Khanty and Forest Nenets people against the Soviet regime in 1933–1934.

6 Timofey Moldanov (2010: 49) reports that women’s attendance has spoiled the small sacred island at the shore of Num-to Lake. Because of that, the sacred place is now abandoned.

7 Torum, Torem (‘god’ or ‘heaven’ in the Khanty language) can be any god in the Khanty cosmology; here the main god Numi Torem (‘heavenly god’ in the Khanty language) is meant.

8 Even today, more than 20 years later, the Surgutneftegaz oil company has not settled the oil drilling licenses with Sergey Kechimov, the shaman who escaped the Russkinskaya ritual in 1993 (see Favorsky 2015; IWGIA 2015).

9 During the 1996 Num-to ceremony, people also prayed for general smoothness of life (political statements stood apart from the sacrificial ceremony as such). Today this kind of general prayer about health, happiness and prosperity are rather common for Khanty sacrificial rituals, as shown by the evidence provided by Andrew Wiget and Olga Balalajeva (Balalajeva and Wiget 2004: 69, 86–87; Wiget and Balalajeva 2011: 119, 131). Kustaa Fredrik Karjalainen (1918: 136) reports that already in the 18th century Khanty sacrifices with this general aim were documented. So it seems to be a rule that collective prayers target general prosperity and happiness.

10 For a more detailed description of the sacrificial ritual, see Leete 2004.

11 According to Timofey Moldanov, it is prohibited to step on ice during a sacrificial ritual (2010: 48). Here we can observe another variety (or seeming contradiction) of sacred rules, related to Khanty rituals and places.
SOURCES


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ABSTRACT
In this article, we outline the meanings modern Wixárika institutions, such as the school and the museum, may receive as parts of ritual landscape and how the community-based videos shot in the context of these institutions may increase our understanding of ritual landscapes in general. We discuss how ritual landscape can be researched using community-based documentary video art in a way that takes the ontological conceptions of the human and non-human relations of the community seriously. In this case, we understand community-based video art as artistic research in which the work is produced with the community for the community. The making of art, discussed in this article, is a bodily activity as it includes walking with a camera in the Wixárika ritual landscape, interviewing people for the camera, and documenting the work and rituals of the pupils, teachers, and the mara’akate (shaman-priests) planning the community-based museum.

KEYWORDS: Wixárika • deified ancestors • community museum • community-based art • videography

Good morning! Could all of you from faraway Finland please step closer. This porthole, by which we are standing, is sacred and this disc next to it is also sacred. We will now place an offering inside the hole and shape it. This will allow you all
It is October in 2014 and we are recording a video in the schoolyard of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi, the Great Grandfather Deertail, junior high school. We have organised a video workshop in the Tsikwaita community together with the school’s teachers. Community craftspeople; the Sámi linguist Irja Seurujärvi-Kari; the student Paula Rauhala, who is employed by The Sámi Museum Siida; and Katri Hirvonen-Nurmi, the curator of The Helinä Rautavaara Museum, have been invited to participate. As part of the opening ceremony, the teacher of the Wixárika culture and a mara’akame (a shaman-priest), Maestro Alfredo lifts a stone disc, tepari, to reveal a sacrificial chamber dug in the middle of the schoolyard. He places an offering into the hole and a burning candle next to it. Doing so he opens a vertical gateway to the beyond – to the upper and lower worlds – and converses with the kakaɨyarixi, the deified ancestors. We, the guests and the school pupils, walk past him one after another and each one of us receives a blessing administered with his feather wand. A teacher of textile handicrafts, Maestra Rosa shields the candle with her hand to prevent it from dying. We are filming for the community museum that is going to be set up in the school.

Alfredo, Rosa, and other teachers at the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school regularly attend, with their children, annual celebrations and agrarian ceremonies (sowing, weeding, roasting, and harvesting corn) that are held in the communally built circular thatch-roofed tuki temple and in the smaller xiriki temples, which are maintained by familial communities. Ceremonies are the most important way to familiarise children and the young with the deified ancestors (kakaɨyarixi), sacred places, and rituals, although today different types of custom are also needed. Not all families are able to attend ceremonies since parents work as migrant workers in sugar fields or sell handicraft in the city and the children are in school. This has inspired the teachers and the members of the parents’ association to found a community-based museum and cultural centre, Tunúwame, in which Wixárika culture will be researched, documented, archived, presented, and taught to the Wixáritari, especially the schoolchildren (Proyecto general 2016). The young need a place where they can obtain knowledge of their own culture in an interesting and modern way. The idea of founding a museum comes from Alfredo, the leader of the ceremony described above. The aim of the seminar is to consider what kind of knowledge will be presented in Tunúwame and through what means this will be accomplished. The teachers find videography especially important since it enables students to follow the ecological changes of sacred places, and the documentation of the rituals for the museum collections and therefore for future generations. Videography can aid the preservation of ritual practice, the yeiyari, and if information is nevertheless forgotten, later generations could learn the details of it by watching the videos. Other similar museum and culture house projects are planned in the context of school network CEIWYNA on the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains.

As representatives of the Finnish civic organisation CRASH (Coalition for Research and Action for Social Justice and Human Dignity), we have been asked to teach videography for the teachers and students of Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school. We have brought...
with us videos from the collection of The Sámi Museum Siida by indigenous videographers, such as the Sámi anthropologist Päivi Magga (2016). They are used as examples of how other indigenous peoples have recorded their cultural landscape on video. For several years, we have delivered messages between the Sámi and the Wixáritari and therefore influenced the views of the teachers of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi on the museum. (Kantonen and Kantonen 2015)

In addition to CRASH, the museum network has been supported by the Mexican Catholic University ITESO (Instituto de Tecnologia y Educación Superior) in Guadalajara; The Sámi Museum Siida; the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland; and the Arts-Equal project of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The museum can be seen simultaneously as development cooperation, research, and community-based art project. We, the authors of this article, work in cooperation with the whole network, although most of the work is conducted in the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school in Tsikwaita. As artists we seek to facilitate and document the workshops and discussions in which the contents of the community-based museum are built. The starting points of our research are connected to the discussions of the CRASH museum group.

In this article, we outline the meanings modern Wixárika institutions, such as the school and the museum, might receive as parts of ritual landscape and how the community-based videos shot in the context of these institutions can increase our understanding of ritual landscapes in general. We discuss how ritual landscape can be researched using community-based documentary video art in a way that takes the ontological conceptions of the human and non-human relations of the community seriously. In this case, we understand community-based video art as artistic research in which the work is produced with the community for the community. At the same time, videography is for us a way to produce research material. In community-based art, either individuals or the entire community may participate in planning and defining the artistic research or they may act as advisors, realisers, informants and interpreters, or as the owners of and audience for the finished work of art. In our work, we seek to return our research, edited in video form, to the Wixárika community so that members of the community can check and update both their own and our views. We call this constantly updated method generational filming (Kantonen, P. 2017). The making of art, discussed in this article, is a bodily activity as it includes walking with a camera in the Wixárika ritual landscape, interviewing people for the camera, and documenting the work and rituals of the pupils, teachers, and the mara’akate planning the community museum.

In recent years, the expansion of transportation and communication networks has brought the Wixáritari into closer contact with the entertainment and culture industries. It has also enabled them to engage with the wider critical discussion on globalisation. The Wixárika ritual art has become fashionable and popular, especially among the New Age-minded Mexican and North American religious communities (Liffman 2011: 52; Neurath 2013: 16). The Wixárika communities are popular travel destinations, particularly during the festivities, and many people want to record the rituals on video. Visits by outsiders increase the trade in services and crafts, but they also interfere with the rituals. Most autonomous Wixárika polities have set strict limits on both visitations and recordings. On the other hand, filmmakers are sometimes welcomed to cooperate with the communities who seek to inform audiences about their land and cultural rights through the means of films or videos.
The autonomous Wixarika political structures function as forums for the Wixáritari to discuss the conditions of artistic cooperation among themselves, with their ancestors, and with the *teiwari*, the non-Wixáritari. We discuss the different stages of the project privately with political and religious authorities as well as communally in the meetings with schoolteachers. The American art historian Grant Kester recommends that community artists work for an extended period in discussion with “politically coherent” communities. Such communities have a clear political aim, which the communal art project may provide with understanding and visibility. These kinds of community are often critical of artists’ suggestions and are not easily led by artists or art institutions. Dialogic cooperation is a long-term project that enables the parties to listen to each other and understand their respective aims (Kester 2004; 2011). Other art historians and theoreticians who have written about communal and participatory art have problematised the aims of communal art by emphasising the internal conflicts of communities and the power and dependency relations of the different parties participating in art projects (see for example Kwon 2002; Bishop 2006; Blom 2009; Jackson 2011).

Although the Wixárika communities are not always exactly unanimous or coherent, our cooperation with the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school has a political goal, as understood by Kester: the aim is to establish a community museum and to create the conditions for autonomous Wixárika video documentation.

Although we are not anthropologists, we work together with them using both the existing anthropological literature on the Wixáritari and concepts related to the so-called ontological turn of anthropology as analytical tools. A large amount of research literature on Wixárika rituals, sacred spaces, and the art pertaining to them has been published recently. In his *Huichol Territory and the Mexican Nation*, the American anthropologist Paul Liffman (2011) has mapped the relationship of sacred spaces to both land ownership and civic organisations. The Mexican anthropologist Hector Medina Miranda (2010) has recorded oral histories in order to analyse the changes in the Wixárika ritual landscape and the related oral literature in relation to the changes in the landscape, caused for example by the building of dams and reservoirs. Anthropologist Johannes Neurath (2011), who works in The National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico, has examined the ontology of Wixárika sacred spaces, rituals, and art. Mexican media researcher Sarah Corona Berkin (2002) has studied Wixárika photography. Working in Mexico, Olivia Kindl (1997) and Neurath (2013) have researched the modernisation of the Wixárika ritual art and its adaptation to new contexts. According to Neurath (ibid.: 19, 60, 102), Wixárika art is thoroughly modern, although it is linked to the pictorial continuum of pre-colonial Mesoamerican art.

In the Wixárika ritual landscape, sacrificial offerings and their material are used to communicate with the deified Wixárika ancestors. Sacrifices, places, artworks, plants, and animals are living and changing actors that actively influence the social relationships of people and the ancestors. Ruy Blanes and Diana Espírito Santo write in the introduction to their edited collection *The Social Life of the Spirits* (2014) that spirits are social beings. Not unlike electricity, law, or virtual currency, they participate in our social relations and shape them in invisible ways. You cannot see them but you can research their effect on human experience and social life. Espírito Santo and Blanes call these effects “evidentiary regimes”. We approach these regimes through our interview data and let the teachers tell how the ancestors control the videos shot in the ritual
landscape. We will also see what happens if we follow the instructions of the teachers and relate not only to the ancestors, but also to the camera as an independent actor that participates in social situations in its own way.

After the 2014 museum workshop – the opening ceremony of which was referenced at the beginning of this article – that was organised in the school the partners of the museum project, CRASH and ITESO, proposed that the workshop addresses be edited into a book for the community-based museum network. For the book Ki ti `utame yu`uximayati – Museos vivos: Experiencias wixárika, na`ayeri y saami (Kantonen, L. 2017), we interviewed the teachers, pupils, and the members of the parents’ association of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school about the thoughts the museum workshop and the shown videos had inspired in them and about their hopes regarding the documentary videos that will be shot for the museum. These interviews are the primary data of this article. The majority of the interviewees are teachers, although we also interviewed young Wixáritari studying in the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit in Tepic. We were especially interested in how the teachers plan to relate to the ritual landscape and the kakahyarixi, the deified ancestors, in the Tunúwame museum. As video artists, we are especially interested in the ways pilgrimages, sacred sites, and ceremonies can be portrayed and how the kakahyarixi can be taken into account in videography. What kind of aesthetic do the Wixáritari want to follow in the shoots and what kind of aesthetic do they want the outsider videographers to follow? What kinds of videography practice are negotiated with the kakahyarixi? What kind of support do they hope the ancestors will provide and how will this be asked for? How do the ancestors express their wishes? What kinds of danger may ensue in contacting the ancestors and what consequences might follow from neglecting them?

We begin the article by providing background information on the administration, institutions, infrastructure, and ritual landscape of the Wixárika area. This will explain the need to make documentary videos for the museum, and will be followed by a recapitulation of the planning process of the Tunúwame centre. The interview data is assessed next. In the interviews, the teachers state what types of documentary video they need for their school and museum collections, what kinds of ground they use to evaluate videos depicting the ritual landscape that are shot by outside documentarists, and what kinds of video they intend to shoot for the museum collection. The teachers have decided among themselves and negotiated with the kakahyarixi on the function of the Tunúwame; some of the teachers have also considered the need for documentary videos and the future of the community-based museum. The data implies a tension between collaboratively agreed goals and the personal views of individual teachers. These tensions reveal a community of teachers within which the need for documentation is defined on the epistemological and aesthetic grounds of the indigenous people with multiple parallel conceptions of knowledge. In the conclusion, we assess the videos in light of the aims and values the teachers highlight in the interviews, and consider what kind of knowledge we have obtained by videographing the ritual landscape.
WIXÁRIKA AREAS, ADMINISTRATION, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND LANGUAGE

There are currently about 45,000 Wixarika-speaking Wixáritari. They traditionally live in Mexico, in the Western Sierra Madre Occidental range. Some of them spend at least part of the year in cities or work as migrant workers on plantations. Most of the Wixáritari living in the mountains grow corn on the mountain slopes and in the highlands. They live with their extended families in settlements that comprise small houses circling a common yard. In Wixárika, the family home is called kie. Land ownership is collective but the right to cultivate a certain piece of land runs in the family. The Wixáritari are constantly on the move because of work, school, celebrations, and pilgrimages. If the fields are far, part of the family is obliged to live part of the year in the administrative and ceremonial centres because of work or school. During the most important celebrations and political meetings, people gather in the administrative and ceremonial centres, visit their relatives, and go shopping. The Wixáritari living in the centres join their families and relatives in the farms during the sowing and harvest times or to participate in agricultural ceremonies. In Wixárika, the home area with its centres, sacred sites, and travelling routes is called the kiekari. It is both a ritual landscape and a lived space where the Wixáritari spend their everyday lives. (Liffman 2011)

The Wixárika area contains three autonomous ceremonial and administrative centres, which during the colonial era were named after Christian saints as San Andrés, San Sebastian, and Santa Catarina, and several smaller centres. Communal religious ceremonies dating back to the pre-colonial times are held in the tuki temple. Familial ceremonies are held in the xiriki shrine. The administrative centres have separate civilian (autoridades civiles) and religious or traditional authorities (autoridades tradicionales). Additionally, every tuki and xiriki have their own authorities. The authorities that gather in the tuki, learning traditional knowledge and seeking initiation, are called the xukuri’ikate. Different administrative systems interact. Political leaders go for advice to the council of the eldest, which leads the traditional administrative system. The council and the tuki comprise initiated shaman-priests (mara’akate), who consult the ancestors. Through them, the ancestors can influence the lives of the communities. In 2002, for example, the authorities explained that the ancestors did not want a sawmill, which would have used trees from neighbouring areas, introduced to the Tsikwaita community, but they accepted solar energy and a health centre. Later, after numerous discussions, the community was connected to the national electricity grid. According to Liffman (2011: 10), discussion with the ancestors expands our traditional understanding of the meaning of the political.

Wixárika is part of the Uto-Aztecan family of languages. Spoken in most Wixárika homes, it is also an administrative and ceremonial language. It is mainly used orally, although an orthography and a grammar has recently been created. Verbal eloquence is valued particularly highly (Hakkarainen et al. 1999). Some older people only speak Wixárika while the young also speak Spanish. Most of the schools in the area are state-run and called “intercultural bilingual schools”. Most of the teaching in them, however, is conducted in Spanish after the first few years of primary education. Some of the autonomous communities have founded their own junior high schools and high schools and seek to provide teaching in all subjects in indigenous languages and from
the indigenous point of view. These schools are supported by civic organisations and form a network with other Mexican and international schools, civic organisations, and movements pertaining to indigenous peoples (Corona Berkin 2007; Liffman 2011; Rojas Cortés 2012; de Aguinaga 2015). In these schools teachers and pupils are able to use computers with intermittent access to the Internet.

RITUAL LANDSCAPE

The most important Wixárika sacred sites can be found according to four general directions, which are reminiscent of but do not equal compass points: Haramara in the west on the coast of the Pacific about hundred kilometres from the Wixárika area; the Wirikuta desert with wild peyote is a site of annual pilgrimages 400 kilometres northeast in the state of San Luis Potosí; deer are hunted for ceremonies at Hauxa Manaka on the northern border of the Wixáritari area; Tatei Xapawiyemeta is connected to a myth about the Flood and can be found on an island in Lake Chapala 200 kilometres southeast; and Teekata is in the middle, in San Andres. In Wixárika ritual objects and artworks, the general directions and the centre are often represented by either a circle or a rhombus. East and Wirikuta are ‘above’ and linked to the sun, light, heat, dry period, and order, while the Pacific coast and the jungled valleys and gorges are ‘below’ and linked to the Pacific Ocean, tropical canyons, monsoon, chaos, and the teiwari (Liffman 2011; Medina 2010; Neurath 2011).

According to the myth, the Wixárika ancestors left Haramara at the beginning of time and wandered east towards the Wirikuta desert. Some of them, or at least parts of their being, were left behind as mountains, rocks, and springs. Pilgrims leave offerings in these places, where they have followed their ancestors (Medina 2010). The Wixárika word yeiyari, which signifies the ritual activity that takes place in the kiekari, also denotes following in the footsteps of the ancestors (Kantor 2012, ref. Neurath 2013: 21). Sacred places are ancestors as sacrificial and pilgrimage sites, which the Wixáritari visit for specific purposes. Different places have different powers for helping humans. Some of them, for example, heal illnesses while others help them to learn a specific skill, such as craftsmanship or musicianship. The mara’akate are able to tell where to go in a specific situation for either help or advice (Kindl 1997; Rojas Cortés 2012).

The tuki temples in the ceremonial centres and the biggest villages send a group of pilgrims annually – every three years in the Tsikwaita community – to the Wirikuta desert for the hallucinogenic peyote cactus, which is used in the tuki and xiriki rituals. The group of pilgrims often consists of the xukuri’kate, who go to Wirikuta for the knowledge and understanding required for initiation. Each of them carries a xukuri, an effigy bowl belonging to a sacred ancestor. The pilgrimage is a ritual drama that takes several weeks and sees the pilgrims transform into their ancestors, move in a ritually organised queue, eat and sleep only little, abstain from sexual intercourse, and say even the most mundane things using a backwards language (Myerhoff 1974). The Canadian company The First Majestic Silver has staked mining claims in Wirikuta, threatening the ecological balance of the place and giving rise to a global protest movement demanding that the place be protected (Shipley 2014).

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On the pilgrimage to Wirkuta, the *xukuri’kate* carry the ancestors, manifested as the *xukuri*, between the *tuki* and the sacred sites. Sometimes they also carry blood, water, a drink called *tejuíno*, peyote, or yellow pigment. In this way the *xukuri* and the *xukuri’kate*, the bowls and the people who maintain them, and which both are and represent the ancestors, participate in the exchange of fluids within the ritual landscape. (Kindl 1997; Neurath 2013: 48–50) Uninitiated people also carry objects and substances between places.

Liffman (2011: 91–96) has analysed the practice of the Wixáritari in the *kiekari* in relation to land ownership. The Wixáritari hold their ceremonies in the *tuki* and the *xiriki* and move between sacred places, temples, and cultivated areas in order to maintain the cosmos and renew their right to cultivate land. The Wixáritari have successfully defended their land ownership rights and through legal proceedings managed to regain some of the lands taken from them. The right to cultivate and use the land is justified with their traditional pilgrimages and travel routes, which they have used since time immemorial to navigate the landscape.

According to Liffman (ibid.), the *xiriki*, the *tuki*, and the sacred sites are in a hierarchical relationship in the *kiekari*. The *tuki* gathers the people of a certain area as members of the ritual community, and each familial *xiriki* is subject to a specific *tuki*. The *tuki* are subject to *Teekata*, the centre of the *kiekari*. The circular or oval architecture of the *tuki* and the *xiriki* represent the *kiekari* in miniature, as do the rounded sacrificial offerings and artistic objects such as *xukuri* bowls and *tepari* discs. The *xiriki*, the *tuki*, the *tepari*, and the *xukuri* repeat the form of the *kiekari* over and over again, endlessly copying each other (ibid.). According to Kindl (1997: 25–28), however, the *xukuri* is not a symbolic representation of the *kiekari*, but it is the *kiekari* and an ancestor, rendering both of them visible in a performative manner. In addition to ritual art, the Wixáritari also produce commercial art objects that are sold to tourists and collectors. These include, for example, masks, *xukuri* bowls decorated with glass beads, and brightly coloured yarn paintings. These types of art or craft are not related to the *kaka’yarixi* in the same way as ritual art is. Yet this does not mean that all commercial art is inauthentic or worthless (Neurath 2013: 84). The artists interviewed by Kindl (1997: 144) say that for them every *xukuri*, even when manufactured for commercial purposes, is a microcosm.

**NEW RITUAL SITES: SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY-BASED MUSEUMS**

The Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school is located at the edge of the Tsikwaita ceremonial centre on a hill descending east towards the River Camotlán. Many of the Wixáritari come to the school on foot at dawn, having travelled several kilometres. While they have breakfast on the cool kitchen yard, the sun rises from beyond the rugged gorge walls on the eastern side of the river, warming the place up. In the reverse light of the morning, the gorges appear as dark and shadowy while in the afternoon as the children return home, they glow red. During the school day, the children live amidst the landscape and in relation to the cardinal directions.

Community-based schools such as the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi are new ritual places among the *tuki*, the *xiriki*, and the sacred sites. They are sacred buildings because the
sacred mission of the Wixárika is to teach children and youth the traditions prescribed by the kakahyarixi. The porthole dug in the middle of the schoolyard covered by the tepari disc that Agustín removed during the opening ceremony, defines the school space as a xiriki (de Aguinaga 2015: 74–77). In this way the school is connected to the network and hierarchy of the xiriki, the tuki, and the sacred spaces (Liffman 2011: 157).

According to Alfredo, the Wixárika communities started to become alienated from the kakahyarixi with the introduction of mestizo or teiwari schools. These schools teach foreign values and knowledge that has no use in the kiekari. Educated youth tend to leave the ceremonial centres since they fail to acclimatise to the ancestral community and rituals. The Tsikwaita authorities initiated the junior high, Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi, where traditional subjects are taught in the language and from the point of view of the indigenous people together with the traditional Wixárika knowledge of the kakahyarixi, the rituals, and the rights of indigenous peoples. In practice, the school does not differ much from contemporary schools in for example Finland. The meetings between the students, teachers, and the parents’ association nevertheless engage all parties in deeper reciprocal learning than is usually required. The pupils take responsibility for organising the learning landscape, and by doing so commit themselves to the larger landscape. The school meetings are modelled after the community-level meetings, thereby accustoming the young to the administrative and ritual practices (Rojas Cortés 2012). Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi, the Great Grandfather Deertail, is a powerful mara’akame in Wixárika mythology (Liffman 2011: 138). Deer tail is a ritual object the mara’akate use as a tool. Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi manifests in the school logo, in the teaching, and especially during important school feasts when the tepari is lifted, the gateway to the domain of the ancestors is opened, and offerings are placed in the sacrificial chamber.

The recent years have seen a network of community-based museums and cultural centres planned in connection with the autonomously founded schools (Proyecto general 2016). Tunúwame, the name of the museum and cultural centre planned in Tsikwaita, comes from one of the five appearances of the sacred deer and is designed as a sister project to the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school. In this way both of these institutions, named after a deer, reference the Wixárika ancestors, ritual landscapes, stories about deer, and treasuring the knowledge of the Wixáritari (Helle 2015: 92). The Tunúwame museum will get a fireplace and next to it a tepari, a sacred disc. The teachers want the Tunúwame to be a modern museum and cultural centre that does not simply collect historical items and documents but also records knowledge of modern life (Kantonen and Kantonen 2015). In the future, a sacred chamber that will be covered with tepari will transform Tunúwame into a ritual site and a part of the ritual landscape.

**OUR EXPERIENCES OF VIDEOGRAPHY**

The kakahyarixi manifest, among other things, as meteorological phenomena. Season and the time of day, the cardinal direction, temperature and humidity define the nature of the landscape and the practice within it: farming work and rituals are timed in relation to the season and the weather. When a Wixáritari or a teiwari, a school pupil or an artist, wanders in the landscape and records work or a ceremony with a camera, he or she shares the meteorological conditions and changes with the ritual community.
Variations in communal alertness, dependent as it is on weather and the time of day, is recorded in the video. Videography as a method produces the kind of bodily and rhythmic information of the ritual landscape that would be difficult to obtain through any other means.

Over the last 15 years we have visited the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school seven times in order to lead video and photography workshops. In the video workshops, the pupils have been tasked with envisioning the kinds of recording processes they would like to see in the Tunúwame museum. According to their wishes, we made recordings of school lessons and breaks, walked in the village filming craftspeople, interviewed a farmer, recorded the cooking of pinole, the making of a mara’akame toolbox and a xukuri, and the carrying of a xukuri using a xikuri, a poncho-like garment that can be worn as a head scarf or on the shoulders and is used for carrying things.

For 15 years, we were only allowed to film in the school. We only shot videos of the kiekari outside the school when we were accompanied by students. In 2015, the authorities gave us permission to film elsewhere in the ceremonial centre. The same year, the filming of a weeding ceremony was permitted by one of the traditional authorities, and we joined a day-long pilgrimage, which we also recorded. The weeding ceremony began one evening in the xiriki, lasted overnight, was resumed in the corn fields, and ended with dining and dancing back in the xiriki. Violin music and singing linked the different parts of the ceremony: the weeders walked the routes between the xiriki and the fields in line, following the fiddler, who also played while they worked. A number of children and young people participated in the weeding and the guitarist accompanying the violinist was a child. At every step of the ceremony, the participants and the camera were blessed with water from a sacred site. The speeches and songs were translated for us afterwards. Judging by the translations, the adults and the children conversed and joked with each other during the ceremony and while they were transitioning from one place to another. Children and young people learn unofficially how to act in a ritual space by participating in the ceremony with adults. This kind of experience-based learning supplements the school teaching about the kiekari.

THE ANCESTORS IN THE RITUAL LANDSCAPE

Our work in the community-based museum network with other researchers of indigenous peoples has encouraged us to consider the relationship of human and non-human actors in more detail from the point of view of ontology.

The deified ancestors of the Wixáritari, the kakahyarixi, have many forms, such as the cardinal directions, planets, meteorological phenomena, authorities, and the wands of the authorities. Their names are based on terms of kinship. They may appear in different ways and take the shape of plants, animals, or even Catholic saints. The most important ancestors are the god of fire Tatewarí (Our Grandfather Fire) and the goddess of the monsoon Takutsi Nakawe (Our Grandmother Nakawe). The kakahyarixi participate in the life of the residents of the Tsikwaita in different ways. They are revered at sacred sites, in the tuki, the xiriki, the administrative buildings, and the modern institutions of the indigenous people. They are communicated with through sacrifices and the songs of the mara’akate. Favours are exchanged with them: in exchange for a sacrifice, they grant
people fair weather, good crops, health, and harmony, while neglecting to present them with offerings may bring ill health, discord, turbulent weather, and the disappearance of items. Typical sacrifices include animals, *xukuri* bowls, and painted arrows on which are hung geometrical patterns, such as crosses and circles, fashioned out of thread and wooden sticks as well as small embroidered pieces of fabric. The material of the sacrificial offerings and the liquids carried within them are connected to the *kakaɨyarixi* and contain ancient force. Their patterns reveal what the person presenting the sacrifices is asking the ancestors for, or what they are being thanked for. According to Neurath (2011), the logic of reciprocal exchange is how uninitiated people communicate with the ancestors, while the relationship between the initiated and the ancestors is characterised by voluntary sacrifice. Following the example of the ancestors, the *mara’akate* sacrifice themselves and are revered as ancestors even during their lifetime.

The *mara’akate* supplicants studying for initiation may ally themselves with plants or animals and receive power and knowledge from them. Plants, animals, and other actors living in the shared *kiekari* may talk to them in a dream or while they are under the influence of peyote. On pilgrimages, they direct all their senses towards the *kiekari* in order to obtain a special power of seeing, the *nierika*.

Philippe Descola (2013) has divided the ontological relationships of humans and non-humans into four categories: animism, totemism, naturalism, and analogism. Neurath (2011) finds the model too simplistic, claiming that Descola sets animism, which is dominated by the mutual destruction of humans and non-humans, against analogism, which depicts a reciprocal relationship. According to Neurath, a single group may nevertheless have several parallel ontologies. He argues that in relation to the *kakaɨyarixi*, the Wixárika rituals represent two different and simultaneous ontologies. The *rukuri’ikate* moving between the *tuki* and the Wirikuta desert aim for initiation and reciprocal relationship with the *kakaɨyarixi*. Their ceremonies are mainly based on an analogous ontology that emphasises reciprocity, although the initiation demands a sacrifice, which has more to do with animistic ontology. In the *xiriki*, an initiated *mara’akame* leads ceremonies in which ancestors that have transformed into arrows are revered. They might be dangerous for their descendants, which is why protection against them is necessary. Here, the relationship to the *kakaɨyarixi* is largely animistic. The ceremonies in both the *tuki* and the *xiriki* have both a harmonious and a threatening dimension, while no one either explains this contradiction or seeks to overcome it. (Ibid.)

During our fieldwork in the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school, we rarely encountered the destructive side of the Wixárika world other than through warnings about the capricious nature of both certain places and ancestors. Some places and the ritual objects within them – which are the ancestors – are dangerous for the uninitiated. The Wixáritari prefer to keep the most dangerous dimensions of the ritual landscape hidden from the curious *teiwari*, or non-Wixáritari. In this sense, it is only natural that we, just like all the other researchers connected to the school world, have mainly been in contact with the organised world of the east, the sun, and the dry spell, which follows the logic of reciprocity. Liffman, Rocío de Aguinaga, and Angélica Rojas Cortés, who have conducted fieldwork in the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school, very seldom mention ambivalent powers in their writings. In interviews, the teachers generally explained the workings of the *kakaɨyarixi* according to the principle of reciprocity.
GRATEFULNESS AND RITUAL PRACTICE

The official talks and publications of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi emphasise that the school’s teaching is based on the Wixárika “cosmology” (Liffman 2011: 145–146; Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi 2014: 21; Helle 2015: 95). In the teaching, cosmology means the exploration of the concept of the kiekari. The school teaches children and the young to live in the kiekari and obey the yeiyari, that is, to respect the ancestors and live in harmony with the sacred sites, the ancestors, plants, and animals. The planned Tunúwame museum also follows the Wixárika cosmology. The young must be taught the knowledge of the kiekari possessed by the elderly, lest it be forgotten (Helle 2015).

According to Liffman (2011), defining the concept of the kiekari through debates between three different generations of the Wixáritari played an important part in founding the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school in the mid-1990s. The Tsikwaita community already had a largely modernised administration and economy and a relatively large number of its inhabitants were bilingual, educated, adults. For the young, the kiekari meant acting in their own environment: walking, working, and participating in the duties of the self-government of the indigenous people. In their definition of the kiekari, the teachers emphasised non-Christian practice in the landscape and continuing the traditions begun by the kakaɨyarixi. The initiated representatives of the older generation emphasised carrying out agricultural ceremonies. Liffman notes that in these discussions, the kiekari was given a stable and objectified definition instead of emphasising its processual nature as manifested by walking, pilgrimages, and communal rituals. The aim was to outline a joint definition that would unify the school community in maintaining the traditions pertaining to the kiekari. (Liffman 2011: 145–160)

In school work, the yeiyari is taught by conducting short walks and pilgrimages (Helle 2015) as well as by interviewing the elderly. Students document their excursions through writing, drawing, and photography (Corona 2002; Kantonen, L. 2005; Liffman 2011). In the workshops we have overseen, they have photographed and filmed different kiekari-related activities such as farming and craftwork. The Spanish-language teacher, Maestro Armando, is particularly interested in ritual geography and the documentation of sacred sites. He is worried about the ecological changes of sacred sites and hopes that through documentation the Wixáritari might be able to protect them.

In the workshops, we have noted that the young understand the landscape through walking. They are able to draw out of memory very accurate depictions of routes between, for example, their homes and the school or a pilgrimage. Some young people are always interested in sacred sites. Their drawings and videos reveal the kind of knowledge about the kiekari that enables others to learn. For example, in a 2002 land rights workshop called Taller de la Tierra, two girls painted a large picture of the kiekari with accurate depictions of the most important sacred sites in all four cardinal directions. (Kantonen, L. 2005: 213; Kantonen and Kantonen 2013: 115)

The headmaster of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school, Maestro Catalino, has twenty years of experience in explaining the ritual landscape to outsiders such as us. According to Catalino, everything in the landscape is sacred: the cultivation of corn and all the other actions of men, animals, and ancestors. The school has to teach the children to respect sacred things and to show gratitude towards their ancestors in and through ceremonies. The kiekari is full of sacredness and corn is one of the deified ancestors:
When we have corn and when the cobs are ripe, you cannot just eat them like that: see, the corn is ripe, how nice, I shall take a cob and eat it. No! The *mara’akame* has to bless it before it can be eaten. Why? Out of respect. Because we respect it. It is said that by doing so we can avoid getting ill. So that nothing bad happens to us, because we have not been grateful.

If the *yeiyari*, as the skill of showing respect towards the *kakaɨyarixi*, is forgotten, the whole world – and not just the area surrounding the Wixáritari – falls into imbalance. People become ill and, at worst, ecological catastrophes threaten the continuity of life. The *mara’akate* are convinced that the survival of the ecosystem depends on offerings made to the ancestors. The continuation of life and culture is also a good reason to demand that the government of Mexico, universities, and civic organisations support the schools and cultural centres – it is for their own good. In this way, the work CRASH and ITESO have done for the school, such as enabling the videography, is reciprocal activity that benefits everyone.

**Connection to the Ancestors Through Dreams, Traditional Materials, and Technology**

According to Neurath (2013), the logic of reciprocity (observed by the official, written discourse of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school and the Tunúwame museum) is the means through which the uninitiated Wixáritari stay in contact with the *kakaɨyarixi*. The communication of the initiated is more complicated and conflicting. The knowledge of the *mara’akate* does not need to be simplified for the school teaching, since it is not necessary for either the children and the young or the outside researchers and collaborators to have profound understanding of the knowledge of the initiated. The *mara’akate* are involved in the school activities as teachers and members of the parents’ association. They participate in meetings and in decision-making and give advice to pupils regarding important decisions. They also participate in designing the museum. They receive knowledge from the *kakaɨyarixi*.

One of the most important ways for the *kakaɨyarixi* to participate in the activity of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school is by providing the *mara’akate* with dreams. They gave the founders of the school its name in a dream and the *mara’akame* Alfredo has received ideas regarding his teaching of the Wixárika culture in dreams. The dreams provide the basis for his lectures and have been edited into a book on the subject (Salvador Martinez and Corona Berkin 2002).

The written mission of the Tunúwame explains that the future museum building is to be built using the traditional Wixárika materials of stones and compressed earth blocks and will be rotund like the *tuki* and the *xiriki*. The reason for the round shape is that the first ‘person’ created the world by starting from the middle of the circle and then proceeded to the four cardinal directions. On the inside, the museum and cultural centre is a modern space that offers the possibility to carry out the functions of a contemporary museum (Helle 2015).

During the interviews, the teachers spoke of the ancestors as “gods” or “saints”, perhaps because they believe that the *kakaɨyarixi* is too difficult a concept for us. Only the
**mara’akame**, Maestro Alfredo, speaks of the “ancestors” (*antepasados*) and the “people” (*personajes*). He tells us what kind of museum the ancestors are expecting:

We have to build a sacred building, like the one the people [*personajes*] built in the past. That is what we need to do. It will not be built out of the same kind of [contemporary] materials as this house [we are in]. The ancestors [*antepasados*] will not allow it. A cultural house cannot be made out of materials such as these, which is how I see it. Let us see what we will build.

The first people provided the Wixáritari with a model they have to follow in their ceremonies. Alfredo believes that the rotund shape of the Tunúwame museum and the traditional building materials enable the museum to follow the example set by the *kakatyarixi*. Nevertheless, Alfredo is not convinced that the museum will become a part of the ritual landscape the way the *tuki* and the *xiriki* are. He adds:

It will comprise a number of meanings, so many that we are unable to understand them ourselves. We have to explain them all. It will be a copy. It will not be like the sacred buildings we have had for ages. It will only be a copy.

Alfredo is interested in the design process of the Tunúwame because it requires that the meanings of a ritual building are investigated and explained to others. As is typical of him, he speaks enigmatically. At first he says that the Tunúwame will be a sacred building constructed of traditional materials, but later on he asserts that it is only going to be a copy of a sacred building, the *tuki*. The data collected by Kindl (1997: 56) and Neurath (2013: 85) suggests that the Wixárika artists consider as “copies” those handicrafts and artworks that are made for the non-Wixáritari and have neither ritual meaning nor independent power. Alfredo might think that the museum building will be a harmless version of the *tuki* with no power to hurt the museum visitors, children, or the *teiwari*.

Puzzled by Alfredo’s response, we asked Maestra Rosa the same question: Will the ancestors come to Tunúwame? The video shows that initially the question makes her laugh, but she soon loses her jollity. She thinks that the question is misplaced and answers (in this case referring to the ancestors as gods and goddesses):

If anything, we shape the gods and invite them to the museum. If we have sacred corn and we sacrifice it, the goddess will enter [drawn by the offering]. If the museum presents the gods with sacrifices, there will be gods. I believe that if I have a stone and I present it daily with an offering, take care of it, and feed it, it will become a god for me. This will also happen with technology.

Rosa thinks that a sacrifice creates or activates the ancestor, not that the ancestors are already active beings within the reach of a group of people or an institution. Rosa’s answer differs from the simplifying ones the *teiwari* are usually presented with. According to her, the ancestors come into being through the sacrifices. Neither Alfredo nor Rosa will say whether the ancestors will appear in the museum, but they both worry in their own way about the consequences of the ambivalent forces their appearance would unleash. To prevent anything unexpected from happening, the *kakatyarixi* need to be presented with offerings. In designing and opening the museum, it is important to follow the instructions the *kakatyarixi* give the *mara’akate* in a dream. It is just as important to follow the instructions of the *mara’akate* regarding videography.
Electricity and digital technology bring new actors to the ritual landscape and institutions of the Wixáritari. Electrical and information networks have power and become new gods or ancestors for the Wixáritari, with which they need to interact. Any object that is given attention and presented with regular sacrifices can be an ancestor. It may be a sacrificial offering made out of traditional materials using traditional means, a digital device, or a digitally produced work of art. Both old and new technologies may produce living and potentially dangerous objects and artworks.

RECORDING A PILGRIMAGE

Numerous documentary movies and videos have been made of the pilgrimage to Wirikuta. We sought to acquire as many as possible for Tunúwame and watched them together at the community’s central square. The screenings were followed by public discussion. Members of the community like the fact that pilgrimages have been recorded on video and think that all the videos and films have something positive about them. Hernan Vilchez’s *Los últimos guardianes de peyote* (2014) shows the environmental destruction that would follow if the mining plans regarding Wirikuta were followed through. Alejandro Zapata Alargon’s *El sueño de la flor* (2014) depicts several beautiful scenes of different stages of the pilgrimage and the ending ceremony in which the pilgrims regain their human identity. The teachers criticise the filmmakers for focusing on the most cinematic moments of the ceremonies while neglecting to record the most important aspects of the ritual. *El sueño de la flor*, for example, only shows short snippets of the ceremonies, all the high points were missing. The clip showing the dance at the ending ceremony was too short and did not reveal how many times the dance was repeated. The teachers seem to agree that outside documentarists have not yet succeeded in recording the ritual in a way that would serve the need of the Tunúwame museum to archive the information for future generations. This has given the teachers the idea that they should shoot their own videos of the pilgrimage.

Maestro Enrique has practiced videography, aiming one year to record the pilgrimage. He served the village of Tsiqwata as a political authority in 2015 and hopes to be elected among the *xukuri’ikate*, the authorities serving in the *tuki*. As a *xukuri’ikame*, he would have the right perspective to film the pilgrimage. He has already envisioned the video in his mind: at every stop, a ceremony dedicated to the *kaka’yarixi* is recorded. The videographer has to know the structure of the ceremony in advance in order to be alert during the most important moments of the ceremony.

Maestro Catalino dreams of an entire school class doing a documentary of their pilgrimage to Wirikuta. He wishes that the pupils could participate in planning and carrying out the documentary. He thinks that the participatory process of filming is as important as the end result. Maestra Rosa notes that the visual details of the ceremonies, such as the sacrifices and the dance steps, have to be recorded from close enough that future generations can watch the videos and revive the traditions.

Pablo, a student of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school, has taken photographs on a pilgrimage to Wirikuta. He was granted permission to be absent from school on the condition that he documents the journey through photography and uses the pictures to create a PowerPoint presentation for the school. This presentation was first shown in the
museum workshop in 2014. Pablo himself did not provide a commentary on the photos because pilgrims who have only been to Wirikuta once are not allowed to describe their journey through words. In the workshop, the photos were explained by Juan, Pablo’s uncle and member of the parents’ association. Pablo was thanked for having taken photographs that, at every stop, excluded nothing.

The teachers of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school agree that the ceremonies and the pilgrimages have to be recorded from beginning to end. The documentation should begin with the travel preparations and the making of the sacrificial offerings and it has to continue until the ending ceremony, during which the pilgrims, who during the journey have become ancestors, are restored to their normal human state. Nothing is to be left out. If the entirety of the ceremony cannot be recorded, at least the most important parts need to be. In order for the videographer to know which parts of each ceremony are the most important, he must understand the philosophy and the meaning behind them.

According to Neurath (2013: 24), the Wixárika artists find it important to depict the highlights of ceremonies in the yarn paintings. It is also important that the details of the picture come together in a coherent way. The late artist Refugio Gonzalez told us that it is important for yarn paintings that portray a specific ceremony to depict the things that are related to that ceremony and nothing else. They should not contain a mixture of random patterns or include patterns that relate to other ceremonies. Neurath (ibid.: 84–85) states that artworks and sacrificial offerings are autonomous actors that have their own will. In principle, videos are also autonomous actors. This is why the teachers find it important that in a video depicting the ritual landscape, things important to that ritual, such as dance steps, the number of repetitions, and the details of the sacrificial offerings, are depicted ‘correctly’. Otherwise the video does not function the way it should, since future generations will not learn the yeyiari, the practical information learned from the kakaxyarixi, by watching it.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS CAN TALK AND ALLY THEMSELVES WITH HUMANS

In the Wixárika ritual landscape, the ground and water shapes, plants, animals, artworks, sacrifices, and the images depicting them are all independent actors. From a sacred site called Tuimayehu on the way to Wirikuta, the pilgrims take water that is later used in the tuki both in the ceremonies of the pilgrimage and to bless the family members who remained at home. A plant that contains a yellow pigment called uxa is gathered from Tatei Matinieri. It is used to decorate the faces of the pilgrims and the items they carry with them. Certain animals and plants are connected to specific places. For example, in a valley near Tsikwaita there is a sacred site called Turamukameta, which is connected to scorpions. If a human being kills a scorpion in Turamukameta, he will soon encounter hundreds of them.

Both the initiated Wixáritari and the supplicants move in the kiekari with a special focus on different plants and animals that are healing and will either provide them with strength or a message. The artisans and the artists who produce ritual craftwork get their material from the kiekari. The craft materials are also ‘people’. Talking trees may
tell people that they want to be felled and worked into drums, which the *mara’akate* and their assistants then play in ceremonies. Catalino says:

I would also have liked to see [in the museum workshop] how and where the tree [that was used to make the frame] was felled and how the people knew that it was a tree fit for making a drum. It is said that a drum speaks, that it sounds, so that people would notice it.

Teachers at the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school invited renowned experienced and knowledgeable craftsmen to the museum workshop. The teachers and the guests from Finland recorded their work on video. In an interview, Catalino was self-critical about this workshop. The whole process of making a drum was neither followed nor filmed, rather the focus was on the moment when the leather was stretched on an existing frame and decorated with flowers. Catalino notes in his address that the video shot in the workshop is imperfect. It should show the whole process from beginning to end, starting with the moment when a person hears the drum speak in the tree trunk and realises that the tree must be felled in order to actualise the potential drum. Ultimately one needs to record the drum being used in the drum ceremony, the *tatei neixa*.

It is possible to ally oneself with plants and animals in order to attain a specific goal. A craftsman, for example, may ally him or herself with a lizard (for example Eger 1989) or small ants. Once the goal has been attained, a sacrifice has to be taken to a sacred site. When Maestra Rosa was a child, her mother and grandmother took sacrificial offerings to a sacred site, the Paratsikatsie, on her behalf for six years in a row so that she would learn crafts. She also had to tolerate stings by small ants so that her hands would become nimble. After six years, the Paratsikatsie received as an offering some crafts by Rosa that were dipped in the blood of deer and oxen. Ever since, she has been swift in all her work and now teaches handicrafts in the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school. (De la Cruz 2014: 17)

Catalino’s address and Rosa’s story reveal how a listening and focused outlook is important when moving in the *kiekari*. A craftsman, especially one looking to be initiated, has to constantly keep ritual sites and ceremonies in mind, observe the surroundings, and communicate with the *kakaɨyarixi*. Rosa finds the *kiekari*, with all its plants and animals, beautiful, which inspires her to produce beautiful crafts. When work produces results, for example when an important object is made, a skill is learned, or initiation is attained, an offering is taken to a place that has helped her as an expression of gratitude. A videographer, too, walks in the *kiekari* fully focused and observing both humans and non-humans.

**WHO CAN BE FILMED IN THE KIEKARI? WHAT DO THE KAKAɨYARIXI EXPECT FROM A VIDEOGRAPHER?**

The relationship between the Wixáritari and the *teiwari*, the non-Wixáritari, is tense in the *kiekari*. The *teiwari* represent a dark and chaotic world of west, rendering them uncivilised and clumsy and unable to understand the Wixárika philosophy unless it is explained to them as if to children. During ceremonies, the differences between the Wixáritari and the *teiwari* can momentarily weaken and the *teiwari* can participate in the
Some teiwari have participated in pilgrimages (Myerhoff 1974; Kindl 1997) and even been initiated (Eger 1989). Normally the teiwari carry a camera and they want to take photographs or shoot videos. In principle, most communities prohibit the photographing and recording of ceremonies and in the public space of the ceremonial centre, but some photographers and film crews have received a permit from the local authorities, often after having paid the community a substantial sum of money.

Neurath (2013) repeatedly stresses that ritual objects are not meant to be seen by the uninitiated, let alone the teiwari. The kakahyarixi do not usually allow the recording of ritual songs or the photographing of ritual objects. Since the teiwari tend to want to know the meanings of the objects and artworks they have collected and bought, the Wixáritari prepare simplifying explanations of traditional knowledge for them and create stereotypical versions of ritual objects in which the ritual meaning is concealed. However, the mara’akate of the Tsikwaita community have started to share their knowledge with the researchers and documentarists from the universities and civic organisations that have supported the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school. The mara’akate have been told in a dream that it is time for some of the communal traditions to be documented and written down so that they will not be forgotten. The community nonetheless wants to participate, through their authorities, in the process of deciding how their traditions are represented. Not all members of the community or even all the teachers agree on whether the teiwari can be granted permission to film, and if they are, on what conditions.

Of the teachers, Enrique and Armando think that only the Wixáritari can portray sacred sites and ceremonies in the right way, since only they know the context and the people. Marta, a student from Tepic, notes that even a Wixárika documentarist working in his or her own community is not guaranteed to receive the trust of the community, especially if that person has not received formal training in cinematography.

Alfredo thinks that a videographer going on a pilgrimage has to be a Wixárika because outsiders have no legal right to go to Wirikuta, let alone collect peyote for consumption. He worries that “an outside documentarist could end up in jail”. On the other hand, Catalino does not think that it is necessary for a videographer of a pilgrimage to be a Wixárika. He believes the most important condition to be that the documentarist supports the political aims of the Wixáritari, allows the portrayed people to participate in the process, and sets in motion socially responsible pedagogical processes. Rosa thinks it important that a documentarist finds good angles so that all the processes and details are recorded at the right distance.

Enrique aims to have meetings of the rukuri’kate in the tuki and their pilgrimage to the Wirikuta recorded on video. No outsiders are present in the rukuri’kate rituals, meaning that the only way to record them is by getting the participants to do so.

A Western artist or researcher is usually accustomed to thinking that all topics are possible and within reach. The teiwari working with the Wixáritari have to explain to the authorities what and why they want to film and how it benefits the community. Researchers have to accept that there are conditions and limitations to their work. (Glowczewski 2014)

Rosa told us that she had discussed the responsibilities of the teiwari towards the ancestors with other teachers. They believed that the kakahyarixi do not expect the teiwari
moving in the ritual landscape to follow the same rules as the Wixáritari or to present similar offerings nor will they be punished for this, because the teiwari are not familiar with the rules. Catalino thinks that the documentarists willing to support the diversity of the ritual landscape and culture are welcome to cooperate with them.

Whether the filmmakers are Wixáritari or teiwari, they need to have the right attitude towards filming. In the interviews, the teachers mention several outlooks the filmmakers are expected to have. A Mara’akame and a teacher of Wixárika culture, Alfredo, says that a filmmaker has to first and foremost be humble and respectful towards other people. The filmmaker is not supposed to believe that he or she is “somebody”. Maestro Armando asserts that a videographer has to aim to tell “the truth”. He goes on to say that a documentary recording modern times should not be designed to look old fashioned or too “traditional”. Marta, who studies at the Autonomous University of Nayarit in Tepic and is part of the Wixárika and Na’ayerite video collective called Sembrando, considers it important that the filmmaker is committed to the work and asks the kakaɨyarixi for help.

HOW DO THE WIXÁRITARI LEARN ART PRODUCTION AND VIDEOGRAPHY?

Many researchers who have written about Wixárika ritual art and interviewed the artists have emphasised that the learning of ritual art requires humility, dedication, tolerance of discomfort, persistence, and sacrifice (Eger 1978; Muller 1978; Zingg 1982; de la Cruz 2014). We asked Rosa whether video art can be considered ritual art. She told us that she has seen computers brought to sacred sites for blessing. She thinks the ancestors (las diosas ‘goddesses’) are just as capable of understanding digital art as they are of understanding traditional crafts, but she has never left a computer-made artwork or offering at a sacred site. An offering is a sign of passionate devotion to learning and she is not as passionately interested in learning digital technology as she is in learning the technology of embroidery or loom weaving.

Rosa’s view is supported by Marta, who has learnt videography on courses, attended the peer-group of the audiovisual collective Sembrando, and participated in the festival of indigenous Mexican film and video makers. She explains how the ancestors (los dioses ‘gods’) may help a filmmaker to develop:

You can offer a video to the gods. Of course we cannot see them but they manifest in the xukuri and in the arrows. I believe that you can present a video as a sacrificial offering. If you make a video and ask the gods to get to know more things [about filmmaking], you have to offer a video at a sacred site. The gods will receive it.

Enrique thinks, however, that the kakaɨyarixi do not accept digital offerings.

Music teacher Félix, who also has participated the pilgrimage to Wirikuta, finds it desirable that a videographer documenting a pilgrimage walks all the most important parts of the journey on foot with the pilgrims. Traditionally the pilgrims convivially encourage each other to bear the heaviest parts of the journey. The pilgrimage and the fasting it requires is an offering that may give the candidate the nierika, the ability to see (Neurath 2013). For Félix, the nierika brings a life full of joy and meaning.
The Wixárika *kiekari*, in which ritual objects and substances are exchanged by travelling the routes between sacred sites and buildings and which is simultaneously fashioned as an aesthetic form, reminds us of the way the world is seen in terms of site-specific art, although it is much more comprehensive than any single work of art. As artists we are interested in the way ritual artworks, buildings, miniature sculptures, and woven patterns can simultaneously be ancestors, miniature worlds, and maps of the world. What happens when an attempt to record this multiform ritual space is made on video by a group of people, children and adults, Wixáritari and *teiwari*, initiated and uninitiated, the movement of which in the *kiekari* is motivated by a variety of reasons, such as teaching children, initiation, art-making, and having fun and who all perceive and are connected to quite different entities?

Within the framework provided by the new institutions and sacred sites, the school and the community-based museum, videography is particularly meaningful, since in addition to traditional documentation it also serves an educating function. The point of videography in the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school program is to teach the knowledge received to the documentarists themselves through the very process of documentation. And not only traditional knowledge but also dreamt up innovations that will become part of the ritual landscape. Videography not only preserves the *kiekari*, but it also alters it by bringing new kind of ritual activity into it. Catalino, the headmaster, thinks that the most important part of filming is the way it enables the students to commit to act in the ritual landscape together with older generations and the *kakaɨyarixi*. When the children go to the administrative building to interview the authorities, or to the *tuki* to interview the *rukuri‘ıkate*, or when they join a pilgrimage, they get in contact with the traditional knowledge gathered over a number of generations. At the same time, the electronic devices, digital methods and networks transform the *kiekari* and bring new kinds of entity into it, ones with which they are in a reciprocal relationship.

Ruy Blanes and Diana Espírito Santo (2014: 6) suggest that the “evidentiary regime” of the spirits, their traces in the landscape, experiences, materials, and social relations can be studied by observing their effects and through them, their cause: “Our general proposal here is to work backwards from effects to form, from tangible to invisible, from motion to substance, from manifestation to agency and so on” (original emphasis). Could this proposal be followed through practice, by acting and trying? What kind of knowledge regarding the ritual landscape and the *kakaɨyarixi* can be obtained through listening to and following the instructions given by teachers of filming in the ritual landscape?

The teachers recommend that the documentarists focus, observe their surroundings, dedicate themselves to the task, and put up with physical strain. Information must be gathered on both the specific activity and its context. Pictures pertaining to different seasons and events documented in different ceremonies are not to be mixed. Every act and ceremony has to be documented from beginning to end, from preparation to the final ritual. It is important that the high point of the ceremony is recorded. The space of the event has to be well and truthfully displayed. The sacrificial objects, dance steps, details of clothing and jewellery, and the number of repetitions have to be clearly observable. The people filmed have to be respected, the instructions given by the *mara‘ıkate* fol-
allowed, and when needed, a sacrifice must be made. The sacrificial offering and the obeying of instructions protect the videographers and the viewers of the video from the dangerous powers of the *kiekari*. Above all, one has to be careful not to become vain.

Although the aim of the videography is good in principle, it still remains threatening. The young filmmakers of the Sembrando collective have noticed that some of the people in their villages are sceptical towards videography although they know that the documentarists are Wixáritari and are aware that the point is the desire to record the traditions of their own people. The *teiwari* using a video camera in a public space within the ceremonial centre may encounter opposition, even if they have permission from the authorities. A *teiwari* may not necessarily understand that filming requires reciprocity with the *kakaɨyarixi*. It is possible not to understand that the god of fire, Tatewari, needs to be shown gratefulness when a device is plugged in (Neurath 2013: 21). The etiquette of filmmaking in the *kiekari* can be learned from the students and the teachers in a video workshop. There, learning is reciprocal. No matter what kind of entity the videographer observes and takes into account, the social relations of which the *kakaɨyarixi* are a part cannot be avoided. The filmmaker is dependent on the *kakaɨyarixi* and on whether they grant permission for filming.

According to Neurath, depicting rituals in art can be dangerous. The pictures can be too lively. They can come to life and ultimately destroy their maker. (Ibid.: 27) The same can apply to videography. Maestra Rosa believes that technological devices, such as cameras, may come to life. The *xukuri* carried in the *kiekari* are alive if they are shown regular attention. A woman carrying a *xukuri* carries it in a sling since it is a living person. Special precautions have to be taken so that a living bowl, a living device, or a living picture will not destroy its user. In a ceremony, the *mara'akate* and their assistants treat the camera as a person and sprinkle it with sacred water or blood. The sacred fluid protects the camera, the videographer, and the viewer. A drop of blood on the lens tells the human and non-human participants (and later the viewers of the video) that the camera is protected.

The permission to film, granted by a *mara'akame*, usually covers the whole process, ceremony, or pilgrimage. Once the camera has been blessed, it is a part of the *kiekari* just like any other moving or movable actor. The leaders of the ceremony discuss the filming with the filmmaker during the process either through words or eye contact. This is to ensure that the camera will not break down at the wrong moment and miss out on the high point. Direct eye contact between the camera and the leader or a participant in the ceremony creates a sense of security for the camera operator that is considered important. The camera can also be addressed directly and it can be told off or laughed at. In the middle of the ceremony, someone may comment on the ritual and joke about the filming. Reflexivity and suspicion are part of the ritual (ibid.: 96).

Based on the discussions we have had with the Tatuutsi teachers and our experiences of filming, we maintain that the camera can make observations in the *kiekari* as a part of a work group or a ritual community. It can forget itself and direct itself towards the landscape and the rituals. Doing so, it moves up and down rocky and muddy hillsides with the community, enjoys the landscape and suffers from fasting and exhaustion. It is important to record the route from beginning to end, to map the contours of the landscape and follow other pilgrims, ritual objects, and the changes in them. The actor-camera begins to implement its own communal aesthetics. Eye-contact is not nec-
essarily an error and neither is a drop of liquid nor steam that blurs the lens. Rather, it provides important information about the place, the landscape, and the community.

The perceptual skill of the actor-camera alters depending on the time of day and the altitude, temperature, and humidity of the location. The camera does not necessarily perceive the way other members of the community do, nor is it as capable to endure strain, but it nonetheless participates in communal vitality. The music, smoke, and lightning of a nocturnal ceremony produce a specific way of seeing typical to the kiekari and the camera might nod off just like any other participant, although it resumes filming. At any moment the kakaɨyarixi could start to speak or the situation might change in some other way.

Editing the video recorded by the camera-actor may give birth to a living picture-actor. A reliable picture-actor stays faithful to the ritual context of seasons and the cardinal directions without mixing together different ceremonies or the images belonging to them.

By filming in the kiekari in accordance with the ideas of the students and the directions of the teachers, we have received the kind of knowledge of ritual communality that would have been difficult to obtain by simply participating in the ceremonies and observing them. The camera has received special attention and care in the ceremonies. The participants have been interested in what ends up being recorded. Members and informants of the school community have later translated the discussions and guided our attention to the most important parts of the rituals, such as how children are joked with during the ceremony and the way the ancestors reply to the singing of the mara’akame. We aim to share the knowledge considering the filming reciprocally with the community, while being aware of the limits bestowed upon it.

CONCLUSIONS

The Wixárika ritual landscape is constantly changing in relation to the changing surroundings, which are shaped by climate change and other human activity. The Wixárika communities discuss the appropriation of new methods and technologies both by themselves and with the ancestors. New sacred spaces, buildings, institutions, routes, and works of art appear in the landscape. New technology and social changes provide sacred spaces and rituals with new kind of political and spiritual meanings. The Wixárika community museums, the first of which is being built at the time of writing, are an example of these new kinds of place. They can become a part of the ritual landscape if the communities adopt them for ritual use. The living could then contact the kakaɨyarixi at the museum, making it possible for the Wixáritari who are unable to attend the agrarian ceremonies to maintain contact with them.

The museum network, which cooperates closely with the schools, is a method dreamed up by the Wixáritari for developing, documenting, and passing on to future generations indigenous knowledge. Video documentation methods meeting the needs of community museums can be developed through the means offered by community art. The job is by no means simple. The project includes Wixáritari and teiwari of different professions and with varied tasks. Researchers may advocate different methods, the community artists have different views on art, and the Wixáritari conceptions of art and
knowledge are also diverse. Jointly negotiated and clear main goals enable the progression of the dialogue. For the museum project to succeed, it is essential that the cooperation is conducted on the terms of Wixárika autonomy and by listening to the kakayarixi.

Translated by Markku Nivalainen

NOTES

1 The names of the teachers given here are pseudonyms.
2 This research was undertaken as part of the ArtsEqual project funded by the Academy of Finland’s Strategic Research Council from its Equality in Society programme, project no. 293199.
3 Katri Hirvonen-Nurmi, who works with us in CRASH and the ArtsEqual project, carries out field work in the Wixárika community of Uweni Myweye, which belongs to the community-based museum network.
4 In the summer of 2016 the CRASH museum group comprised, in addition to the authors, Outi Hakkarainen, Pauliina Helle, Katri Hirvonen-Nurmi, and Pyry-Pekka Kantonen.
5 We refer to video art since our background is in experimental video and community-based art instead of documentary filmmaking. Working with the Wixárika community, however, this differentiation seemed unimportant.
6 In this context we find the term community-based art (see for example Bruyne and Gielen 2011) relevant, but we could on an equally good basis speak about collaborative art (Kester 2011).
7 In the research group called Socially Responsible Artists and Art Institutions, which forms a part of the ArtsEqual consortium, this kind of communal artistic activity is also called artistic action research.
8 In postcolonial research on indigenous peoples, returning the research to the community is heavily emphasised (see Smith 2012). The same interview data we have discussed in this article is also used in the book Ki ti´utame yu´uximayati – Museos vivos: Experiencias wixárika, na´ayeri y saami (Kantonen, L. 2016), which is meant for the use of the community museums.
9 Later we edit the documented data into ethnographic performances, which we present with the people who have appeared in the documentaries.
10 Teiwari is Wixárika, the Huichol language, for ‘one who is not us’ (Helle 2015).
11 Some anthropologists have summarised these discussions. For example, Arnd Schneider and Cristopher Wright (2013: 8–9) compare artists to anthropologists, noting that Grant Kester highlights values similar to those important in anthropological fieldwork, such as the openness of interaction and the recognition of the positions of the different collaborative parties.
12 In 2013 a member of CRASH and a student at the Aalto University Pauliina Helle was an exchange student at the ITESO university and conducted fieldwork that related to the Tsikwaita museum project. Together with the teachers of the Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi school, she edited the mission statement of the Tunúwame museum in Spanish. The teachers shared areas of responsibility among them, collecting data regarding family folklore, traditional architecture, furniture, clothing, jewellery, food, the teaching methods of the school, and the sacred sites and the changes in them. The teachers are meant to collect and document the data together with the students by using videos and photographs. The mission statement shows that the museum and the documentation has to be based on the Wixárika worldview (cosmovisión). The primary mission of the museum is to support the school and family task of transferring this worldview to the future generations. (Helle 2015) The Wixáritari believe that the ancestors have given them this educational duty. The world lives on as long as the equilibrium and gift exchange with the ancestors continues.
According to Neurath 2013, the concept of cosmology is misleading in relation to the Wixárika kiekari, since they have at least two simultaneous worlds and ontologies.

See for example Kwon 2002.

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Maestro Enrique, interviewed in Tsikwaita, Jalisco, November 12, 2014
Maestro Félix, interviewed in Tsikwaita, Jalisco, September 27, 2015 and in an airplane, December 21, 2015
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Marta, interviewed in Tepic, Nayarit, September 10, 2015
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INITIATIONS IN THE BURMESE RITUAL LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

In Buddhist Burma, a variety of ritual has been found pertaining to quite differentiated aspects of religion. This rich ritual landscape remains under-examined due partly to the Buddhist-studies bias of most of the scholars looking at religion in Burma. In this paper,* I develop comparative analysis of a class of ritual, namely that of initiation, in three components of Burmese religion: Buddhist monasticism, Buddhist esotericism, and spirit worship. At least from the present analytic perspective, the three components considered could be taken as encompassing the entire Buddhist religious sphere in Burma. Looking at initiation rituals in these three ‘paths’ is a means of understanding how they frame contrasting kinds of differently valued religious practice, and of showing that, although not often discussed, rituals do matter in Burma because they help to distinguish categories of action according to their relative religiosity. By doing so, I aim to give a sense of the real diversity of the Burmese ritual landscape, which until recently was rarely taken into account, and to contribute to the on-going debate in the field of Buddhist studies on what could be encapsulated as the question of Buddhism and spirit cults in Southeast Asian Theravada.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist esotericism • Buddhist monasticism • Burmese religion • initiation rituals • spirit worship

In Buddhist Burma, a variety of ritual has been found pertaining to quite differentiated aspects of religion. This rich ritual landscape remains under-examined, due partly to the Buddhist-studies bias of most of the scholars looking at religion in Burma. This bias has to be understood in the light of a contrast between religion and ritual that was historically produced in early modern Europe by the progressive differentiation of a properly religious field (Bourdieu 1971). Since its inception in the 16th century, the concept of ritual has been looked down on as the practice of ‘others’. According to this view, actions that are not truly ‘religious’ in a given society are termed ritual (Muir 1997). In

* My warmest thanks go to the anonymous readers, and to Jake Carbine and Alexandra de Mersan, who provided very helpful comments and suggestions. Errors or omissions are mine.
Southeast Asian studies, the bias against ritual is further reinforced by the tendency of reformist monastic and lay Buddhism to discard rituals altogether. As stated recently by Erik Davis (2016: 223), quoting Donald Swearer (2010), Buddhist rituals in Southeast Asia are often considered the best example of ‘syncretism’, although in ways that confirm Buddhism’s hegemony.

Ritual, or action that deals with the sacred, according to the Émile Durkheim stance, is one of those categories that have been much discussed among social scientists since the turn of the 1970s. With the work of Catherine Bell (1992) among others, the focus has shifted towards the *ritualisation* process, that is, the setting apart of categories of action classified as ritual in a specified society. How is the so-called sacred produced in any given society? Or, how are some events spatially and temporally set apart, isolated or encapsulated in a different time and space?

In this paper I will argue that, although not often discussed as a scholarly domain *per se*, rituals do matter in Burma precisely because they help distinguish categories of action according to their relative ‘religiosity’ – that is, according to varying cultural prescriptions of what should religion be. By doing so, I aim to give a sense of the concrete diversity of the Burmese ritual landscape, which until recently was rarely taken into account, and to contribute to the on-going debate in the field of the Buddhist studies on what could be encapsulated as the question of Buddhism and spirit cults in Southeast Asia.

Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart-Strathern (2013) recently stated that when the denying of actions classified as ritual has occurred in the history of European Christianity, in favour of other values, ritual has also re-established itself in contexts where it had apparently been excluded. Comparisons of kinds of rituals in different realms of Burmese religion strongly suggest that reformist trends tend to affirm the pre-eminence of Burmese Buddhism through the denial of the efficacy of these events. I have previously analysed how the consecration of religious objects such as statues is one instance of this kind of occurrence. In Burma, the consecration of images of Buddha is performed in a very straightforward manner through the recitation of the first verse of the first Buddha’s sermon, hence the name of the ritual (*aneikaza tin*)- enhancing the religious focus on the Buddha’s teachings and on their scriptural legacy. Compared to the ‘bringing to life’ (*a thek thwin/-leippya theik*)- enacted to consecrate images in spirit worship, or to the ‘opening of the eyes’ of Buddhist images elsewhere in the Theravada world, the Burmese consecration of Buddha images appears as ostensibly simple and deprived of any fancy ritual.

In this paper, I develop the comparative analysis of another class of ritual, namely that of initiation, in three components of Burmese religion: Buddhist monasticism, Buddhist esotericism, and spirit worship. Initiation will be considered here, for the sake of this comparison, as a class of loosely defined rituals through which a person is transformed from a former status and becomes a practitioner of one particular ‘path’ (*lan*) within the religious field: a monk, an exorcist or a spirit medium. It does not start from the preliminary characterisation of rituals as formally structured along a ternary sequence as established by Arnold van Gennep in his famous study *Les rites de passage* (1909).
At least from the present analytical perspective, the three components considered could be taken as being encompassed in the entire Buddhist religious sphere. They are constituted as fields of practice called paths (lan) in Burmese and identified as contrasting. Although all three paths are inhabited by Burmese Buddhists, they are each articulated in a specific way in the encompassing religious whole. Spirit worship and Buddhist esotericism are the province of laypeople (lu, ‘human beings’) as opposed to monks (hpongyi) who, as a rule, do not engage with these practices. In fact, spirit worship and Buddhist esotericism are the product of a history of differentiation, discarding and relegation, constitutive of the Buddhist-dominated religious sphere in Burma.7

More rigorist Buddhists do not indulge in spirit worship, which does not pertain to ‘religion’ as they see it. Nor do they consider it as forming another religion, as argued by Spiro in his Burmese Supernaturalism (1967).8 They see it, rather, as part of Burmese tradition (yoya), while spirit worshippers and mediums consider their practice integrated in their Buddhist identity. As for esotericism, it is widely understood as a deviance of mainstream Buddhism while practitioners of this path see themselves as safekeeping Buddha’s teachings.

These views on the relative religiosity of various practices are grounded in ways to conceptualise religion that have radically evolved throughout the colonial encounter. As told by Gustaaf Houtman (1990a) and Alexey Kirichenko (2009), this history is that of the emergence of a new word batha (P. bâshâ) in the missionaries’ mid-19th century dictionaries to signify religion as a professed denomination and a qualifier of personal identity. This introduction of a concept largely predicated by the Western notion of world religions then in formation would have been meant to make up for the inadequacy of the Burmese thathana (P. sâsana) whose original meaning of Buddha’s teachings had come to designate different levels of Buddhist dispensation and particularly the previous all-encompassing Buddhist royal order – in other words, Burmese Buddhicised social space (see Brac de la Perrière 2017).

In this paper, I examine initiation in Buddhist monasticism, Buddhist esotericism and spirit worship as belonging to the same religious and ritual world in order to better understand how they frame contrasting kinds of religious practice, differently valued. Initiation as a transitional rite involves a radical transformation of the person, establishing a boundary between the new initiate and the non-initiate that is conceived of as ontological. As stated by Pierre Bourdieu (1971), initiation defines and produces the identity of its subjects as antagonists to the non-initiate and contributes to social reproduction. By comparing rituals of initiation in three major fields constitutive of the all-encompassing religious sphere in Burma, I aim to demonstrate that rituals do contribute to the construction and transmission of differentiated worlds of behaviour and understanding, or of differentiated ontologies. However, while producing the impression of well-bounded fields, initiations in these paths still resonate with each other. As stated by Davis (2016) about Cambodia, differentiated fields emerge from the same ritual ‘imagination’, the distinction established being more moral than cosmological. The comparison of initiations aims at demonstrating how they contribute to the religious differentiation as well as to the production and reproduction of an original and diversified Burmese ritual landscape.
Entrance into the monastic order (thanga, P. samgha) will be my starting point, as it determines the pivotal social differentiation in Buddhist Burma that opposes monks (hpongyi) to all other human beings (lu, the laity). The importance of the Sangha comes from the fact that it is considered vital to the survival of Buddha’s teachings (thathana), that is to say, to the very existence of Buddhism in society. Being linked to the Buddha through a supposedly unbroken line of transmission, monks are taken for the living embodiment of these teachings and are said to be sons of Buddha. As such, they have to comply with the renouncer’s way of life established by the Buddha and fixed in the 227 rules of the Vinaya, and to submit themselves fully to the religious practice, of which there are two main kinds: the study of the texts (P. pariyatti) and the practice of meditation (P. patipatti). This entitles monks to their specific status, which is conceived of as the result of good karma, i.e. the merits accumulated in previous lives. This status makes them worthy of receiving donations from lay people who expect meritorious reward – that is, karmic enhancement – from their generosity. In short, both statuses are strongly contrasting and structure society along the interdependent relationship between ordinary Buddhists, who depend on the Sangha for their spiritual progress, and monks, who depend on them for their material maintenance. These statuses are also highly hierarchical. However, any male member of society can seek to enter the monastic order, and any monk may request to discard his robe when he feels he is no longer able to sustain the moral standard of the status. In any case, the monk status is the highest in Burmese Buddhist society.

Two distinct rituals mark entry into the Sangha, and both can be considered initiations because they transform a simple Buddhist male into a worthy recipient of religious donations: this transformation makes of a layperson a religious one. One ritual – known as shinbyu – is undertaken by most young boys, who must all enter the monastery as novices, as a rule, usually for a short stay. The gift of a son to the monastery is considered highly meritorious for parents. The ceremonies performed on this occasion may be huge affairs consisting of two phases, one lavishly ostentatious, in which the young boys are taken by their entourage in royal pageant around their locality, and the other more modest, taking place in the monastery through which their admission to the Sangha (P. pabbajjâ) is performed. The temporary ordination of the young boys has been analysed elsewhere as a rite of passage allowing the person to become an accomplished Buddhist young man able to take his place in secular society. In this sense, shinbyu appears an essentially transitional rite celebrating the coming of age of males, and in which the temporary initiation to the religious status signals the preeminent role of renouncing in social organisation (Brac de la Perrière 2009b).

In this regard, the higher ordination (P. upasampadâ) through which a simple Buddhist becomes a full monk is the reverse. However, it can only be performed after the candidate has been accepted in the monastery as a novice. In Burmese, the higher ordination is called yahan tek bwe, that is, the ritual to ascend to yahan status, yahan being one of the terms designating a monk. My presentation relies on the analysis made by Jason Carbine, completed by my own observations. Carbine focuses on the Shwegyin case, a particular monastic group (gain) originating in a 19th century reformist split of the Burmese order. Shwegyin, known for its rigorist respect of monastic rule, is the
only monastic branch to have preserved its own ordination lineage besides the monastic mainstream lineage (Thudhamma) after the 1980 monastic reform. Carbine demonstrates that the procedure to fully ordain a monk is a “community transaction” that has been established progressively and fixed in the Vinaya (the Pali book of monastic rules) in order to ensure the continuity of the monastic community and Buddhist teachings (thatana). For an ordination to be valid, five conditions must be fulfilled: a proper bounded space called thein (P. simâ), usually located in the monastery; a required number of fully ordained monks (five is the most commonly stated number); the eligibility of the candidate; and the two kinds of Pali statements, the motions put in the name of the candidate to the present monks and the decisions made in the name of the monks’ assembly. All together, these statements are known as the upasampadâ-kammavâcâ (P.), attributed to the Buddha and specified in the Vinaya. These five conditions are such as to signal the specificity of the situation that makes of the higher ordination a ritual and renders it effective. The higher ordination is thus a process of transformation: through this process a simple human being (lu) is ritually endowed with a radically new religious status by a body of monks representing the community he seeks to enter.

The transaction is mainly performed in Pali – the language of the corpus of religious texts in the Theravada tradition – and explained in Burmese. It starts when the candidate enters the bounded space (thein) with his alms bowl and his robes, which are the requisites of the monastic life, and when he sits close to the present monks in order to facilitate concentration on the proceedings. The first stage is the appointment of the preceptor who will become like a “father figure responsible for [his] care”, an analogue to the Buddha-disciples’ relationship (Carbine 2011: 121–122), and the recognition that the alms bowl and the robes are the candidate’s belongings. Then, he is taken aside by another monk acting as an instructor to prepare him for the next phase of examination. The purpose of this phase is to make sure that the candidate is eligible for the role and status of a monk. He has to be a male over 20, free of debts and obligations, and in good health. Finally, monks recite the Pali formula through which the ordination is performed three times. As Carbine (2011: 131) states, the proper recitation of these formulas is crucial, since they “are considered to be the very words of the Buddha himself regarding the communal decision-making process entailed in the higher ordination”. Once the recitation is over, without any objection from the monks present, the decision is effective. This is followed by instructions delivered to the new monk about monastic life and the four misdemeanours that might entail a fall from the religious status. When this is done, the newly ordained monk takes leave of his seniors, and the group of monks goes out of the thein. Then, family and friends attending the ceremony outside of the place give them alms in their bowl. By this collective transaction made in concord with the Vinaya, the new monk is integrated into the collective embodying Buddha’s teachings and becomes a worthy recipient of religious donations.

To my knowledge, the Theravada Buddhist higher ordination has not been formally analysed as an initiation case, although the radical transformation of the person that is performed through it would allow for such consideration. Interestingly, Carbine discusses the interpretative metaphor of spiritual rebirth, a decisive marker of initiation rituals, generally, which has also been found in the higher ordination elsewhere in Theravada monasticism. While he dismisses it in the Shwegyin higher ordination case on the ground of the legal form of its communal decision-making procedure, he further
considers that, from the ethical perspective, what is produced is indeed a new son of the Buddha, a new kind of spiritually-oriented human being (Carbine 2011: 115–116). The lack of ritually-performed spiritual rebirth dimension in the higher ordination, leaving way to the wrapping of the event in a formally-legal cloak, seems to me indicative of a distance with more ritual elaboration found in other domains of religious life. The ritual initiating a simple Buddhist man into the religious order transforms his body and mind through the apposition of the Buddha’s words from the *Vinaya*, displaying a textual inflexion that resonates with the consecration of Buddha images through the recitation of the first Buddha sermon. This textual inflexion and ritual lessening of processes making a man or an image ‘religious’ in Burmese Buddhism are very distinctive when viewed in regard to the initiations performed in the other ritual fields of practice that will be now examined.

### BUDDHIST ESOTERICISM

Buddhist esotericism is, in Burma, a large ubiquitous realm identified as the *weikza* path, from the Pâli *vijjâ*, in reference to the specific knowledge cultivated by the practitioners of this path.\(^{15}\) To belong to this path, which is mainly a lay path, is to engage in dedicated Buddhist practice through the respect of the precepts in a varying number (3, 5 or 8, according to the level of practice), through meditation, and through the cultivation of specific knowledge: alchemy, magic squares and formulas, traditional medicine and exorcism. Through this intensive Buddhist practice and knowledge cultivation, one may obtain specific powers (ubiquity, longevity, healing power, etc.) active in this world. That is why the domain is classified as worldly or *lawki* and is mainly located outside of monasticism. However, the ultimate goal of these intensive practices is to get out of the karmic cycle (*thandeya*, P. *samsâra*), alive or dead, but staying in a mysterious place called Maha Myaing from where it is still possible to rescue people and to protect the Buddha’s teachings. In other words, the goal is double: it is at once self-oriented, with the aim of being freed from the karmic cycle, and altruistic, insuring the protection of Buddhism for the rescue of fellow beings. Virtuosi of the *weikza* path are thus supposed to reach *htwe yap pauk*, the ‘way out’, and to become *weikza do*, or *weikza* bearers, the beings that are addressed by the multifarious *weikza* cults.

For the sake of this comparison, I focus on the analysis of the initiation ritual in the *Manaw seittokpad* congregation, which is a relatively well-known organisation of Burmese Buddhist exorcists.\(^{16}\) Exorcists or ‘masters of unnatural diseases’ (*pe yawga hsaya*) are healers who deal with illness considered to be caused by malevolence of humans or evil powers (*meissa*). They release patients of these negative influences thanks to their practice of the *weikza* path and of healing knowledge. Exorcists’ congregations are known as *gaing* as are the branches of the monastic order. They are the most organised structures of the highly diverse and volatile field of *weikza* practice. Among them, the *Manaw seittokpad* is one of the few *weikza* organisations operating freely in Burma. The most decisive feature of the structured organisation of the *Manaw seittokpad* is a formally rigorous procedure of registration through the initiation process performed during annual meetings. On this occasion, all the healers of the congregation coming from all over Burma with their patient-disciples meet at the headquarters pagoda of the
congregation for a few days of initiation to the master’s grade (hantima), giving access to healing practice, under the organisation’s control, hence the ritual name: hantima tek bwe, or the ritual to ascend to hantima status.

The pagoda campus is a closed space featuring the main figures of the congregation’s ideo-scape so as to make entering visitors recall and turn to Manaw seittokpad world-views and behavioural codification. The initiations to the master’s grade are performed inside a specific ritual enclosure set up in an elevated building opened on its four sides and oriented towards the pagoda. During the annual meetings of the congregation this building is referred to by many members as a thein (P. sīma), like the bounded space of monastic initiation. The ritual enclosure is set up in the building for the meeting time only and dismantled at the end of the proceedings. It is made of a fence called yazamat and of cotton threads on which Buddha’s words have been chanted: the space thus enclosed is considered protected from any intrusion from spirits and other lesser beings thanks to the protection of Buddha’s words, of Buddhist saints and of the benevolent weizza of the congregation invoked during the installation of the yazamat.

The initiation is also called the gift of knowledge (pinnya pay-). What it involves, however, is the tattooing of substances considered to be the congregation’s medicines. The process starts inside the yazamat, with a tattoo along the hair central parting and other tattoos on the upper part of the body, which all together confer the protection of higher beings. After a change in officiator and substance, it goes on with the tattooing of the lesser and nevertheless powerful beings on the lower part of the body. Finally, it ends up with the tattooing of the feet and heels and with the mastering of the ogres (bilu) outside of the yazamat. In continuity with the healing process, the initiation tattooing follows a path starting with the top of the head and going down to the heels and consists of drawing sacred letters or figures with substances corresponding to various entities inhabiting the cosmos. Note that this process equates the initiate’s body to a spatial map of the cosmos. Maurice Eisenbruch (1992: 286) aptly demonstrated about exorcism in Cambodia that “the body of the patient is a metaphor for the cosmos”.

What is tattooed, however, is not mere ink but congregation medicine (gaing hsay), which is conceived of as knowledge (pinnya). Hsay, the substance tattooed, means both ink and medicine, in Burmese, and the initiation process plays fully on this double meaning. The medicine thus tattooed is specific to the congregation (gaing) because it is considered to originate in the medicine first created by U Aye, the founding weikza-healer, and it is produced since that time, collectively, at the end of the general meeting, using a bit of this root substance.

Initiation into the Manaw seittokpad is made up of iterative procedures of tattooing congregation medicine on the body, in a highly ritualised way, playing on analogies between tattooing protective drawings, applying congregation medicine and dispensing congregation knowledge and healing powers. These procedures involving the body create a sense of renewed belonging to a bounded Buddhist community of hsaya and hsayama (masters) whose commonality is based on ‘reformed’ Buddhist behaviour: keeping the main Buddhist precepts, particularly those of not drinking alcohol and not having improper sex, to be protected from influences considered nefarious in the gaing understanding of Buddhist cosmology. Thus, spirits (nat) that can be protective if propitiated as in spirit worship (see below) are discarded in the Manaw seittokpad practices and may be harmful. The rigorous procedure of registration in the Manaw seittokpad
seems to be a specificity of this exorcist congregation aiming at guaranteeing the proper use of the congregation’s healing knowledge, the efficiency of which depends more on the respect of hierarchies than on charismatic powers.

These procedures for entering this reformed Buddhist community resonate strangely with procedures leading to the entering of the Sangha: the collective aspect of the process and the value placed on seniority, which are reinforced by the use of monastic metaphors such as *gaing* for the congregation, *thein* (*P. sima*) for the bounded space in which ritual takes place, and ‘monks’ rice serving’ (*hsun kap*) for the collective food offering to the founding *weikza*-healers. However, the *Manaw seittokpad*’s procedures are also clearly distinct from monastic practice, as shown for example by the discarding of religious monetary donations (*ahlu*): it is an explicit rule of the congregation’s procedures that the masters must not ask for such offerings but only receive the homage fee (*puzaw bwe*) for their transactions (Brac de la Perrière 2015). Moreover, the highly ritualised process of giving knowledge through tattooing *gaing* medicine is in itself in contrast to the denial of ritual efficacy that may be found in reformist monastic Buddhism. Nevertheless, this highly ritualised process is what creates for the initiate the sense of becoming a distinctively and consciously reformed Buddhist.

*Photo 1. Tattooing along the hair central parting. Photo by the author.*
SPIRIT WORSHIP

Spirit worship is a common practice of the Burmese Buddhists and is mainly framed by the pantheon of spirit possession, known as the Thirty-Seven Lords (thonze hkunit min). This pantheon includes a number of individual tutelary spirits, known as nat and worshiped in local communities. Its emergence may be seen as the legacy of the Buddhist kings’ ritual policy of recognizing and paying homage to the main local spirits. However, it survived the collapse of kingship (1885) as an impressive ritual complex that underpins huge annual public festivals, celebrating each member of the pantheon in its specific domain, as well as private ceremonies organized at the client’s request—anywhere in Burma but particularly in urban contexts—in which all the spirits of the pantheon are called on to be embodied by spirit mediums. In short, it articulates local rituals commemorating tutelary spirits with spirit possession ceremonies focused on a pantheon of spirits whose specialists are spirit mediums.

Burmese spirit possession conforms remarkably closely to the general description, as found in many cultures, of what Gilbert Rouget (1980), among others, labels positive spirit possession. It implies that there is both worship of the possessing entity and identification with it. In practice, it consists of embodying a spirit within a necessarily ritual frame. Recruitment to it is thought of as being instigated by the spirits. Spirits who wish to embody themselves, choose their medium-to-be within the communities of people who worship them. This choice is manifested through the causing of symptoms, which could be seen as initiatic disease. It can be stated that spirit possession is at the core of the working and reproduction of spirit worship as it is practiced today in Burma and that it is the province of spirit mediums. In Burma, spirit mediums are called nat kadaw. The term is made up of nat, meaning ‘spirit’, and kadaw, ‘wife of an official’. Mediums are said to be the wives of the spirits, who are lords of the domains where the monarchy has established them. This term applies equally to male and female spirit mediums, although some men prefer to be called nat hsaya (‘spirit master’).

Spirit possession ceremonies are performed in distinctive ritual structures (kana) usually set up for the occasion for which this category of ritual is named (nat kana bwe). This ritual structure is a possession-enabling device marked at one end by altars full of statues representing the spirits and of the offerings presented to them, and at the other end, by the richly-decorated traditional orchestra playing tunes calling on the spirits during the performance. Thus the material scene of possession is wedged between these two powerful sensorial poles, one musical, in which the spirits are summoned, the other representational, in which they are present in a latent fashion and in which they manifest themselves. It is therefore a particularly dense yet open space, in accordance with the ritual’s logic, which is that of an encounter between spirits and humans, one requiring the free circulation of both. This is what makes a possession-enabling device of the ceremonial pavilion.

Becoming a spirit medium requires a long process of familiarisation under the guidance of an experienced medium, usually the one who identified the spirit responsible for possession (gaunswe). By attending ceremonies supervised by this master, the person a spirit has chosen undergoes an apprenticeship in embodiment by letting the entity enter him or her (nat win-) when it appears, taking the place of the person’s inner...
and invisible component, called *leippya* (‘butterfly soul’). The initial instances are called ‘wild’ (*yaing*) but gradually become more orderly. The process is ritualised in different stages, although always within the context of ceremonies held in honour of the Thirty-Seven Lords. Begun with the ‘handing over of the *gaunswe*’ (*gaunswe a-*), it concludes with the initiate’s ‘marriage’ to the spirit, which marks the newly attained status of *nat kadaw*.

This marriage could be taken as the initiation ritual of the spirit mediums and is performed by the master.²⁰ A nuptial chamber is set up, signalling a specific ritual space (*san hkan*, ‘residence’) inside the usual ceremonial pavilion (*kana*). This space is covered with white and red fabric featuring the nuptial bed and bounded by hanks of white cotton, watched over and manipulated by six full-fledged mediums. The latter are the guarantors of the space’s purity, and through their skilful manipulation of the threads, they allow only the master and his disciple-candidate to enter. This bounded space gives its name to the ritual, which is called entering the residence (*san hkan win-*)..

*Photo 2. The initiate dressed as the ‘spirit’s wife’ before entering the ‘residence’. Photo by the author.*
Within this space, the performing master subjects the person to a series of ritual gestures: those of bringing something to life (a *thek thwin*-) just as in the case of surrendering to the seducing spirit (gaunswe a-) and like rituals for the bringing to life of statues (*leippya theip*). These gestures serve to introduce into the person the spirit’s vital energies by a number of means, among them a series of strokes on the body’s openings and sense organs made using bunches of rose-apple leaves, the ‘leaves of victory’. They make the medium into the spirit’s receptacle. In this sense, they can be said to construct possession metonymically. Since the marriage entails an element of enlivening or animating, this ritual involves both a wedding and a rebirth, much as mediums enter into ambiguous relations – at once conjugal and filial – with spirits. The relationship that allows a person to become the means to a spirit’s embodiment is described as an amorous one. At the same time, the new ‘spirit-spouse’ enters into a web of ritual obligations to the spirits and to the master, called and marked through the gesture of respect (*kadaw*). She/he enters into a new spirit family whose leader is her/his spiritual master whose power (*tago*) to deal with the spirits is incorporated into the medium’s ritual objects, especially in the statues. In other words, the disciple’s master is like a father or a mother and will often be referred to as such. From this point, the person’s life will be oriented anew by the ritual obligations of spirit worship and by her/his growing ability to master possession by any of the possessing entities belonging to the pantheon until she/he becomes a master, in turn.

**A CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF DIVERSIFIED RITUALS: COMPARISONS**

From the point of view of the analysis, all three rituals may be said to transform the person into a ritual specialist, be it a monk, an exorcist or a spirit medium. The ritual formula imposes in each of the three cases the same conditions as those required in higher ordination for the change in status to be effective: a bounded space, a quorum of specialists serving as guarantors of the process, an eligible candidate and a specific process. These can be said to be the technical requisites of initiation rituals allowing for the change of status to be effected.

However, the three rituals are also very contrasting. This is evidenced first in the shape and appearance of the specific places in which they are held, and which pertain to very different statuses: the consecrated bounded space (*thein*) the establishment of which is vital for the preservation of a Sangha, the ritual enclosure protecting exorcism from spirit intrusion (*yazamat*), and the ceremonial pavilion enabling spirit possession (*kana*). While the first tends to be a permanent building, the other two are usually only temporary ritual devices. Their contrasting aesthetics and materialities are representative of the divergent worldviews displayed in the fields the initiates seek to enter. This contributes to the diversity of the ritual landscape.

The *thein*, as a closed ordination hall usually located in a monastery, appears to be designed only to encapsulate the words of Buddha and ensure the continuity of his teachings for this five-thousand-year era. In contrast, the *kana* features flamboyant shrines and an orchestra to host the ephemeral visit of the spirits belonging to the Thirty-Seven Lords, but only for a limited period, hence its makeshift character. Inside
the ritual pavilion, the hanks of cotton threads delineate the residence space to protect the intimacy of the spiritual wedding. As for the yazamat, it is a generic tool for spatial ritualisation inherited from royal ceremonies. While in the Sweyingyaw congregation studied by Rozenberg (2014: 194), initiation takes place in front of the initiator’s household Buddha altar, apparently without any specific ritual device, the Manaw seittokpad initiation requires the use of yazamat for spatial ritualisation. The strictly contained ritual device of the exorcists provides a safe space for the exorcised patient through a selection of the spiritual agencies allowed to be present in it.

Thus, thein and kana are spatially organised structures serving contrasting religiousities – that is, contrasting presencing of numinous agency – and also displaying different temporalities and relative closure or openness. The thein is designed to prevent the entry of worldly spiritual entities in its purified space. Devoted to the performative agency of Buddha’s teachings for the time of their dispensation, it is determined by its closure and permanence. As for the kana, it is a pavilion allowing for the encounter of spirits and people, and dedicated to the ephemeral manifestation of spirits belonging to the possession pantheon: it is rather characterised by its openness and temporariness. Finally, an exorcist yazamat combines the hosting of protective agencies with the expelling of nefarious ones to prevent the exorcised patient from the attack of miscellaneous and potentially dangerous spiritual entities inhabiting the world. Strikingly, what is good and what is bad in the cosmos according to the Manaw seittokpad worldviews is concretely discriminated through this function of the yazamat in the initiation. As a tool for ritualisation, the yazamat inhabits an interstitial place that structures the whole ritual landscape. As in Cambodia, every exorcist ritual replays the drama in which the patient’s body verticality represents the moral axis of good and bad (Eisenbruch 1992: 311).

However, these varied ritual spaces are not without commonalities: the general orientation of the area, the ritual offerings all made of coconuts and bananas, and at least in the yazamat and kana cases, threads infused with words partitioning the space, rose apple leaves called ‘leaves of victory’ (aung thabyay) used as an operator of the ritual efficiency in a performative way, and more. In other words, as contrasting as these ritual devices appear, they are fundamentally part of the same ritual world.

The way the transformation is effected is also worth commenting on. For what is done to the person who undergoes the transformation is, in each case, very different. In all three cases, however, the initiation is performed only after a phase during which the neophyte becomes acquainted with the field of practice. In the spirit medium case, this period usually starts with disease or life accidents that prompt the person – either a man or a woman – to seek help from a specialist. This may also be said to be true of the exorcist case since levels of initiation are considered part of the healing treatment.22 In both cases, initiation marks the return to a ‘normal’ state but with a new status. In the spirit medium case the influence and the powers attributed to the spirits are added to the person through the wedding, and that allows him/her to embody or manifest the spirits at will, for a ritual purpose. In the exorcist case, after he/she has been freed from any negative spiritual influences through reiterated exorcist procedures, the specific knowledge of the congregation is implanted in the person through the tattooing of the congregation’s medicine onto the person’s body. In both cases the person is transformed through the addition of either spiritual agency or protective ‘knowledge’. Interestingly, this transformation is definitive although not apparent to an outsider in daily life. It is
only manifested in the spirit worship context or exorcist practice. In the case of a monk, what is done is to separate him from his previous life, and from worldly life in general, through the shaving of his head and the changing of his clothes, and to inculcate in him the words of the Buddha. The transformation is not definitive, as the monk may request to withdraw from the Sangha or be expelled from it if the situation requires it, i.e. if he cannot comply with monastic rule. But the change in status is visible in all circumstances through the outward appearance and behaviour of the religious man, inducing specific manners on the part of laypeople in their daily interactions.

These contrasting transformative rituals also introduce the initiates into a very different milieu. In all three cases, the new specialist enters into a new social belonging through the initiation. The ordinand has to quit his original familial background to enter the Sangha, which is mainly ordered by seniority. The senior monk of the monastery in which the ordinand settles serves as his substitute parents. The spirit medium definitely joins a new spirit-family in which relationships are governed by spirit possession. As for the exorcist, he belongs to a congregation that is egalitarian in spirit and ordered by seniority, like the Sangha, and in which everybody is addressed as a master (hsaya).

The three initiations also involve contrasting performances of gender. The higher ordination is exclusively male oriented. Women are excluded from the status gained through the ritual and from the bounded space in which it takes place although they give their sons to the Sangha and contribute to the daily maintenance of the monks through food donations. The exorcist congregation is comprised of males and females, all treated with the same respect, although the masters who officiate to confer the hantima grade are exclusively male. As for the spirit’s spouses, they may be male or female but are envisioned as ideally feminine, hence the growing presence of transgender people in spirit medium circles.

Moving from one field of practice to the other, the observer also has to adapt to very different ways of interacting. From the restrained demeanour expected in the monastic context to the joyful extravaganza displayed in spirit possession ceremonies, the behaviours are poles apart. The rituals display various knowledge, sounds, smells, foods and visual elements which create the specific character of each event: the tense examination of the monastic candidate, the solemn tattooing of the congregation medicine or the frenzied dance of the medium embodying a spirit. This variety of ritual means and of bodily deportments makes up for the truly diversified ritual landscape found in Burma.

**WHEN LESS IS MORE**

In this way, the three initiation rituals make new specialists adopt very specific and contrasting worldviews. In particular, the initiations create distinctive ontologies: the monk embodying Buddha’s teachings and whose body and mind are ideally oriented toward salvation, the exorcist cultivating knowledge and keeping Buddhist precepts to protect himself and rescue people from worldly impediments, and the medium seeking protection and prosperity in his intimate relationship with the spirit world. While the whole life of the spirit medium is governed by intense relationships to spirits thought of as purveyors of all the necessities if well propitiated, the exorcist sees them as a poten-
tial source of harm and spares no efforts to keep them at bay through the cultivation of the congregation’s knowledge and of reformed Buddhist behaviour. As for the monk, his embodiment of Buddha’s teachings makes him immune to the spirit’s actions, at least in theory.

Actually, the worldviews ritually displayed in Burmese Buddhist monasticism, esotericism and spirit mediumship are properly distinctive in that they are differently valued. These worldviews as exemplified through attitudes toward the spirits seem irreconcilable. At face value, at least, they leave few avenues for hybridisation. This is not to say, however, that some blurred zones do not exist at their margins, neither that ritual creativity does not carve up space for new less clearly identifiable practice, nor that individual entrepreneurs do not trace their own trajectories in this ritual landscape. However, it can be said that each of these fields of practice is related to two exclusive positions regarding the world (to which the spirits are attached): the withdrawal of the monk or the involvement of both the exorcist and the spirit medium. The renunciation orientation performed by the monks in their daily behaviours is what bestows on them their unique status, on moral grounds.

It is significant to see that this distinctive position of the monks is also built into the relative rituality of the ordination compared to other initiations. We have seen that the three rituals examined here share the same formal specificities pertaining to their common transformative nature. However, one of the most common dimensions of initiation rituals, generally speaking, the enacting of a rebirth (and of a death), is not ritually performed in the Burmese higher ordination, while it is at the core of the ‘bringing-to-life’ kind of process performed in the wedding of a new medium. Yet, the transformative dimension of the monastic ritual is the most radical because it produces a change in status that encompasses the other transformations. Not only does it create a new son of the Buddha, but also one who is defined in relation to mere humans – the non-initiates – who become, through the same process, supporters of Buddhist teachings (dayaka). The exorcists and spirit mediums belong to this non-initiate category, while designing for themselves, through differentiated initiations, their own fields of ritual action.

The avoidance of enacting the rebirth symbolism in the Burmese higher ordination can be taken as another mark of the general distance with rituality as the one signalled in the introduction concerning the example of the consecration of Buddha’s image. While Burmese Buddhism is far from devoid of rituals, the kind of ritual means brought into play appears rather sober compared to the flamboyance of the spirit worship rituals. More generally, when comparing the initiation rituals in Burmese Buddhist monasticism, esotericism and spirit mediumship, we observe a gradation in ritual expressivity, ranging from less to more. From this perspective, the low level of ritual elaboration and the textual inflexion of the higher ordination may be seen as having a distinctive effect that allows it to stand apart from other initiations.

I suggest that this ritual minimalism of the Burmese higher ordination is in itself part of the distinctiveness of the monastic religious stance – which is oriented towards the embodiment of Buddha’s words –, and that it is a statement the meaning of which comes out relatively, from the ordination being part of the same, although diversified, ritual universe as the two other initiation rituals. A comparison of three initiations in apparently discreet segments of religion enables us to see how they are in fact speaking to each other to establish dialogically differentiated fields of practice. The ritual sobri-
The population of Burma is complex, as it is made up of a dominant Theravadin Buddhist majority and of many diverse ethnic or religious groups. Apart from Buddhism and ethnic religions, various denominations of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam are also present in the country, adding to the complexity of the religious landscape. However, in this chapter, I will only deal with the rituals of the Buddhist majority.

In this paper, ritual landscape is used in a metaphorical sense rather than as it has emerged in the wake of archeological landscape studies such as those discussed by Tony J. Wilkinson in Archaeology of Landscape (2003). This metaphorical use of ritual landscape aims to consider as a whole a range of rituals pertaining to different brands or aspects of Burmese religion.

For an overview of the field of religious studies about Burma that highlights this bias, see Brac de la Perrière 2009 and Schober 2003.

The main exceptions are the work of Melford Spiro (1967), the thesis of Juliane Schober (1989) and Gustaaf Houtman (1990b).

On the comparison of images of Buddha with those of spirits, see Brac de la Perrière 2006; on consecrations of Buddha images in Theravada Buddhism, see mainly Swearer 2004. Schober (2003: 16), in contrast with my observations, reports on “opening eyes” consecration ceremonies concerning a Burmese Buddha image in Mandalay (the Kyauktawgyi).

Buddhist esotericism is used here as a convenient shorthand for a field of practice designated in Burmese as the ‘path of knowledge’ or weikza lan. While this label was introduced by Spiro (1970: 167–187), its pertinence has been discussed particularly by Niklas Foxeus (2011: 3–10) and Steven Collins (2014: 224–225). For recent scholarly contributions to this field of practice, see Brac de la Perrière et al. 2014.

This is not to say that these fields exhaust the variety of practices found in Burmese religion. In particular, lay Buddhists may engage in different brands of meditation on a regular basis. However, the engagement in these practices does not involve an initiation ritual, as is the case for those examined here.

For a rare Burmese defence of spirit worship as part of the Buddhist cosmos, see Nu 1989 and Brac de la Perrière 2009a.

In Burma, women can enter religious life as thilashin, ‘keeper of the precepts’, but they are not entitled to the same status as monks and do not go through the full higher ordination that will be considered below (Kawanami 2013).

Shinbyu has been described by a number of authors, among them Htin Aung 1962; Spiro 1970; Houtman 1990b; Robinne 2002, and Brac de la Perrière 2009b.

A variant of this phrase is yahan khan- ‘to bear (the status of) yahan’. Another expression is phongyi wut- referring to another word, more profane, for monk: phongyi.

‘Condition’ is my rendering of the Buddhist concept translated as accomplishment (P. *samma-patti*) by Carbine (2011: 111). Through this rendering, I aim to suggest how the Buddhist conceptualisation of higher ordination fits the theorisation of ritual as ‘ritualisation’ (Bell 1992).

On the spiritual rebirth metaphor in Cambodian Buddhist ordination, see Bizot 1988 in particular, as well as Davis’s (2016: 234) discussion of the symbolic death (and rebirth) involved in the ritual equation of the ordination in Cambodia. In this regard, the difference in approaches of rituals may very well explain the gap in the findings, and a plausible objection could be that a more thorough symbolic analysis of higher ordination in Burma than that which was possible in this essay, and referring to materials beyond the Shwegyin reformist tradition, could change our view of it. However, I do think the difference has more to do with the specificity of the Burmese case and its particular articulation of the whole religious field.

There is a wealth of well-established research on *weikza* practices, such as that of Spiro 1970; Ferguson and Mendelson 1981; Schober 1989; Pranke 1995; and of new research such as that of Foxeus 2011, and those that have been recently published in *Champions of Buddhism* (Brac de la Perrière et al. 2014). In the latter volume one will find a piece authored by Guillaume Rozenberg (2014), who has recently produced a very comprehensive ethnography of exorcism in the congregation of *Shweyingyaw* masters, which is another important congregation of Burmese exorcists. In this piece, Rozenberg focuses on the way the *Shweyingyaw* initiation shapes the exorcist’s identity.

The congregation has its headquarters in Bago (Pegu) and is already known through Patrick Pranke’s paper “On Becoming a Buddhist Wizard” (1995), in which he translates and comments on a manual that is a useful introduction to the tenets of this organisation, “The Goal and Path of the great Manosetopad Gaing”. I base my analysis of the initiation ritual on my observation of the annual congregation meeting in December 2012 and 2013, in Pegu.

See Rozenberg (2014: 199) for a list of the higher beings involved. The list, consisting of the 5 Buddhas of this world cycle, the guardian-founders of the congregation, the guardian deities of the world and the main deities such as Thagyamin and Thuyathadi, is very close of that of the higher beings whose protection is tattooed on the upper part of the initiate’s body in the *Manaw seittokpad*.

Concerning the worship of the Thirty-Seven Lords, see Spiro 1967 and Brac de la Perrière 1989.

Rouget (1980), it will be recalled, suggests that spirit possession can only be positive, by which he means that possession implies adorcism. This stance differs from that of Luc de Heusch (1971), who, apart from distinguishing the ideology of possession from that of shamanism, also contrasts adorcism to exorcism in that, in the former case, the presence of the external spiritual agent is sought by the person, while in the latter case, the spiritual agent is chased from the person.


For the bringing to life of statues, see Brac de la Perrière 2006, and above.

For the sake of accuracy, it has to be noted that among exorcists, some do not report to have gone through the ordeal of any initiatic disease. In the *Manaw Seittokpad* case, they are those belonging to the leaders’ family and this may be taken for a statement about their status in the congregation. Cf. Rozenberg’s (2014: 213) statement about *Shweyingyaw* exorcist: “accession to the role does not require having been exorcized”.
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ABSTRACT
In this work I analyse the ethnographic case study of the icon of Our Lady of the Wall as establishing a unique ritual landscape among the cement slabs of the Israeli–Palestinian Wall separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem. Although the Wall has been widely described as a technology of occupation on one side and as a device to ensure security on the other, through Latour’s concept of assemblages I unearth its agency in developing a Christian shrine. Through a decade of weekly recitations of the Rosary along the Wall near Checkpoint 300, the Elizabethan nuns of the Caritas Baby Hospital have been invoking Mary’s help to dismantle the Wall. This weekly ritual represents both political dissent against the bordering action enacted by the Wall, as well as giving visibility to the plea of the Palestinian Christian right to live in this territory in the face of their status as an ethno-religious minority.

KEYWORDS: Israel–Palestine • Our Lady of the Wall • assemblages • bordering • Elizabethan nuns of the Caritas Baby Hospital • shrine • ritual

INTRODUCTION
Our understanding of globalisation today must recon with its inherent exhibition of a tension between opening and barricading (Brown 2010: 7–8). While it is generally recognised that this term has predominantly referred to the pervasive development of transnational connections, people’s movement across national boundary lines and a growing range of media reaching across borders (Hannerz 1996: 4), today we are witnessing an increasing erection of walls around the globe. Prominent examples include the wall built between Mexico and the United States; the Morocco Wall of Western Sahara, which separates the Moroccan-controlled Southern Provinces from the Polisario-controlled areas known as the Saharwi Arab Democratic Republic; between India and Bangladesh; between North and South Korea; between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; between Saudi Arabia and Yemen; between Zimbabwe and Botswana; between Afghanistan and Pakistan; between Kuwait and Iraq; the wall that in Belfast divides the Protestant and...
Catholic neighbourhoods; the wall in Cyprus that divides the Turkish from the Greek area; the wall built in the Italian city of Padua in Via Anelli to separate the immigrant and poor neighbourhoods from the rest of the citizens (Brown 2010: 8; Farinacci and Filippini 2015), or even the very recent barricading along the borders of several European nations against the massive arrival of migrants.

In this work I address the Wall running between Israel and Palestine, particularly the segment that separates South Jerusalem from the Palestinian municipalities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. According to the 2012 survey conducted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 542 obstacles hinder the movement of the Palestinians in the West Bank area (OCHA 2012). Among these many diverse barriers, the Wall perhaps represents one of the greatest physical obstacles between Israel and Palestine. Its construction began in 2002, and it is planned to extend for approximately 773 kilometres at completion. Approximately 90% of the barrier’s length consists of an “electronic fence flanked by paved pathways, barbed-wire fences, and trenches” (B’Tselem 2011). However, the 15-kilometer-long segment of the Wall that is the focus of my research is an eight-meter-high concrete barrier. My investigation aims at examining the impact that the physical presence of the Wall has on the Palestinian Christian population residing in the Bethlehem governorate. In this article, I will address the peculiar aspect of the development of a ritual landscape among the cement slabs near checkpoint 300, where the Christian population protests against the bordering agency of the Wall through the weekly recitation of the Rosary while reaffirming its right to dwell on the land as a religious minority.

Although numerous connoisseurs and scholars of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, such as political scientist Wendy Brown (2010: 29), address the Wall in terms of “a technique of strategic land appropriation that poses as an antiterrorist technology” or “as an offensive political military technology, posing as a pacification structure”, in my research I have unveiled a more complex dimension to the Wall’s impact on the Palestinian Christian population through an innovative framework connecting new materialism with phenomenology. The approach is based on Bruno Latour’s concept of assemblages. Latour’s notion of assemblages allows for a democratic interplay between the humans, who usually dominate the attention of scholars, and the frequently overlooked material things, in an attempt to bridge the divide between subject and object. As he assures his readers,

> it is not a matter of replacing a gamut of actions traditionally associated with the subject by a shorter range of actions that would reduce the first. On the contrary, the associations that are presented […] seek to add to the first list a longer list of candidates (Latour 2004: 75),

thus also allowing non-humans to become the focus of scholarly analysis. Therefore, in this article I adopt and adapt the theoretical framework of Latour’s concept of assemblages in as much as it allows to challenge the notion that agency pertains solely to human actors while embracing the idea that things also exert power. Accordingly, the Wall is not just an inert cement structure that the Israeli Government constructed in order to guarantee the safety of its people, but it exercises an agency distributed across a gamut of human and non-human actants. In particular, in my research I have addressed five dimensions in which the Wall, understood as an assemblage, exercises its agency:
Palestinian land appropriation, control and surveillance of the lives and movement of the Palestinians in general and of the Christians in particular, community and family fragmentation and separation, acts of sumud or steadfastness developed by the Christians, and the topic of this article, the development of a Christian ritual landscape among its cement slabs. Herein, I examine how the Wall assemblage, in addition to gathering actants of surveillance and control also encompasses an entanglement of religious practices, rituals, and materials that are developing into a novel Christian shrine. In this work, I analyse how the physical presence of the Wall, and the agency that it deploys, exhorted the Italian congregation of Elizabethan nuns who run the Caritas Baby Hospital, to initiate a weekly recitation of the Rosary near the militarised entrance to and from Bethlehem known as Checkpoint 300. This ritual was developed over a decade ago in order to beseech the Virgin Mary for the miracle of destroying the Wall. The continuity of the recitation of this prayer along the route of the Wall, has gradually developed into a unique ritual landscape where human and non-human actants interact and interconnect with the Wall. A few of the involved actants that were identified include: guns, soldiers, watchtowers, gates, barbed wire, army vehicles, eight-meter-high cement slabs, interaction with religious bodies, Holy Masses, the Eucharist, Rosary beads, a new prayer written especially to be recited at the Our Lady of the Wall icon, the Emmanuel’s convent isolated by the Wall, nuns, activists, foreign pilgrims, and Hail Maries. Hence, herein, following in the footsteps of Robert Alvarez (1995), Gloria Anzaldúa 2012 [1987], Latour (1999; 2004; 2005), Jane Bennett (2005; 2010), Kristy Nabhan-Warren (2010), Sonia Hazard (2013), Alejandro Lugo (2015), Valentina Napolitano et al. (2015), Nurit Stadler (2015), Nurit Stadler and Nimrod Luz (2015), I document how considering the Wall as an assemblage allows the notion that the Wall is merely a technology to ensure safety or exercising occupation to be challenged, while unearthing the development of a new Christian ritual landscape along a segment of its route in opposition to its presence.

GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

As a result of the Oslo peace process initiated in the 1990s, and particularly due to Oslo II, known as the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the West Bank was subdivided into three areas of jurisdiction: Area A where the Palestinian Authority (PA) possesses full civil and security control, Area B in which the PA retains civil control with a joint Israeli-Palestinian security control, and Area C which is under full Israeli civil and security control. In particular, in the Bethlehem Governorate, which includes the municipality of Beit Jala, approximately 6,000 people dwell in 17 residential areas located in Area C, thus directly under Israeli control.

More than 85% of Bethlehem governorate3 is designated as Area C, the vast majority of which is off limits for Palestinian development, including almost 38% declared as “firing zones”, 34% designated as “nature reserves”, and nearly 12% allocated for settlement development (OCHA 2015).

Thus, the Oslo II agreement essentially gave Israel military control of the “interstices of an archipelago of about two hundred separate zones of Palestinian restricted autonomy of the West Bank” (Weizman 2007: 11).
The separation between Israel and Palestine became more rigid and overt through the construction of the renowned “security fence” also known as the Wall. Consequent to Ariel Sharon’s walk on Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on September 28, 2000, the Al-Aqsa Intifada (also known as the second Intifada) exploded causing approximately 6,371 victims among Palestinians and 1,083 among Israelis (B’Tselem 2010). Thus the period between the years 2000 and 2005 witnessed numerous suicide bombings and terrorist attacks against the Israeli civilian population, which propelled the development of the security barrier project. The barrier’s total length has been planned to run for approximately 773 kilometres along the 1949 armistice line (while in fact the total length measures twice the length of the Green Line) and its construction initiated in the year 2002 with the consent and under the supervision of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Specifically, the Wall in the Bethlehem Governorate extends across 53.5 kilometers starting at the eastern rural area north of Al-Khas village and runs south to reach Um Al-Qassies village; it then extends towards the west, bypasses the southern part of Abu Ghabi mountain north of Beit Sahour, before it continues northwest of Bethlehem and Beit Jala cities and westward to run along bypass road #60 south of Al-Khader village, it then runs southeast towards Wad Al-Nis to encompass Efrat settlement (ARIJ 2007: 25).

Moreover, the route of the Wall extends south and southwest isolating the western rural area of the Governorate along the Gush Etzion settlement Bloc (ibid.).

While strongly acknowledging and affirming the shared experience of the impact of the physical presence of the Wall both by Muslims and the diverse Christian denominations living in this territory, this research focuses on the Christian Catholic segment of the Palestinian inhabitants (about 8,000 people belonging to 1,000 families). According to the 2014 CIA census, Christians represent 1.0 to 2.5 percent of the population in the West Bank (The World Factbook), and about “three-fourths of all Bethlehem Christians live abroad” (Adelman and Kuperman 2001: 1). In contrast, there is a higher percentage of Christians in Israel, constituting approximately 2% of the population (according to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, on Christmas Eve 2011 Christians numbered 154,500). The reason for selecting the Christian community as the focus of my research lies in the fact that their status as a minority, even in an historically predominantly Christian city like Bethlehem, unearths peculiar dimensions of the Wall’s agency that would not have arisen otherwise, such as the development of the weekly ritual of the prayer of the Rosary near Checkpoint 300 addressed in this work. In fact, given their status as a double minority in Israel (compared to the Jewish and Muslim population) and as a minority compared to the Muslims in the West Bank, as Stadler and Luz (2015) highlight, the development of the shrine of Our Lady of the Wall does not uniquely reveal their dissent against the presence of the Wall, but it also reinforces their right as an ethno-religious minority to reside on the land.

**METHODOLOGY**

As stated above, the present research work focuses on the effects of the Wall on the Christian population living in the municipalities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. The data.
was collected through extensive fieldwork conducted over three expeditions for a total of twelve months. I planned the first two trips in two different moments of the year in order to capture both the impact of the Wall on ordinary life, as well as during the particularly meaningful and solemn festivity of Easter’s Holy Week. The decision to focus my research on the segment of the Wall in the Bethlehem Governorate area allowed me to investigate multiple dimensions of the Wall’s agency. Several cases analysed in my work, in fact, took place along this 15-kilometer-long segment of the Wall (in places already constructed and in others still under construction). Furthermore, this peculiar section of the Wall enabled the exploration of its temporal dimension. Since the Wall is still under construction, I was able to gain an insight into the perceptions and attitudes of the people who witnessed the erection of the first cement blocks in 2002, of those who are currently living in the vicinities of the Wall and are thus forced to interact with its presence daily, as well as of those who have been informed of its intended route, which will sever their homes from their fields.

Figure 1. Map of the Rachel’s Tomb Area and Checkpoint 300 (ARIJ).

The methodology I employed to collect the data consisted of a combination of interviews and participant observation. The interviews, when possible, were conducted in a structured manner. However, given the sensitivity of the issue and the possible repercussions on the local population if found criticising Israeli policies, I collected most of the data in an informal manner, in ways that protected the identity of my interlocutors. The subjects of interest in the research were lay Christians resident in the area, local authorities such as the Mayors of Bethlehem, lawyers, and local clergy. I also gathered...
data by observant participation during the celebration of the Holy Masses, other community events on important Christian Holidays such as Advent and Easter, and all the activities involving the Christmas Youth Choir of the Saint Catherine Parish.

Furthermore, I adopted a particular technique when conducting the interviews, which proved to be extremely successful due to the unconventional nature of my approach: the respondents had to describe their experience of the Wall with just one word. This method forced the interviewees to think about the Wall in an unfamiliar way. As a Christian woman told me, this question represented a challenge for the Arabs who tend to be very descriptive. Thus, when asked, they had to either condense different elements of the assemblage called Wall, or select its paramount element. Furthermore, in order to gain insights on their embodied experiences of being in a world surrounded by the Wall, I asked them to narrate their memories of the times when the Wall was being constructed, of how their lives changed since its erection, and of a particular event that they will never forget in connection to the presence of the Wall.

Let us now observe how carrying out the research through the adoption of this particular methodology revealed the necessity to adopt Latour’s concept of assemblages in the analysis of the impact of the Wall on the local Christian population.

**THE WALL AS A NON-HUMAN ACTANT**

The decision to adopt the assemblage framework arose from the complexity of the data collected through the interviews conducted during the fieldwork. Let us look at a concrete example derived from my conversation with Mariam, one of the women involved in the development of the Sumud Story House project. First of all, Mariam works in the Rachel Tomb Area (See Figure 1), a zone of the city of Bethlehem where the Wall, in order to annex the tomb of the Jewish matriarch Rachel to the Israeli national territory, winds in between the homes of the Palestinians who live there. Due to the pervasive presence of the Wall, this particular area has progressively emptied of its inhabitants, becoming desolate. The Sumud Story House was opened there in order to revitalise this part of town. Furthermore, this area hosts Checkpoint 300. The construction of this checkpoint interrupts Hebron Road, which represented the major artery connecting Jerusalem to Bethlehem. This sophisticated passage point regulates the entrance and exit to and from Bethlehem on foot through a series of queues, turnstiles, and metal detectors, and – for vehicles – a route through the solid iron gate that Mariam mentions in the interview. These are Mariam’s words describing her experience of the Wall:

I looked at the gate, it was closed, I felt that someone is really trying to kill me; someone is trying to put his hands on my neck [she tightens her hands around her neck mimicking someone strangling her] […] I will never ever forget this feeling. Imagine yourself, the main entrance is closed and you don’t have the authority to open it so this is what I felt at that moment, that someone is killing me […]. Killing, illness, serpent, a lot of ugly words, these words even cannot describe what we feel when I say it is killing me, it’s not just a word, it is really killing me. So you know looking at the Wall, it’s ten metres high and when you look at it you can’t even continue to look at it, you feel really afraid, just sometimes I feel really afraid.
This description provides a few insights onto the importance of incorporating a new materialist interpretative framework through Latour’s concept of assemblages. Instead of describing the Wall through adjectives such as ‘ugly’, ‘tall’, ‘solid’, she depicts it as strangling her, that is, she attributes to the Wall an action, that of choking. Already, in this first observation the materiality of the Wall, that is, its physical presence, does not appear inanimate, but she describes it as possessing the same agentic power as a human subject. Secondly, if we acknowledge that the Wall has agency, what does it mean that it strangles someone? After all, the Wall might have been anthropomorphised, but it still does not have actual hands. So what is it about the Wall that strangles?

In order to answer these questions, we must understand that we are facing a group of different elements, an assemblage of parts that, because of their material presence, structure, design, architecture, and humans operating with and through them provoke the sensation of choking. Mariam’s description of the Wall as a “serpent”, and as “killing” can be understood as alluding to the snake’s ability to wrap its body around the prey choking them with its coils, thus killing them by taking their breath away. Furthermore, the Wall’s ‘serpentine’ quality may come from its non-linear architecture and route, which insinuates itself deep within the city wrapping its ‘body’ around buildings severing them from the city’s major arteries and from Jerusalem, thus preventing Palestinian inhabitants from accessing the Israeli city. This is the case with the Anastas family whose home, due to its proximity to Rachel’s Tomb, is surrounded on three sides by the Wall isolating them from the rest of the city (see Photo 1). Furthermore, my

Photo 1. Home of the Anastas family surrounded on three sides by the Wall. Photo by the author.
request to narrate an unforgettable experience relating to the Wall reveals the necessity to analyse the Wall in terms of an assemblage of different actants. In this particular case, Mariam describes her experience of standing in front of the closed checkpoint’s gate impeding the movement to and from Bethlehem. The fact that she chose such an event made me realise that she considered the checkpoint and its gate as integral parts of the Wall. Moreover, this particular experience ties to Mariam’s previous description of the strangling agency of the Wall, which can be explained as a result of the Israeli Army’s unilateral authority to deny access to the city through the checkpoint’s gate.

This short example allows us to recognise that the Wall is neither a listless monolithic object, nor a simple set of cement slabs. Through Mariam’s narration we understand that the Wall possesses agency and that it is composed of a gamut of different elements whose agencies interact within the assemblage Wall. Thus, I was able to comprehend the responses of my interlocutors who, when asked about the Wall, did not merely address its cement slabs, but spoke about their lost land, their vegetables, checkpoints, icons, etc. They clearly understood that the Wall has a complex presence that gathers a multiplicity of elements. Latour thus delivers us a world where “agency is always a complex agency, unlocalizable and distributed across assemblages of both humans and things” (Hazard 2013: 66). Thus, it becomes apparent that the adoption of a framework such as that of Latour’s assemblages becomes indispensable when analysing the elements emerged from the field, more so than other theories committed to the study of materials. Often, as Sonia Hazard (2013) reminds us, theories such as social constructivism, despite their attention to materials, do not centre their scholarly enquiry on objects specifically, but de-objectify objects in order to “gain better insights into their makers’ ontology” (Hurd 2008: 98), thus maintaining an anthropocentric perspective that is firmly rejected by scholars of the materialist turn.

Accordingly, when examining the data collected, I could not find myself in complete agreement with Latour when he asserts (2005: 78–79) that

we have to take non-humans into account only as long as they are rendered commensurable with social ties […]. To be accounted for, objects have to enter into accounts. If no trace is produced, they offer no information to the observer and will have no visible effect on other agents. They remain silent and are no longer actors: they remain, literally, unaccountable.

My findings show this idea not to be completely accurate. In fact, there is clear evidence that the Wall acts despite its entrance into the Christian’s accountability. Given these premises, I needed to integrate the concept of assemblages with the standpoint of those scholars who work within a new materialist perspective (Barad 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Bryant 2011; Bogost 2012; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2013; Connolly 2013; Hazard 2013; Morton 2013) in order to account for the narrations recorded in the field. The common denominator among new materialists relies on the belief that

material things possess a remarkable range of capacities that exceed the purview of human sense or knowing, and, therefore […] that the materiality of material things themselves must be carefully considered, not merely interpreted for their implications on human concerns (Hazard 2013: 64).
Certainly, the attention to the agency of non-humans that the new materialist perspective guarantees and defends allows us to gain an innovative outlook onto the impact of the Wall’s physical presence. However, I find this unilateral focus on objects troublesome, given the fact that my understanding of the agency of the Wall came almost exclusively from the human experience and perception of the human interlocutors. This aspect represents, in my opinion, a paradox to the investigation of non-human agency; how can the materialist framework coexist with what seemed a cultural phenomenological method of collecting data? I believe that Jane Bennett’s work *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), speaks eloquently about the issue at hand. She recounts her encounter with an assemblage of materials on the street (a glove, a rat, pollen, a bottle cap, and a stick) and how their materiality “started to shimmer and spark” due to the “contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me” (Bennett 2010: 5). As she explains, had the sun not glistened on the glove she might not have been able to notice the dead rat and so on. Because they were all there and positioned in that particular way, she was able to catch “a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that […] [she] generally conceived as inert” (ibid.). In the assemblage that Bennett describes, these non-humans appeared “as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics” (ibid.). This assemblage of materials formed a “contingent tableau” with each other and with her, her mood that day and the specific weather; she became an active participant in that particular assemblage. Furthermore, it seems that she also shares our concern for the inevitability of factoring humans into the equation when enquiring about the agency of non-humans:

> Was the thing-power of the debris I encountered but a function of the subjective and intersubjective connotations, memories, and affects that had accumulated around my ideas of these items? Was the real agent of my temporary immobilization on the street that day *humanity*, that is, the cultural meaning of “rat,” “plastic,” and “wood” in conjunction with my own idiosyncratic biography? It could be. But what if the swarming activity inside my head was itself an instance of the vital materiality that also constituted the trash? (Ibid.: 10)

This eloquent query does not simply address the methodology through which to investigate the agency of non-humans, it uncovers the challenging issue concerning the relationship between phenomenology (Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962; 1968; Csordas 1990; 1994a; 1994b; 1999; 2011) and materialism. Through Bennett’s work we reveal the challenge faced by anthropologists whose “first task […] is to convey […] feelings empathetically” (Miller 2011: 41). As Bennett asserted, she was the one to perceive this vibrancy and thus phenomenology cannot be eliminated from the “assemblage”. She was the one that day who, because of her mood and assertiveness, because of her being-in-the-world, perceived the tableau of objects in the street.

Specifically, this article analyses how the adoption and adaptation of Latour’s assemblage framework allowed me to unearth the development of a peculiar ritual landscape in response to and as a part of the Wall assemblage. In the next section, I will discuss how the more overt elements connected to security near Checkpoint 300 where the prayer of Rosary is recited weekly – that is, cement slabs, watchtowers, barbed wire, gates for cars, checkpoints, cameras, lighting fixtures, metal detectors, turnstile entrances, finger
printing, soldiers who check IDs – interconnect with the dimension of the Christian practice of the Rosary recitation. As a result, among the above-cited human and non-human actants, we discover also the presence of praying nuns, pilgrims, rosary beads, the Our Lady of the Wall icon, Hail Maries, Salve Regina, and prayers to achieve the miracle of making the Wall fall. Consequently, the Wall understood and constructed in order to guarantee security to the Israeli inhabitants and experienced as a technology of occupation by the Palestinians, when understood as an assemblage reveals the development of a ritual landscape that is both part of its assemblage and at the same time developed in opposition to its presence.

Photo 2. The Elizabethan nuns, Abuna M., an EAPPI volunteer, and Christians recite the Rosary by the Wall next to the entrance of Checkpoint 300. The Checkpoint’s watchtower looms over it. Photo by the author.

THE WEEKLY PRAYER OF THE ROSARY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

As I approached the edges of Bethlehem, the smell of car exhaust became more intense. I met Sister Anne at the Caritas Baby Hospital, the only paediatric facility in the West Bank established in the 1952 by a Swiss priest Father Ernest. She offered to accompany me toward the checkpoint where they recite the Rosary every Friday afternoon. As we strode on the narrow sidewalk we had to pay attention not to bump into the wing mirrors of the numerous cars lined up waiting to exit Jerusalem through Checkpoint 300.
This checkpoint is just one among the “61 permanently staffed checkpoints (excluding checkpoints on the Green Line), 25 partial checkpoints (staffed on an ad-hoc basis) and 436 unstaffed physical obstacles, including roadblocks, earth mounds, earth walls, road gates, road barriers, and trenches” (OCHA 2012) present in Palestine. Right in front of the gate leading to Israel, stood two soldiers controlling the permits of the drivers and opening the trunks of the cars. As they saw us approaching on foot they became alerted, but as soon as Sister Anne showed them her rosary they relaxed and went back to their duties. Under these circumstances, every Friday at 17:30 in the winter and at 18:00 in the summer, the Italian Elizabethan nuns of the Caritas Baby Hospital gather near the vehicular entrance to and from Bethlehem. As I previously mentioned, this passage point consists of a gate that can close when the Israeli military feels threatened, a watchtower with military presence at all times, surveillance cameras, and bright flood lights. The recitation of the Rosary begins at this location, in plain view both of the Israeli soldiers and of the many Palestinian drivers who wait in line to exit from the checkpoint (see Photo 2). Depending on whether the soldiers are newly assigned to guard the checkpoint or already familiar with this weekly appointment, the arrival of the faithful and pilgrims may be more or less smooth. If the soldiers are not yet aware of this initiative, the nuns reassure them by ‘unsheathing’ their rosaries and explaining that they are going to pray. My usage of the term unsheathing is not unintentional since Sister Anne tells the pilgrims that “there are those who throw stones and those who throw rosary beads”. This statement truly reveals the significance of focusing the inquiry on materiality. The beads of the rosary not only assist the Christians during prayer by materialising each Hail Mary, but they also become a laissez-passer upon approaching the checkpoint, as well as becoming the weapon that these Christian Catholic nuns have chosen to fight the presence of the Wall.

The moment of prayer is structured as follows: one person throughout the recitation remembers the Mysteries, while the other participants take turns in different languages reciting half of the Hail Mary while the rest, each one in his or her own language, declaims the second half. As the fingers work their way through the beads of the wooden rosaries, the group walks back and forth from the checkpoint to the end of the road in front of the gates of the Greek Catholic convent of the Emmanuel where the recitation ends with the singing of the Salve Regina in Latin in front of the Our Lady of the Wall icon (See Photo 3).

The participants are regularly few in number and are rarely local Palestinians. In fact, as Sister Anne discloses “last week it was just the two of us [Sister Anne and Abuna Mario] praying together at the Wall, but we prayed anyway because it is by now a fixed appointment that we care about”. The reason behind this absence is closely connected to the policies governing permits to enter Israel:

Ten years ago, there was a stricter security especially concerning the inhabitants, thus they were afraid that the soldiers might recognise them. […] Thus there was not, and still there is not, a strong Palestinian presence exactly because there is this fear of coming close to the checkpoint and being recognised especially since there is always a soldier in the watchtower who closely controls who goes there. (Sister Anne)
The lack of a strong Palestinian presence is linked to the fact that any type of participation in activities suspected to be connected to political protests or uprisings often leads to the future denial of a permit to enter the State of Israel. Already the Christians benefit from the infrequent permits allotted almost exclusively in conjunction with major religious festivities and any suspicion of political dissent may jeopardise allocation, preventing them from visiting family and friends living on the other side of the Wall.

The initiative of the weekly Rosary commenced in 2004 when a priest visited the Caritas Baby Hospital, a facility that is overseen by the Elizabethan nuns. In that year, the first cement slabs were placed without anyone truly understanding the meaning and magnitude of this barrier:

We yet did not understand what this barrier meant because its dimensions were unknown; we could guess the route because they were digging the gutters especially here. There were clues even if they were not very clear; you could understand that it was enclosing something. (Sister Anne)

Thus this priest prompted them with this question “And you? What will you do to face the construction of the Wall?” (Sister Anne). As the priest left, the nuns began to brood on this question.

Why not find something to show that we oppose this thing? But something that will not provoke, something that will not make the Israelis and the soldiers retaliate; something that will become a moment of meditation both for us and for them.
and that will draw us in the spiritual dimension and in that of prayer. [...] Then if we believe in prayer we may ask the Lord to decide what to do. Thus we chose to recite the Rosary. (Sister Anne)

This is how the Elizabethan nuns devised the idea to organise a moment of prayer at the segment of the Wall near the entrance to and from Bethlehem under the suspicious supervision of the Israeli soldiers who gave them quite a few problems meaning that they did not want to let us go, so they used to come with their vehicles and would drive back and forth following us with their machineguns pointed at us as if to say “the next time you will not come here”. (Sister Anne)

In addition to my presence, the weekly Rosary gathered a few international nuns from different countries around the world, always at least one Elizabethan nun, a couple of EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel) volunteers, sometimes some seminar students and Franciscan monks, many Italian pilgrims, and almost always Clemens, a middle-aged Palestinian woman whose house has been severed from the family land by the Wall. Clemens is one of the few local Christians (Greek Catholic) who participate in the Rosary. Clemens joined the weekly Rosary due to particular events in her life that were closely connected to the construction of the Wall.

Basically, when they started building the Wall, she owned all the land on the other side of the Wall that was part of her olive garden and they [Israeli soldiers] without asking anything expropriated her land and uprooted the olive trees. Her husband a year and a half later, after they built the Wall, gave a piece of his land, the piece where the paved road passes in order to allow the nuns [of the Emmanuel convent] to enter, otherwise they would not have had an access [to their property]. (Sister Anne)

Thus Clemens’ husband donated a strip of their own land in order to pave the path that connects the entryway to and from Bethlehem to the Emmanuel’s convent which, after the construction of the Wall, was severed from the main road and access to the city. The same pathway is now used for the prayer of the Rosary. However, a few years after the construction of the Wall Clemens’ husband, who had lost most of his possessions, died of a heart attack; “he could not stand looking every morning at this Wall” (Sister Anne). Clemens suffered greatly from the loss of her husband, whom she talks about often when meeting new pilgrims. However, her husband’s death became the catalyst to her overcoming the fear to approach the Wall and join the nuns for the prayer of the Rosary. As she explained to me, for nine years now she has been an active member of this weekly prayer.

Another loyal participant in the Rosary is Don Mario, known to the local Christian community as Abuna Mario, an Italian priest who has lived in this area for ten years and describes the Wall thus:

The Wall hides reality; it shatters relationships. I call it diabolical exactly for this reason, because it severs relationships. There was friendship before, among the simple people, between the Palestinian side and the Israeli side, among the Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Wall broke these relationships. (Abuna Mario)⁹
Thus, to him the Rosary is an opportunity to call upon the Lord because, if horizontally our voice is heard by no one, because this Wall truly breaks everything, they have not yet closed the top, they have not yet built a roof and therefore we believe that by addressing the sky someone will listen to us (Abuna Mario).

Thus, the Rosary is perceived as one of the residual ways in which the voices of the often forgotten Christian population can still be heard. The presence of this cement Wall, in fact, obstructs communication and prevents any interaction between the two sides, thus the Christian plea can only be heard and answered by God. Too often the interviews I conducted recorded the request of my Christian interlocutors to divulge their stories and remind the outside world that among the Palestinians there are Arab Christians as well.

Hence, Sister Anne reveals another important dimension of the recitation of the Rosary, which is the attention it draws among the Christian population and their opposition to the presence of the Wall. She narrates how one evening, as she was approaching Checkpoint 300, a man pulled his car near her and rolled the window down.

He tells me “you are a nun from the Caritas Baby Hospital?” and I answered “yes”. “Are you going to recite the Rosary at the Wall?” I replied that I was, but I didn’t know this person so I asked him, “Pardon me but who are you?”. “We don’t know each other, I am a Muslim and I am going to Jerusalem, I found out about this initiative, now I will cross the checkpoint but you should know that I will join you in prayer in this moment, because I know what you are doing for us”. Hearing from a Muslim that he knew about our initiative and that he would join us in prayer as a Muslim really moved me. (Sister Anne)

This narration is particularly significant in as much as it reveals the public dimension of the dissent against the Wall specifically enacted by the Christian population. The particular location selected to recite the Rosary not only responds to the necessity of the nuns whose Caritas Baby Hospital is directly affected by the Wall due to its proximity to the checkpoint, but it also represents one of the most significant places where Israeli presence and power is unavoidably deployed. Checkpoint 300, in fact, represents a major access point in the region, so much so that it is referred to as ‘the terminal’ because its security measures resemble those of an airport terminal. Furthermore, given the constant presence of Israeli military, Palestinian inhabitants, and tourists, the action of these Christians is scrutinised by everyone. Accordingly, we start to gain an understanding of the socio-political implications of the development of a ritual landscape where the Wall so bluntly establishes the border imposed between Israel and Palestine.

**OUR LADY OF THE WALL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHRISTIAN SHRINE THAT CONTESTS THE WALL’S BORDERING AGENCY**

When we investigate the impact of the Wall on the lives of the local Arab Christian communities in order to understand what is really at stake underneath the overarching and cloaking narrative of the Wall as a technology of occupation or security, we must embed
these events within the logic of the Wall as an assemblage. In this case the assemblage embraces an entanglement of the religious practices, rituals, and materialities interacting within a venue that is not considered an official site of the sacred geography of the Holy Land, but which nonetheless is visited by pilgrims and activists and is becoming a potent venue of political dissent over borders. Therefore, scholars such as Stadler and Luz (2015: 127) have analysed the particular venue of Our Lady of the Wall in terms of a new Christian shrine developed as a “political tool by various [human] actors […] in a dispute over borders”. This particular research belongs to a wider branch of studies (Alvarez 1995; Nabhan-Warren 2010; Anzaldúa 2012 [1987]; Hernández and Campos-Delgado 2015; Lugo 2015; Napolitano 2015) addressing the “role of sacred places and pilgrimage centers in the context of contemporary geopolitical strife and border disputes”, which understands shrines and sacred sites as “becoming more influential in processes of determining physical borders” (Stadler and Luz 2015: 127).

The relevance of this venue as a Christian border-disputing shrine increased consequently to the presence of the icon of Our Lady of the Wall. As the nuns persisted in their Friday prayer, the importance and visibility of the ritual grew to such an extent that in 2010,

at the request of some nuns living near the Wall, the British iconographer Ian Knowles painted an icon of Mary on the Palestinian side of the barrier. This icon, known as Our Lady of the Wall, is becoming a site of pilgrimage and veneration. (Stadler and Luz 2015: 129)

This icon portrays a pregnant Virgin Mary instead of the most common Mother and Child image.

The peculiarity of the subject chosen for the icon could refer on the one hand to the Book of Revelation (12:1–5) in which “a pregnant woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads” is mentioned (Stadler and Luz 2015: 134). This hypothesis can be corroborated by the fact that a large serpentine dragon graffito appeared on the Rosary’s Wall route before the Wall was repainted grey for the arrival of Pope Francis in 2014. On the other hand, there could be a connection between the subject of the icon and the increasingly popular images divulged on social media on the internet by activists and supporters of the Palestinian cause. Specifically, one painting, allegedly created by famous British graffiti artist Banksy, portrays a pregnant Mary with Joseph. In this image Mary cannot give birth in Bethlehem because the Wall
Figure 2. Picture of Mary and Joseph blocked outside Bethlehem by the Wall allegedly painted by graffiti artist Banksy (2015).

Figure 3. Mary and Joseph inspected at the Checkpoint before entering Bethlehem (Polyp).
obstructs her and Joseph’s way (see Figure 2). Another vignette portrays Mary and Joseph stopped and searched at the checkpoint by Israeli soldiers (see Figure 3). This impediment of movement caused by the Wall and hindering Mary from giving birth to Jesus could refer to the idea that the Wall, in opposition to which Christians pray the Rosary every week, prevents life from flourishing. On this account it is worth mentioning the story of Clemens, whose experience of the Wall connects to her husband’s death after losing their lands, or the account of Abuna Mario, who understands the Wall as diabolically preventing any relationships between the people living on opposite sides.

Noteworthy is the decision to paint the icon directly onto the Wall’s surface instead of, for example, nailing or cementing a painting to its slabs as has been done with other icons added at the site by pilgrims (see Photo 5). Thus, the icon fits into a landscape pervaded by graffiti.Both in Israel and Palestine many of the political protests have been made in different historical moments through the use of graffiti. Very common was the usage of graffiti during the first Intifada, as Julie Peteet (1996) describes in her work. Remembered as the “war of stones”, in the 1980s and early 1990s in addition to stone throwing, the protest against the Israeli occupation was also voiced through “writing on walls” (ibid.: 139). At the time Peteet wrote her article she was unaware that the “preponderance of stones and stone walls [...] [that] provided ready-made, easily accessible weapons of communication, assault and defense” (ibid.) was going to dramatically increase with the construction of the Wall after the second Intifada. However, despite the fact that two decades have passed, the graffiti are still actors of Palestinian protest, this time against the presence of the Wall that has itself become the cement canvas for their graffiti. For instance, in December 2007 the Bethlehem area and its Wall led Banksy to develop the initiative known as Santa’s Ghetto. Along with the London-based organisation Picture on Walls, he relocated “their ‘annual squat art concept store’ called Santa’s Ghetto from London to Bethlehem” (Parry 2010: 9) inviting 14 other international street artists to work side by side with Palestinian artists.10 The intent was not merely raising money to be donated to local charities, but to bring foreign visitors to Bethlehem to witness with their own eyes the presence of the Wall. In fact, in order to acquire the works of art produced by the artists on this occasion, the interested buyers had to travel to Bethlehem and bid in person at the auction. The artists located the headquarters for selling their work in a former chicken shop on Manger Square in Bethlehem in front of the Church of the Nativity. Despite the objections of those Palestinians who did not agree with the
presence of graffiti on the premises because they purportedly embellished and hid the brutality of the Wall, the initiative was very successful and, within a few weeks, Santa’s Ghetto raised over one million dollars while also, and most importantly, drawing the world’s attention to the social and political implications of the Wall. During my fieldwork in Bethlehem, Banksy’s graffiti still constituted an element of pride among the people; they had even become a sightseeing attraction for tourists. However, not all the graffiti are still visible and some of them have been modified by the locals through the years.

This is the milieu in which the icon of Our Lady of the Wall is embedded. Before the arrival of Pope Francis this icon stood at the end of a section of the Wall fully covered in graffiti and shared with them the same ‘canvas’. As Peteet (1996: 140) suggested in reference to the first Intifada, the “graffiti did not merely send messages or signify defiance; their mere appearance gave rise to arenas of contest in which they were a vehicle or agent of power”. Our Lady of the Wall, in fact, stands as an active non-human agent in the assemblage. Through the faithful weekly prayer of the Rosary, it gains the power to shred the Wall to pieces. Furthermore, like graffiti, the icon reveals the active presence of the Christian minority in the territory and their active participation in the protest against the Wall. It signals a “refusal to acquiesce, a refusal to normalize the abnormal” (ibid.: 155). Hence, just as the first Intifada’s graffiti “transformed contested space into a communicative arena” (ibid.: 149), the icon transforms the contested bordering action of the Wall into a Christian ritual landscape aimed at dismantling the Wall.

Moreover, the icon itself communicates the plea of the Palestinian people in general and Christian’s in particular. In the icon, in fact, Mary is portrayed with her right hand near her ear. Since the Elizabethan nuns explain that the aim of the Rosary is that of exhorting Mary to grant them the miracle of dismantling the Wall, she has been painted in a listening attitude. Furthermore, underneath the image of Mary, Knowles has painted cracks on the Wall evoking the Virgin’s power to smash this Wall to pieces. Moreover, beneath the image of Mary there is an open door depicting the view of Jerusalem with a few olive trees – a symbol of the Palestinian rootedness in the land – that is now concealed by the Wall. Next to the door there is a key which is the symbol adopted by Palestinian refugees to invoke their right of return. There is also a pair of boots, hanging on the Wall, a symbol of those Palestinians who await the chance to walk once again on their land, which the Wall’s construction has stolen (Stadler and Luz 2015: 134). We find an important parallel when we consider the icon of Our Lady of the Wall as part of the wider graffiti socio-political and artistic context, i.e. their role as the “voice for those who felt voiceless in the international arena” (Peteet 1996: 145). As hinted above, during the fieldwork, over and over the plea to divulge the stories of the Christian people emerged from the interviews. My interlocutors often revealed their feeling of being neglected by international attention and aid claiming that all the money was distributed exclusively among the Muslim population. Thus, it becomes evident that the icon of Our Lady of the Wall truly becomes the voice of the forgotten Christians transforming this segment of the Wall into a Christian ritual landscape.

Additionally, the presence of this icon on the Wall is particularly important in as much as Mary in the Christian communities of the Middle East and particularly in Israel and Palestine plays a cardinal role. In fact, as Stadler (2015: 751) tells us, “Mary is being portrayed as the mother of the timid, landless, and oppressed. At times of unrest,
female themes like fertility and motherhood are increasingly broached within the framework of local politics.” Given the status of the Christian population as a religious minority in the West Bank and an ethno-religious minority in Israel, Mary represents the “defender of oppressed minorities in Israel/Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt” (ibid.: 727). Through the weekly ritual of the recitation of the Rosary, the yearly anniversaries that mourn the construction of the Wall, and the Holy Masses celebrated by pilgrims at the Icon, this venue has become not only a ritual landscape in opposition to the Wall’s presence and agency, but it is also becoming recognised as a new Christian shrine. Much as during the first intifada “writing on the walls was a dramatically graphic and visible way of simultaneously responding to and resisting an assignment of public space that attempted to exclude them” (Peteet 1996: 148), it is no coincidence that the recitation of the Rosary has been described by Sister Anne as

our pacific intifada, this is how we have defined it in order to exhort from Mary this miracle: that the Wall might fall, that there could be peace in this land, that these children and families might live in peace and be able to move around as they please.

Our Lady of the Wall, thus, stands as a visible and agentic presence that reclaims a space for the Christians in the face of their increasing departure from the land and their fading into the oversimplifying category of ‘Palestinians’. Thus, in the footsteps of Stadler and Luz, through this ethnographic research I unearthed a dimension of the Wall that assembles the security dimension of the controlling and highly militarised Wall with the ritual landscape developed in opposition to its presence. Since the Rosary was developed in confrontation to the construction of the Wall, I demonstrate not only that “ethno-religious struggles over space and resources are altering Jerusalem’s sacred landscape” (Stadler 2015: 726), but also that ritual landscapes have become the battlefields of border altercations and venues that channel the attention “upon the oppression and liberation of […] the nation” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 3).

In this dispute over physical borders, the presence of pilgrims is central to contest the presence of the Wall. As discussed below, through their prayers pilgrims impose the right to claim that venue as a Christian site and more broadly to reaffirm the right of existence of the local Christian community and their national objectives of liberation. I concur with David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995: 9) when they state that “Although ritual might enact a myth, signal a transition, reinforce political authority, or express emotion, ritualization is perhaps best understood as a particular type of embodied, spatial practice”. It is the bodily presence of the believers who participate at the weekly Rosary, their physicality, that stands in those contested spaces, and praying that challenges the “Israel/Palestine’s volatile borders and political order” (Stadler 2015: 726). Thus every visitor “use[s] rituals to press for changes to the landscape in the face of ongoing confrontations” (ibid.: 728) “with the objective of calling attention to their plight as ethno-religious minorities in areas and landscapes dominated by Jews and Muslims” (ibid.: 740) characterising this unique ritual landscape as an actual battlefield.

Furthermore, every year on March 1, the local community organises a celebration of the anniversary of the placement of the first cement slab. Thus, pilgrims and activists from various countries participate and through their bodily presence join the dissent
of local Christians against the construction of the Wall. Moreover, on these occasions unique prayers are devised. For example, on occasion of the 2015 anniversary, the Italian association *Un Ponte per Betlemme* (which translates into English as a Bridge to Bethlehem) modified Psalm 86 to fit the Palestinian situation and distributed it to all the participants to be recited in front of Our Lady of the Wall. One of the most meaningful and explicative sections of the prayer reads

Listen to the prayer that potently rises from our communities, / on the day in which we remember this odious wall that generates hate / that transforms Bethlehem into a prison. / Help us to transform the generic invocations for peace / into strong words of condemnation and annunciation, / of proximity and indignation, / of faith in you, God who saves and consoles.  

These few verses both invoke God’s help in tearing down the Wall as well as exhorting all the participants present at the celebration of the anniversary to give voice to the injustice that the Wall brings to the inhabitants of Bethlehem. In addition to developing a ritual landscape, the agency of the Rosary prayer brings visibility to the presence of Arab Christians and their plight as Palestinians, which the physicality of the Wall conceals. In fact, groups from abroad (predominantly from Italy) are invited to schedule their pilgrimages in such a way as to arrive in Bethlehem on Fridays enabling participation in the recitation of the Rosary. Thus, this site is starting to be included among the pilgrimage venues of the Holy Land that tourists and pilgrims visit during their travels. The narrative that the Elizabethan nuns deliver is that of sharing with the outside world what the pilgrims see in order to communicate the experience of being-in-the-world in a Walled city and the precarious conditions in which the local Christians dwell. There is an attempt to charge the pilgrims with the responsibility of what is happening in Israel and Palestine because

this is the land of the Christians, and not just of the Christians who live here in the Holy Land, so they [pilgrims] must feel this as their own home and ask with one Hail Mary per week that there could be peace here (Sister Anne).

The effervescence that emerges from the development of this initiative, which in turn gives rise to the surge in popularity of a new Christian shrine, springs in response to the presence of the Wall. The more the Wall imposes, the more the world pushes back in the form of complex agency that, as an assemblage of human and non-human actants, disputes its presence and impact on the life of the local population. The Wall itself in its physical presence has become the surface upon which the sacred[12] has been materially ‘posted’. The sacred was even wedged in the crevices of the Wall as the icon of the Virgin Mary of San Luca[13] has been literally pushed in between the two concrete slabs (see Photo 6). Moreover, Sister Anne cemented two additional icons to the Wall, aiming to increase the agency of Mary against the Wall, as well as expanding the shrine itself, demonstrating how important it is to focus our gaze on the agency of materials. Furthermore, the materiality of the colours used to paint the icon, and the bodily presence of the pilgrims, the sound of the prayers and the singing of the *Salve Regina* that imbue the landscape, all represent human and non-human actants that surface underneath the overarching and overbearing label of the Wall as a technology of security and occupation. Thus, by looking at the Wall as an assemblage of human and non-human actants
we uncover the presence of a ritual landscape that, through a decade of unflinching prayer, has been developing into an actual shrine that is increasingly expanding through the posting of new religious icons. When analysing this particular Wall through the assemblage framework, we do not only realise that it cannot be understood as a mere inert cluster of concrete slabs, but also that because of the agency it exercises on the population, a ritual landscape has developed along its route as a battlefield to voice the dissent of a particular religious group: the Christian minority. In turn, the ritual landscape becomes an integral part of the Wall assemblage. We have seen how its formation gathers both human and non-human agency, such as Rosary beads, the colours and symbols adopted in the icon of Our Lady of the Wall, the addition of other Marian icons, the physical presence in this militarised area of the praying pilgrims, nuns, volunteers, activists, and a few local Christians, the chanting of the Hail Mariæ, the singing of the Salve Regina, and as discussed in the next section, the Eucharist, the chalice, a portable altar, and the songs and guitars adopted during the celebration of Holy Mass.

TWO HUNDRED PILGRIMS PRAY AT THE ICON OF OUR LADY OF THE WALL

In the previous section I addressed the agency that the creation of new shrines, or in some cases the revitalisation of ancient ones, exercises in bordering disputes and cultural identity claims (Napolitano et al. 2015). In these disputes, the presence of pilgrims, believers, and activists becomes fundamental to the alleged claims. The bodily presence of the believers who participate in the weekly Rosary, their physicality expressed fully in those contested spaces by praying, reaffirm the right of the Christian minority to exist on that land while, at the same time, contribute to the development of this area as a ritual landscape. In this section I will describe how the presence of two hundred pilgrims from Italy celebrating the Mass at the Our Lady of the Wall icon transformed this ritual landscape into a site of political dissent showing how religious “rituals [allow subjects] to press for changes to the landscape in the face of ongoing confrontations between agents of Judaization, Islamization, and Christianization of Israeli/Palestinian spaces” (Stadler 2015: 728).

On April 10, 2014, a group of 220 pilgrims and local nuns made their way to the checkpoint 300 in order to witness the presence of the Wall and celebrate the Holy Mass.
at Our Lady of the Wall. As I mentioned above, the religious activities that have sprung from the presence of the icon have become, for the pilgrims who visit Palestine, a way to familiarise themselves with the political situation in this land as well as a solicitation for God’s intervention to bring peace and justice. On the morning of April 10, the great number of pilgrims aroused suspicion among the Israeli soldiers guarding Checkpoint 300, and they immediately closed the gate. They followed the pilgrims near the icon and asked the priests for explanations. In response the priests replied that they were not doing anything wrong, that they just wanted to pray at Our Lady of the Wall and they would pray for them as well. The soldiers replied that if they wanted to pray, they would have to do so inside the gates of the monastery of the Emmanuel and not by the Wall. The argument lasted sometime, but in the end the priests agreed just to move one metre away from the Wall refusing to abide by the soldier’s request. As the Holy Mass started, more armed soldiers arrived at the site. However, none of them tried to interrupt the prayer. They seemed intrigued by this event and started taking pictures and videos of the Holy Mass. At the conclusion of the celebration all the pilgrims approached the soldiers, shook their hands and hugged them wishing peace upon them (see Photo 7).

This event further corroborates the influence of pilgrims present at a venue involved in bordering disputes such as Our Lady of the Wall. Analogous to any large gathering happening in the vicinity of the Wall, and because of the pilgrims’ intention of celebrating the Mass there, the soldiers perceived the event as a threat to the militarised section of the Wall eliciting the closure of the gate at the checkpoint. However, given the international status of the majority of the pilgrims present, the soldiers could not enforce their request to get away from the Wall and pray within the premises of the Emmanuel monastery. In addition, on this occasion a special prayer was written to invoke the help of Our Lady of the Wall and made into a santino or holy picture. The prayer was recited at the end of the Mass and distributed to all the pilgrims. Thus, the pilgrims, through their prayers, claimed that venue as a Christian site and more broadly reaffirmed the right of existence of the local Christian community and their national objectives of liberation.
CONCLUSION

By employing the concept of assemblages proposed by Latour, the Wall ceases to be a mere conglomerate of cement slabs statically set in place to guarantee the security of the Israelis. Instead, within Latour’s framework, the Wall triggers the development of a ritual landscape where the weekly prayer of the Rosary is recited to contest the bordering agency of the Wall and to reaffirm the right of the Christian ethno-religious minority to reside on this land. Through the application of an assemblage framework to the ethnographic case study of the weekly Rosary prayer at Our Lady of the Wall, I reveal the formation of this unique ritual landscape that is part of the Wall assemblage and at the same time, developed in contrast to the Wall’s presence. The Latourian assemblage framework allows the researcher to unearth the richness of humans and non-humans which, through their agency, gives life to a ritual landscape that interacts and intertwines with the agency that the Wall exercises on the Palestinian population in general and the Christian minority in particular. The variety of actants that partake in the Wall as an assemblage of the ritual landscape of Our Lady of the Wall are the nuns, the volunteers, priests, pilgrims, rosary beads, the first cement slabs, the checkpoint, the watchtower, the machineguns, the Hail Mariés uttered to request a miracle, the Salve Regina in Latin. All of these actants become part of an assemblage that connects the Wall’s agency as a highly militarised security measure with the humans and non-humans that partake in the weekly ritual of the Rosary recitation and which are developing a new Christian shrine among its cement slabs.

Through the development of this religion-based initiative, we see how rituals, beliefs, prayers, pilgrims, songs and materials intertwine with the security actants that are at the centre of a dispute over borders and cultural identity. After all, as Chidester and Linenthal (1995: 15) tell us “sacred space is inevitably contested space, a sight of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols”, and, we might add in our case, the contention over the safeguard of the Arab Christians cultural identity and their narrative. This venue is developing into a ritual landscape that through all its materials and bodily presence of local Christians and pilgrims becomes a battlefield of political dissent against the presence of the Wall and of reaffirmation of the right of the Christian ethno-religious minority to dwell on this land.

Just one question arises from this acknowledgement: what will the future of this venue be if the Wall falls? Will this venue still be a ritual landscape visited by pilgrims and animated by the weekly prayer of the Rosary if the Virgin Mary grants Christians the miracle they beseech?

NOTES

1 The usage of the term Palestine is very controversial due to the fact that there is no unanimity in regard to its spatial extension, an issue that is reflected in the lack of clear borders of the State of Israel. In fact, the reputed, actual, and desired borders between Israel and Palestine have changed throughout history and varied according to the different actors involved (Halpern 1969; Yehuda 1978; Zureik 2001; Newman 2005; 2006; Marzano and Simoni 2007; Weizman 2007; Shelef 2010; Petti et al. 2011). In this research the term Palestine was used to identify the West Bank, which is not an emic term but is used predominantly by the Western world, including thus also
the area under full Israeli military control, that is Area C, in as much as my interlocutors think of it as rightfully belonging to the Palestinian people, but under Israeli occupation. Obviously, other interlocutors also identified as Palestine the territory that falls within the ever-shifting borders of the State of Israel.

2 The term to identify this assemblage of human and non-human actants varies greatly depending on the political perspective that activists, politicians and scholars adopt, as well as depending on the architecture adopted in different segments, i.e. in some places it appears under the guise of a complex system of electric fences and barbed wire, in other as an eight-meter-tall concrete wall. Thus, it has been referred to either as Wall, Barrier, or Fence. To know more on this subject, consult Regan Wills 2016.

3 The Bethlehem Governorate consists of 10 municipalities, 3 refugee camps and 58 rural districts. The municipalities included in the Governorate are: Battir, Beit Fajjar, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, Al-Dawha, Husan, al-Khader, Nahalin, Tuqu’, al-Ubeidiya, and Za’ataara.

4 Some of the more relevant and principal cases collected and analysed in my research work are: the development Sumud Story House’s project of the “Wall Museum”, the Weekly celebration of the Holy Mass among the olive groves of the Cremisan valley as a form of protest against the proposed route of the Wall, the experience of the Franciscan Nuns whose convent in the Aida Refugee Camp area is located in front of the Wall, the case of Claire Anastas and her family whose home is surrounded on three sides by the Wall, the narration of Antoinette whose lands were severed from their home due to the construction of the Wall, etc.

5 When I use the term Christian I refer predominantly to Arab and foreign Roman Catholics (Latin), with a minority of interviews conducted with Melkite Greek Catholic Christians as well as Protestants. Although in Bethlehem, as well as in the West Bank and State of Israel, Roman Catholics do not represent the largest Christian denomination, I have decided to focus primarily on them for several reasons. Firstly, during my past visits to Israel and Palestine I was introduced to various members of this community. Secondly, my status as a member of the Catholic Church allowed me to have a more fluid introduction in the community as well as a direct admittance to the community’s activities. Thirdly, and most importantly, it was a group of Catholic nuns and Catholic priests who initiated two of the core activities developed in response to the Wall, which inspired the development of my research. The last reason is tied to linguistic concerns.

6 The Arab Educational Institute (AEI), which is a member of the international peace movement Pax Christi, opened the Sumud Story House in 2009. The Sumud Story House is a building located in the Rachel’s Tomb Area where Palestinian women from Bethlehem and the neighbouring towns gather weekly to narrate their experiences living in a walled city. These stories have been written and printed on panels posted on the Wall in the Rachel’s Tomb Area constituting the Wall Museum.

7 For instance, at first glance it might be inferred that the farthest away from the Wall Christians live, the least it impacts their lives since they are not involved in the violence and disorders that take place in the Wall’s vicinities and they do not have to endure its architectonical impositions daily. However, those Christians living far from the cement slabs still experience its agency that manifests itself under the guise of psychological disorders provoked by the Wall’s enactment of closure. An example is represented by the inability to exit freely the West Bank that Lorenzo, an Italian men married to a Palestinian woman who lives in the Bethlehem Governorate, describes:

The family [here] has become what in Arabic we call musas; every family today becomes a soap opera, the musas is a soap opera. The Turkish and South American soap operas here are very popular, and today they have reached every family in Bethlehem, they are the reality in which they live. This happens also because here on Saturdays and Sundays you cannot decide to stop working and go somewhere, get out and visit Jerusalem or go to the seaside or plan a hike in the mountains. You don’t even wait for the weekend or for the holydays to
go out. Here people don’t take vacations anymore; there are people here who have three or four years of overdue vacations; where can they go?

8 Original interview with Sister Anne was conducted in Italian.

9 Original interview with Abuna Mario was conducted in Italian.

10 Among them were Souleiman Mansour, Abed al Rohan Mousain, Sam 3, Ron English and Sir Peter Blake. Artists from Ramallah, Gaza and Bethlehem’s Dehaisha refugee camp are well represented. Others have come from as far afield as Washington DC, Madrid and East Sussex. (See Banksy 2007)

11 Original text in Italian:

Ascolta la preghiera che si leva potente dalle nostre comunità,/ nel giorno in cui ricordiamo questo muro odioso e generatore di odio/ che fa di Betlemme una prigione. Aiutaci a trasformare le generiche invocazioni alla pace /in forti parole di denuncia e annuncio, / di prossimità e indignazione, / di affidamento a te, Dio che salca e che consola.

12 Interesting here to think about Emile Durkheim’s considerations about the interaction between sacred and profane things. He suggests that the delicate interaction between the sacred and the profane is always a delicate operation that “is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and in some degree” (Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 38). Following this reasoning thus, the presence of the icon of Our Lady of the Wall, due to its sacred nature, imbibes and transforms the Wall and its surroundings into a sacred place.

13 A sanctuary in Bologna, Italy.

14 Ethnographic account published on the website created by the Hebrew University on researches on sacred shrines (see Sacred Sites in Contested Regions).

INTERVIEWS

The names of the interviewees have been changed to guarantee their privacy and safety Abuna Mario, Bologna, Italy, 2012

Mariam, Sumud Story House, Bethlehem, April 2014

Sister Anne, Caritas Baby Hospital, Bethlehem, April 2014

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ABSTRACT
This article* examines rituals of mourning in the digital mediascape in the case of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, 2015. The idea of the digital mediascape draws on Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) seminal work on mediascape and develops it further in the current framework of digital media. Rituals of mourning are approached as a response and a reaction to the anxiety and distress caused by the unexpected violent death of global media attention. The phenomenology of ritual practices in Charlie Hebdo is characterised as multi-layered, relational and coexisting. The article looks in particular at the ritual mourning in association with the message and the meme “Je suis Charlie”. The ‘imagined worlds’ created around the digital circulation of this ritual message are discussed in relation to the idea of the politics of death formed around such fundamental value-laden questions as whose life counts as life and is thus worthy of public recognition of mourning, as Judith Butler (2004) has asked.

KEYWORDS: digital mediascape • politics of death • mourning rituals • Charlie Hebdo

CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACKS CAPTURE THE DIGITAL MEDIASCPE

At 11:30 on the morning of January 7, 2015, a Wednesday, French-Algerian brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi attacked the headquarters of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. Twelve people were killed in the rampage. After the attack, the Kouachi broth-

* This article is based on the research project entitled Je Suis Charlie – The Symbolic Battle and Struggle over Attention, conducted in the School of Communication, Media and Theatre at the University of Tampere. This two-year-project (2015–2017) is funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. The author wishes to thank Annaliina Niitamo and Paula Hyssy in the University of Helsinki for their contribution in copy editing the manuscript as well as the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.
ers returned to their car and exchanged fire with police who were blocking their escape route. A few minutes later, they executed an injured police officer, Ahmed Merabet, at point-blank range. An ordinary media user, Jordi Mir, filmed the perpetrators’ escape from the building, as well as the shooting of the police officer, and posted the video on Facebook. The video immediately went viral, and the attacks exploded into professional mainstream media and social media alike. Newsrooms all over the world followed the massive security operation as the Kouachi brothers managed to hijack another car and flee north out of Paris. In the evening, tens of thousands of people took to the streets around Europe to show their solidarity with those killed by the gunmen. Global public mourning took off on Twitter when a French journalist and artist, Joachim Roncin, first tweeted “Je suis Charlie”, for *Stylist Magazine*. In the next days, this hashtag became the most re-tweeted message in the history of Twitter (Sumiala et al. 2016).

On the next day, January 8, the attackers continued their escape and thousands of security personnel were deployed to comb the area, approximately 90 kilometres away from Paris, where the two men were last seen. Meanwhile, in Paris, reports emerged that a policewoman had been shot and killed, but the link with the Charlie Hebdo attack was not immediately established. On Friday, January 9, police located the attackers in the area Dammartin-en-Goele. The brothers were chased to an industrial complex 35 kilometres from Paris where they seized a printing works and took a hostage. In east Paris, at around 12:30 p.m., a third gunman, Amedy Coulibaly, seized a Jewish supermarket, killed four people, and took hostages. It emerged that Coulibaly was responsible for the killing of the Paris policewoman the day before. In his phone call to the French TV station BFM-TV, Coulibaly stated that his attack was synchronised with the attacks of Kouachi brothers and that they belonged to the same group of terrorists. He also threatened to kill his hostages unless the Kouachi brothers were allowed to go free. After several hours, hostage-situation police special forces stormed the market and killed Coulibaly. The Kouachi brothers were also killed by special forces on the same day. The next peak in the event took place on January 11 when world leaders and people in France gathered in the streets to demonstrate the values of liberty and freedom of expression. These marches gained massive visibility on the digital platforms of professional and social media. The drama escalated upon the publication of a ‘survival issue’ of *Charlie Hebdo*; the cover featured an image of the Prophet Muhammad holding a slogan, “Je suis Charlie”, with the title “Tout est pardonne” (’all is forgiven’). Its publication on January 14 became a media event in itself (Sumiala et al. 2016).

This article examines the ritual response to the unexpected violence of massive media interest in the digital mediascape. The idea of digital mediascape was first introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1990: 296) and relates to Appadurai’s work on five dimensions in global cultural flows he calls ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes. Of these scapes, mediascape is of special relevance here. In Appadurai’s (1990: 298–299) understanding mediascape refers both to the distribution of technological capabilities that produce and disseminate information, which are today available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media. Appadurai (1990: 299) explains:

‘Mediascapes’, whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those
Appadurai’s work on global flows based on his idea of the various, interconnected scapes has had a notable influence in anthropology because of its attempt to re-think the relationship between the local and the global in the contemporary world of global communication and movement of people (see for example Inda and Rosaldo 2008). His work has inspired scholars to look at the mobilities, flows and mediated imaginations created in multilayered local, national and global contexts (see for example Metcalf 2001). While considerably influential in theorising globalisation in anthropology, the main criticism against Appadurai’s thinking has addressed the level of generality in his theorising. His work has been criticised for its lack of empirically based evidence and, hence, weakness to grasp the complex ways in which the global flows of social imaginations are always socially constructed, multiple and embedded in local meaning and social structures (see for example Tsing 2004; Derné 2008).

In this article I wish to apply empirically the idea of mediascape and develop it in the framework of digital media. I approach mediascape as a fluid, digital landscape that creates “imagined worlds” (Appadurai 1990: 299) through ritual practices. This digital mediascape is made of complex mélanges of digital communication technologies, producers, messages and audiences. It is a mobile and a liquid scape, to use Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) terminology, in which circulation and dissemination of images has special importance. These images can be produced by professional media users such as editors, journalists and PR professionals, as well as ordinary media users. They may include online news images, as well as memes, Instagram photos, Facebook and YouTube images. The ritual narratives in this digital mediascape consist of forms and formats such as posts, tweets, comments and blogs. The audiences in the digital mediascape vary immensely. We may identify local, national as well as transnational and global audiences. In the digital mediascape viewers move from one category to another. They may participate in rituals in their local social media groups as well as in the platforms of the international news agencies. Furthermore, viewers can change their status with a click, and thus alter their status between a member of a ritual audience and a producer of ritual practices, and vice versa (cf. Sumiala 2013).

My analysis is based on empirical material collected in the research project Je Suis Charlie – The Symbolic Battle and Struggle over Attention. The project combined quantitative big data analysis with qualitative digital ethnography. The digital data consists of 5,159,097 tweets, of which 28.83% were original tweet posts and 71.17% were ‘engagements’, which means here re-tweets and/or comments. The hashtags used to collect data were: “Je suis Charlie”, “Je suis Ahmed”, “Je ne suis pas Charlie”, “#jesuischarlie”, “#jesuisahmed”, “#jenesuispascharlie”, and the languages included in selecting the data were French, English, and Arabic. The empirical material collected covers the period between January 7 and January 16, 2015, which marks the time frame between the beginning of the attacks at the Charlie Hebdo headquarters on the January
7 to two days after the publication of the new *Charlie Hebdo* issue (which took place on January 14). This survival memorial sold a print of 795 million copies (the regular circulation of *Charlie Hebdo* paper is about 60,000 copies).

The analysis of the empirical material consisted of three interconnected phases: 1) digital ethnography collected during the time of the event provided the first outline of the event; 2) automated content analysis and social network analytics carried out with the quantitative media data constructed the digital field for research (Boumans and Trilling 2016); 3) digital ethnography provided an in-depth interpretation of what (substance/content) was circulating and how this material connected with the ‘where’ in the digital landscape, hence constituting links and connections in the media landscape necessary for the social meaning making of the event (Sumiala et al. 2016: 8).

This article draws on the findings of phase three. The practices of fieldwork consist of participating in the digital mediascape and tracing how actors, audiences, texts, images and posts travel from one platform and context (starting from Twitter) to another; identifying those repetitive patterns of symbolic communication and detecting the social encounters created in these digital activities. By following and visiting different digital platforms and locations the ethnographer begins to observe connections made between the events (the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks) taking place in the world ‘out there’, and their digital lives in the digital mediascape. The digital media has a reference point beyond, but not totally independent from, itself. In this online–offline relationship, the ethnographer travels between the ‘real’ and the ‘digital’, between the centre(s) and peripheries of ritual action.

A note of digital ethnography is in order here. This shift in the scope of ethnography has consequences for the idea of fieldwork in ethnographic research. Aside from traditional ethnography, concepts such as “web ethnography,” “netnography”, and “virtual ethnography/anthropology” have emerged to describe fieldwork conducted on virtual environments (Boellstorff 2008; Postill and Pink 2012; Hine 2015; Kozinets 2015). These new approaches on ethnographic studies indicate the changes of media environment in which the boundaries between different operators, texts, and images are under constant flux. But as Tom Boellstorff (2008) points out, these virtual worlds are as legitimate as contexts of culture and meaning making as the ‘real’ worlds. It has also become more and more difficult to draw a line between the two, as the elements of virtual worlds blend with the elements of the ‘real’ worlds. In other words, the virtual worlds are not just reflections of ‘reality’ or completely separate or isolated from ‘real’ worlds. Instead, they should be perceived as sites of meaningful social action and cultural reconstruction that can be studied through ethnographic methods applied to the digital media environment. However, it is important to note that in this article ‘virtual’ does not refer to the world of Second Life or avatars (Boellstroff 2008). Instead, the virtuality in the digital mediascape is played out in a complex interchange between physical actions taking place in certain locations (such as Paris) and their digital mediations (images, texts). In addition, the digital mediascape offers a space for ritual practices performed solely in the digital context.
THEORIZING DEATH RITUAL

Ritual is one of the oldest and most resilient responses to death – itself an essential element in constructing death in society (see for example Metcalf and Huntington 1997). In the anthropological literature, death rituals are considered to take different forms and shapes depending on historical, cultural and social context, hence, there is no universally shared definition of death ritual, or any other ritual for that matter (cf. Grimes 2014). Instead of focusing on finding a general definition of ritual, Ronald Grimes (2014) and many other contemporary scholars of ritual, suggest an approach in which the emphasis is rather given to what a ritual does (see also Bell 1997).

One way to think about death ritual is to categorize it as a rite of passage or a life crisis ritual (see for example van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969; Bell 1997). The work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner is particularly influential in this tradition of thought. Whereas van Gennep emphasises ritual as a process rather than a representation, Turner examines ritual as a transformative practice. As Bruce Kapferer (2004: 38) maintains, Turner (1969) understood the ritual process as something more than merely a machine for social reproduction or for maintaining the cultural categories of meaning. Instead, Turner concentrated on the process of ritual as the generative source for the invention of new cultural categories. Kapferer (2004: 38) explains:

The powerful argument that he [Turner] began was that processes observable in ritual action – especially those that are creative, generative, and innovative – are constantly repeated (regardless of whether or not they are recognized as being ritual) in the contexts of major moments of social and political change. Furthermore, they often dramatically appear at transformative moments.

When thinking about death ritual in this Turnerian framework, we may approach death ritual as a transformative cultural and social practice that has the potential to create new meanings in a chaos caused by the loss of life. In addition, death ritual can help individuals and society to overcome disorder triggered by death and, hence, create a new sense of continuation of life. What is more, death ritual can help the living to transform the deceased into a new category in social life, whether it is ancestors, spirits, angels or memories. In helping to reorganise those social relations between the living and the dead, death ritual can create new social life around death (see Metcalf and Huntington 1997; Davies 2002).

The idea of ritual as a transformative practice resonates with Kapferer’s (2004) work on ritual, imagination and phantasmagoric space. Kapferer (2004: 47) explains:

A phantasmagoric space a dynamic that allows for all kinds of potentialities of human experience to take shape and form. It is, in effect, a self-contained imaginal space – at once a construction but a construction that enables participants to break free from the constraints or determinations of everyday life and even from the determinations of the constructed ritual virtual space itself. In this sense, the virtual of ritual may be described as a determinant form that is paradoxically anti-determinant, able to realize human constructive agency. The phantasmagoric space of ritual virtuality may be conceived not only as a space whose dynamic interrupts prior determining processes but also as a space in which participants can reimage (and redirect or reorient themselves) into the everyday circumstances of life.
This is to say that in Kapferer’s thinking the creative grounds of the phantasmagoric open to the imaginal, to the imaginaries through which worlds are made, but also to the imaginaries through which worlds are changed, together with the living (Handelman 2004b: 214). According to this way of thinking about death rituals, a scholarly focus is first given to the actual ritual work in the digital mediascape, and only after that to its meanings or functions in a given context. Don Handelman (2004b: 213) calls this perspective a phenomenological approach to the study of ritual. It gives special emphasis to the phenomenality of the phenomenon itself, and not to its surround, ritual in its own right, if you will (Handelman 2004a: 3–4).

In the digital mediascape the phenomenality of ritual cannot be thought of without the concept of the virtual. Kapferer (2004: 37) makes a distinction between his use of the concept of virtual in studying ritual and “the virtuality of cyber technology”. However, I would like to suggest an approach in which the digital mediascape includes the potential for phantasmagoric space. It opens to the phenomenality of ritual and related imaginal dimension in digital ritualisation around death. In this line of arguing, the rituals of death are perceived as activities that are profoundly spatial and imaginal. Inspired by the work of previously mentioned Boellstorff (2008: 5), I wish to argue that not only do digital rituals borrow assumptions from ‘real life’ rituals, but digital rituals can also show us how our ‘real life’ rituals have been ‘virtual’ all along (cf. Grimes 2014).

MOURNING RITUALS IN THE CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACKS

In the rituals of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, elaborate practices of mourning and commemoration, as well as ritual contestation, were performed and circulated in different digital media at local, national and global levels (see also Sumiala et al. 2016). In this article I look in particular at the rituals of mourning carried out in connection with the Charlie Hebdo attacks. The quantitative media data gathered for the analysis suggests that the slogan and a meme “Je suis Charlie” became the most tweeted and shared message associated with the event. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in numbers if we compare the “Je suis Charlie” hashtag with the two other popular hashtags in the data, for example “Je ne suis pas Charlie” (‘I am not Charlie’) and “Je suis Ahmed” (‘I am Ahmed’, referring to the death of the police officer Ahmed Merabet).

In addition to Twitter, the international news media also contributed actively in popularizing the “Je suis Charlie” slogan and meme. The creator of the meme, Joachim Roncin, became an internationally recognised public figure and a topic for global news (see Potet 2015). The BBC interview (January 3, 2016) of Roncin demonstrates a desire to give meaning to the public mourning symbolised around his meme:

“I was deeply shocked, but I wasn’t frightened.” […] The slogan took off because “we’re trying to feel a community”, he says. “It is very reassuring to be all together whenever there is something horrible happening.” […] for […] Joachim Roncin, the meaning of his slogan is still straightforward. “Je suis Charlie’ is just an expression of solidarity, of peace,” he says. “And that’s all.” (Devichand 2016)
DIGITAL MEDIASCAPe CONNECTS SITES OF RITUAL MOURNING

When we analyse the mourning rituals performed in the digital mediascape after the Charlie Hebdo attacks we need to acknowledge a close interplay between the physical and the digital ritual practices of mourning. In mourning practices, Paris was constituted as the ritual centre of the events. The digital mediascape was filled with news and social media images of people gathering in silent demonstrations on the streets, squares, and plazas to mourn and to pay respect to the victims of the attacks. I consider taking and sharing these pictures in the digital mediascape a ritual practice demonstrating solidarity and compassion for the victims of the attacks. As Roncin put it “we’re trying to feel a community […] It is very reassuring to be all together whenever there is something horrible happening.” (Devichand 2016) Typical of the digital mediascape, these images were produced by professional and ordinary media users alike and followed a repetitive pattern of symbolic communication, crystallised around the message “Je suis Charlie”.

Figure 1. The popularity of hashtags associated with Charlie Hebdo attacks.

Figure 2. Je Suis Charlie drawing (H.KoPP 2015).
We may argue that those ritual practices of producing and sharing “Je suis Charlie” images in the digital mediascape contributed to the creation of a phantasmagoric space in which participants in the digital mediascape could reimagine, and redirect or reorient themselves (Kapferer 2004) in this shared imaginary of compassion and solidarity symbolised in a ritual message “Je suis Charlie” (‘I am with those who were killed’). The virtuality of this ritual practice of imagining solidarity brought media institutions (for example CNN, The New York Times, BBC, Le Monde) as well as ordinary, individual media actors together in the digital mediascape beyond the local (Paris) or national (French) contexts and frameworks, hence creating what Appadurai (1990) calls an ‘imagined world’ of mourning.

PILGRIMAGE IN THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE

Another aspect in mourning after the Charlie Hebdo attacks was a ritual pilgrimage (see for example Coleman and Elsner 1998; Eade and Sallinow 1999). This describes physical and digital journeys to places of high symbolic value. In addition, in this ritual practice a complex dynamic between the physical and digital spatial encounters was performed. As a site of a spontaneous shrine, the street outside the headquarters of Charlie Hebdo turned into a sea of flowers and notes of condolence. Images of people wandering to this particular site of mourning and meeting there to pay their respects circulated in the digital mediascape. In addition, physical and digital pilgrimages were made to the Eiffel Tower. The lights of the tower were turned off on January 8. This ritual gesture was given massive attention and recognition in the digital mediascape as numerous images and their remakes circulated in the digital mediascape. The Daily Mail headline from January 8, 2015 put it: “Paris Goes Dark for Charlie Hebdo: Eiffel Tower’s Lights Are Turned off as Vigils are Held around Globe for 12 Victims Slaughtered by Fanatics” (Mullin and Boyle 2015).

Another place of high symbolic importance and, thus, a site of pilgrimage, was the Place de la République (the square of the republic), in which people gathered to pay their respects for the victims around the statue of Marianne, the personification of the French Republic, which is located at the centre of the square. An image in which people had gathered by the statue holding placards of Roncin’s meme became particularly well known.

At the national level, tributes were paid in several French cities, such as the Place des Terreaux in Lyon and in the centre of Marseille, as well as in numerous other locations of intensified symbolic relevance and meaning.
Photo 1. Place de la Republique, January 11, 2015 (Ortelpa 2015).

The waves of public mourning and commemoration travelled well beyond the physical borders of France, as people in different parts of Europe and the world joined Paris and France in public mourning and commemoration. To give some examples of the ritual performances carried out in other cities and in the digital mediascape, in London people gathered together on several occasions to pay tribute to the victims of *Charlie Hebdo* and performed public rituals of solidarity by created circles of pens in Trafalgar Square.

In Berlin people gathered at the Brandenburg Gate to pay their tribute and manifest solidarity carrying signs saying “Je suis Charlie”. In Moscow people gathered around the French Embassy and brought flowers, candles and notes of condolence to pay tribute to the victims. Spontaneous symbolic sites were created on the ground by the embassy, such as a heart made out of red roses. French embassies, as spatial representations of France in mourning, were given special emphasis in many other cities as well.

Yet another ritual performance of mourning and paying tribute to victims was carried out on January 11, 2015. The ritual march of public demonstration of around 40 world leaders including Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President François Hollande among others joined millions of people marching in the streets of Paris (called *marche républicaine*, in English ‘repub-
lican march’) and elsewhere in France. This public spectacle, performed by the world leaders as well as by ordinary people, made massive headlines in the global news and caused substantial activity on the social networking sites. To give an example, *New York Times* wrote on January 11, 2015: “Huge Show of Solidarity in Paris Against Terrorism” (see Alderman and Bilefsky 2015), *Independent* on January, 11 2017 opened its story with a headline “Paris March: Global Leaders Join ‘Unprecedented’ Rally in Largest Demonstration in History of France” (see Lichfield 2015).

**Professional and Vernacular Practices of Mourning Circulate Side by Side**

One type of ritual practice characteristic of social media was making a video of mourning and commemoration. Ordinary people of different nationalities made YouTube videos to pay tribute (*hommage* in French) and to commemorate the victims. Many of these videos provided rich symbolic visualisations of mourning, grief and commemoration and showed solidarity for the values of freedom of expression the cartoonists represented for the mourners. One of these videos, made by username Eloïse Derquenne (2015) is titled “Je suis Charlie Hebdo – Hommage/Tribute”. The video was uploaded on January 8, 2015, only a day after the attacks took place. This video consists of elements of music, still and live images and phrases in which the solidarity for the victims is expressed and the values of liberty of expression are defended against violence. Another YouTube video by username striks Vindicta (2015) is titled “Vidéo de l’Hommage Mondiale à Charlie Hebdo”. This video also consists of music and images of the different sites in the world at which people have gathered together to mourn the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The slogan “Je suis Charlie” is constantly repeated in the images.

On Facebook, people also posted notes expressing solidarity, many of them using the slogan “Je suis Charlie”. Two Facebook sites called “Je suis Charlie” were established, in addition to which the *Charlie Hebdo* Facebook site published the slogan on its page. Moreover, different types of artistic intervention took place on various platforms and online sites. Professional and amateur artists contributed to the ritualisation of the events by drawing cartoons and making and remaking other visual and political commentaries, such as songs composed, recorded and posted on YouTube (see for example JB Bullet 2015).

*Figure 3. The Scream. Image by Paris 16 (2015).*
The ritual practices of mourning and paying tribute to the victims were carried out in the digital mediascape by countless actors including professional news media as well as ordinary social media users on a variety of digital media platforms. In many cases those practices had an explicit connection with the mourning rituals held at the physical sites in Paris and elsewhere in the world. In other cases, the rituals of posting, sharing, making and remaking images and memes associated with the slogan “Je suis Charlie” were circulating prominently in the digital media and had more remote connection with the physical rituals carried out on the streets of Paris and the world. In many cases the dynamics are very difficult to categorise as the ritual practices referring to the actions outside and inside the digital media circulate simultaneously in the digital mediascape. The phenomenology of these ritual practices can, then, be described as multi-layered, relational and coexisting.

However, we should not overestimate this and claim any simple unanimous ritual reaction to the attacks. Counter voices were also articulated in the digital mediascape. One of the hashtags circulating in digital mediascape was “Je ne suis pas Charlie” (‘I am not Charlie’), voicing various criticisms against the attacks and the waves of solidarity in public mourning. Protests were also reported in different parts of the (Muslim) world, including countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Nigeria. Protests were also seen in London and other multicultural and multireligious world cities (see for example Guardian 2015). Slogans such as “Je suis Kouachi” (referring to the perpetrators, the Kouachi brothers), “Je suis musulman” (‘I am Muslim’), but also “Je suis musulman, pas terrorist” (‘I am Muslim, not terrorist’) were used as symbols of ritual resistance in the digital mediascape. Furthermore, in many YouTube videos reporting and representing protests, the message voiced was anger against Charlie Hebdo and its presumed islamophobia. The pictures of the Prophet Muhammad were considered insulting and deeply disrespectful of the sacred values of Muslims, hence offending Islam and its principles. While it would be misleading to categorise these ritualised performances as carnevalising the Charlie Hebdo deaths, they certainly voiced a counter-ritual performance against public mourning, grief and articulation of solidarity with the victims of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (see Al Jazeera 2015).

THE POLITICS OF MOURNING IN THE DIGITAL MEDIASCAPE AND BEYOND

To follow Appadurai’s (1990: 299) idea of mediascapes, digital mediascapes are also best described as image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality that are formative for the ways in which ‘we’ imagine our lives. In the mourning over the Charlie Hebdo deaths the image and the narrative “Je suis Charlie” was transformed into a powerful ritual message that invited solidarity and belonging in the digital mediascape well beyond any physical location or community. This message was performed simultaneously in multiple forms, and numerous physical and digital places and platforms by a vast number of actors. We may, thus, think about this digital space for mourning as a phantasmagoric space (Kapferer 2004). It enabled participants in the different parts of the world to come together in this digital mediascape, to break free from the constraints of everyday lives lived in different localities and to participate in the global digital ritu-
alisation around this death event. The digital mediascape, thus, offers a space in which the participants can imagine and reimagine as well as reorient themselves into the circumstance of life (and death!) in this global condition.

The ritual process of imagination and reimagination should never be taken as a neutral, let alone innocent, cultural phenomenon (Sumiala 2013). Rather, we should think about the consequences of these imaginations, in the frameworks beyond the given situation. The most prominent ritual activity in the Charlie Hebdo attacks was the massive sharing and circulation of the ritual message “Je suis Charlie”. Hence, the solidarities and belongings were performed most explicitly in association with the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, and what they represented. The Guardian articulated on January 9, 2015 the ethos of this solidarity with explicit words: “We Are Charlie: ‘Freedom of Speech Needs to Be Strongly Defended’” (Carrier 2015). The other victims, such as Jewish customers at the Kosher supermarket, the police officers and other people murdered at the Charlie Hebdo office were given much less attention in the digital public mourning. (As an exception, one must acknowledge the attention given to Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim police officer, whose killing was recorded and went viral in the digital media.)

Other actors who also received less attention than the cartoonists were those who participated in the counter ritual marches and demonstrations against the solidarity wave for the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists. The category of victim (see for example Fassin and Rechtman 2009), those worthy of public compassion and solidarity, was excluded from those opposed to the public mourning who, perhaps, felt victimised by what they considered offensive actions by the Charlie Hebdo newspaper. According to the Independent from February 9, 2017, the demonstrators in London declared: “recent cartoons and drawings of the prophet published by the French magazine Charlie Hebdo and other publishers is a ‘stark reminder’ that freedom of speech is ‘regularly utilised to insult personalities that others consider sacred’” (Sabin 2015).

What we need to consider then, is the issue of the politics of mourning in the digital mediascape. Judith Butler (2004) reminds us of the constructed nature of the value of human life. Butler asks (ibid.: 20), “who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?” By ritually manifesting “Je suis Charlie” the mourners can be interpreted as identifying with the narrative of the digital mediascape “we are with those, who died because of what they represented.” By ritually declaring “Je suis Charlie” the lives of the cartoonists were made grievable over others who were also killed in the attacks, but were not associated with the values of liberty, equality and freedom (of speech) in a similar manner. The global volume of public mourning ritualised in the message “Je suis Charlie” intensified those imaginations between ‘us’ (the ones with Charlie) and ‘them’ (those who were not with Charlie). This digital coexistence of contradictory solidarities and belongings should not go unnoticed.

To conclude with, the ritual manifestation “Je suis Charlie” cannot be properly discussed without reflecting the value of freedom against the idea of blasphemy. The attack on the Charlie Hebdo newspaper headquarters was justified by the perpetrators by the blasphemous nature of the newspaper. Charlie Hebdo had violated the Muslim religion and its prohibition against drawing and visually insulting the Prophet Mohammed in many ways and on several occasions. Talal Asad (2009) argues that what is at stake in this kind of conflict is a discursive opposition between the secular West and religious
Islam. In the volume *Is Critique Secular?* Wendy Brown (2009: 14) argues that typically in this type of discursive opposition the West imagines itself as representing life and rationality, and those identified with religion (here in particular Islam) are imagined to represent death and aggression. The ritual mourning around “Je suis Charlie” also performs this opposition. The politics of death in the digital mediascape, thus, have the potential to create concurrently intensified global imaginations around ‘us’, and, consequently, the ‘other’ as the enemy. This heightened sense of ritualised imagination and related polarisation may bring about many unexpected consequences and effects when those globally ritualised imaginations become materialised in the local meaning and social structures of people’s everyday lives.

REFERENCES


THE POSTPARTUM TRADITION OF SAWA MAHINA IN RURAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT
The Punjabi postpartum tradition is called sawa mahina (‘five weeks’). This study* investigates infant health care belief practices in rural Punjab and looks at the social significance of infant care beliefs practiced during sawa mahina. During six months of fieldwork, using participant observation and unstructured interviews as primary research methods, the study explored the prevalent postpartum tradition from a childcare perspective. A Punjabi child holds a social value regarding familial, religious, and emotional values. The five-week traditional postpartum period provides an insight into mother–child attachment, related child care belief practices, and the social construction of infancy. A child’s agency is recognised in the embodied mother–child relationship, and a child is seen in a sympathetic connection with the mother. Establishing an early foundation of ascribed identities is another important part of postpartum belief practices.

KEYWORDS: postpartum tradition • social construction of infancy • sawa mahina • infant care belief practices • mother–child sympathetic connection

INTRODUCTION
In spite of the universality of the birthing physiology and related psychological issues faced by the birthing woman (Soet et al. 2003), the process itself is culture specific, and diverse belief practices influence birthing across cultures (Liamputtong 2007). The postpartum period also contributes to several other social processes. One of these is the transition of a couple to becoming parents and forming a parent–child relationship. The social value of the child describes what it means to be a child and to be parents in a social context (see Hoffman and Hoffman 1973; Arnold et al. 1975; Nag et al. 1978; Vlassoff and Vlassoff 1980; Mathews 1986; Bühler 2008; Nauck 2014). In this sense, postpartum is an important period that ritualises early childhood.

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The World Health Organization (2014) describes the postnatal period as a critical phase in the life of a mother and child. Among other studies on postpartum depression (Lee 2000; Miller 2002; Heh et al. 2004; also see Bina 2008 for a literature review on postpartum depression), few ethnographic studies find the cultural tradition of postpartum as a socially supportive phenomenon for the health of a mother and child (Harkness 1987; Stewart and Jambunathan 1996). The tradition of postpartum is a time of rest for the mother, who is relieved of several domestic tasks. Extended social and emotional support from the family helps the mother to recover and come out of this state of vulnerability (Stewart and Jambunathan 1996; Lee 2000; Heh et al. 2004). An ethnographic study conducted on Hmong women from South East Asia living in Australia reported that the 30-day postpartum tradition is highly supportive of mothers (Rice 2000). Another qualitative study found great support from mothers and mothers-in-law during the one-month postpartum period of Kipsigis women in Kenya (Harkness 1987), and an ethno-nursing study conducted on Jordanian Muslim immigrant mothers in Australia found that mothers often missed their traditional support and experienced postpartum depression as a result. In this case, missing support includes childcare and domestic responsibilities shared by the family women present during the 40-day postpartum tradition in this Jordanian Muslim community (Nahas and Amasheh 1999). There are several other studies that consider the postpartum tradition as an important contribution and a necessary cultural factor that ensures the physical and psychological wellbeing of mothers (see Bina 2008). Ultimately, this period is seen to prepare a mother for motherhood and constitutes an infant health care strategy during early infancy. In this connection, other women in the family offer their practical support (Jamaludin 2014).

These studies position women in a vulnerable and dependent state after birth, thus exposing them to harm. The mother is being prepared for a ‘good’ motherhood, which includes rich breastfeeding for the child and a period of recovery in order to return to a non-pregnant state that allows the mother to take care of the child and return to the other household activities that are suspended during the traditional postpartum period (see Holroyd et al. 1997; Whittaker 1999; Upton and Han 2003; Griffith 2009; Hussain et al. 2014; Jamaludin 2014; Yeh et al. 2014). Two studies on Bengali immigrant mothers living in London and Hunzai mothers in Hunza, Pakistan, also report the risks of evil effects that multiply during postpartum and early infancy regarding the vulnerability of a mother and child to external natural and supernatural dangers (Griffith 2009; Hussain et al. 2014).

Most of the studies reporting a mother–child dyad during postpartum care have mainly focused on belief practices regarding confinement rituals and nutrition beliefs. The common tradition, as described in several studies, is postpartum rest for the new mother. This tradition falls under different names in different cultures, for example zuò yuèzi (‘doing the month’) in Chinese culture (Liu et al. 2015); purudu in South India (Saavala 2013 [2001]); dalam pantang (‘in confinement’) in Malay (Laderman 1984); Nyo dua hli (‘thirty days’) among Hmong in Australia (Rice 2000); and chollish din (‘forty days’) in Bangladesh (Winch et al. 2005). Other important beliefs practiced during the postpartum period (such as breastfeeding beliefs, placenta ritual, and naming rituals) are rarely addressed in postpartum studies conducted in traditional societies. The exception is a qualitative study conducted in Nepal that explores infant-related post-
natal cultural practices, such as placenta rituals, naming, and weaning ceremonies (Sharma et al. 2016).

In Punjabi culture, the traditional postpartum period is named *sawa mahina*, meaning five weeks. A Punjabi child, with a social value, is a major participant in family formation and raising the status of the couple as ‘exalted’ parents. A couple (particularly the woman) are often positioned as incomplete or without a family if there is no child.

This article is a part of my PhD research on infant care belief practices in rural Punjab, Pakistan. In this research, I investigated several aspects regarding the postpartum period, comprising the following: the evil eye belief and its significance in infant care belief practices before and after birth, the social value of the child in connection with the higher status of the mother and the marginalised position of a childless woman, the fears attached to childlessness or infertility, the sympathetic connection between mother and child, and postpartum belief practices. This article pursues the two research questions: what are the infant care beliefs practiced during *sawa mahina*? What is the social significance of these belief practices in a Punjabi cultural context?

**Research Context and Methodology**

Punjab is a populous, developed, and fertile province of Pakistan. The population is dominantly Muslim. This study was conducted in a village in south Punjab consisting of approximately 200 households with a population of approximately 1,800. The dominant majority of the villagers belong to the Arain community, which is the biggest agricultural community in Pakistan (Jaffrelot and Beaumont 2004). The Arain are traditionalists and do not marry their children in other communities. Farming and manual labour are primary professions, and although the economic conditions are not good, the Arain cannot be labelled poor as the community have enough food and clothes to fulfil their needs. However, with one basic health unit (a dispensary), one primary school for girls and one primary school for boys, this village provides unsatisfactory health and education opportunities. Following a patrilineal extended family system, people prefer to marry their children within close family relations (cousin marriages).

**Doing Research in Rural Punjab**

This study is based on fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2013, including two months of preliminary fieldwork (2010–2011), three months of fieldwork (2011) and one month of follow-up fieldwork (2013).

Native understanding of the context produces challenging cultural explanations in a new way (Gullestad 1992). As a Punjabi Muslim brought up in a big city with a rural, parental background, I was able to overcome significant language and cultural barriers. In addition, my ‘non-native’ familiarity with rural life, as well as my practical knowledge as an ethnographer helped me to bracket presumptions.

Investigating traditional postpartum practices means studying the personal lives of Punjabi families. Hence, a native understanding of the contextual complexity and sensitivity is required. I conducted the fieldwork together with my wife Saima Azher,
who was my research assistant (RA). She is an educator and has previously conducted research with me in my earlier research in rural Punjab. She was trained to conduct interviews, which helped me to mix with the rural families in a more reliable way and strengthened the trust relationship between researcher and informants. The role of the RA was significant in this study as all the participants were women and the topic of the study restricted male access to the participants. My wife’s reflections and experience as a married Punjabi woman, and discussing findings with my parents, who are Arain and belong to different rural areas in Punjab, helped me to understand and follow-up the data in its contextual meanings.

Research Methods and Data

Most people live within their cultural contexts and construct their stories by constituting the material facts and culturally normal aspects of their social reality (Gullestad 1992). A researcher, while conducting qualitative research, should focus on contextually sensitive and flexible research methods that can deal with the complexity of the contextual findings (Mason 2002). For example, ethnography comprising different fieldwork methods (such as participant observation and in-depth interviews) can help in observing, describing, and documenting the ethnographic evidence found in its natural setting through the first-hand involvement of a researcher and informants (Agar 1981; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Murchison 2010). In this study, I used qualitative research design as a descriptive and interpretive methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2011 [1994]) with an ethnographic approach investigating the social construction of infancy and the mother–infant dyad in the postpartum period. Apart from participant observation, which produced rich ethnographic field notes, I used the unstructured interview as a primary research tool. To respect gender boundaries, my RA conducted all the interviews in this study. The interview outline was prepared during preliminary fieldwork. Every interview was transcribed, including observation details on the same day when it was conducted. In addition, all field notes and interview transcripts were read thoroughly and repeatedly to get an analytical insight, with the responses discussed between the researcher and RA. Ambiguity was traced, and the RA conducted follow-up interviews where required. An inductive content analysis was conducted to induce manifested and latent meanings from the data (Graneheim and Lundman 2004; Elo and Kyngas 2008; Schreier 2012). Following this, the data was coded. Themes and sub-themes emerged, and significant evidence was sorted into respective thematic categories. The interpretation of the findings was based on the manifested and latent meaning of the data, as perceived by the participants and as induced by the researcher.

Participants in the Research

During two months of preliminary fieldwork, my primary focus was to gain a contextual insight into infants, infancy, and relevant belief practices. In the second month of fieldwork, the RA met a woman who had returned to her in-laws (in this village) after completing her postpartum period at her parents’ home (in another village). She had
agreed to participate in the study. Considering her recent experience, I decided to take her as the first participant for the study. Her interview was conducted in this fieldwork.

During three months of fieldwork, together with my RA, I visited a family where a postpartum tradition was in practice. The RA, being female, had easy access to the mother Zahida and the other family women. Zahida and her mother-in-law Razia were also participants in the interview. However, an in-depth interview with them could only be possible when Zahida had ended her postpartum ritual. Using purposive and snowball sampling (Creswell 2003 [1994]; Bernard 2006; Babbie 2008), I approached the other participants. Zahida and her mother-in-law helped to locate these participants. A total of five participants included four mothers (key informants) who had experienced childbirth in last two years and one mother-in-law. It is customary that the woman stays at her parents’ home at the birth of the first child and spends the traditional postpartum period there. However, this depends on the availability of the women in the family and the required resources to provide support. In this sample, Zahida and Samina did not go to their parents’ home. They stated that their parents were not able to support them due to a lack of resources. All the key informants experienced home birth carried out by a traditional midwife.

Table 1. Participant information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Participant status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zahida</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>She had a three-year-old daughter. When I visited the family, she had just given birth to her second child (a baby son) who was ten days old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazia</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>She had a two-year-old son. Her parents took her home in the seventh month of pregnancy, and she remained there until the end of the postpartum period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samina</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>She had three daughters. Her youngest daughter was six months old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fozia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>She had one baby son. Her interview was conducted during preliminary fieldwork. She had spent the last couple of months of pregnancy, the birth, and the postpartum period at her parents’ home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razia</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>She was Zahida’s mother-in-law and took care of the mother and the child during the postpartum period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-interview meetings were conducted to get informed consent. All the names used for the participants are fictitious. All the interviews were conducted at the participants’ home to make them comfortable and open.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I discuss the findings of the study, beginning with a detailed field note that was documented during participant observation. The following observation provides an umbrella contextualisation of the sawa mahina tradition in a Punjabi village, followed by an analytical discussion supported by the primary data.

During the fieldwork, I along with my RA visited a family who were rejoicing at the arrival of a baby boy born about two weeks previously. I made only a few visits to the family during my stay in the village as frequent visits would make the family uncomfortable.
Abdul-Razak (60 years old) was celebrating his second grandchild’s birth. His happiness had no limits because the new-born was a boy (the first grandchild was a girl). I had already conducted a few meetings with Abdul-Razak during the preliminary fieldwork. I along with my RA took Munir (a young boy who used to be with me visiting different places) with me and reached Abdul-Razak’s house. Before entering the house, Munir said, “The house is in sudak. Women usually do not like to visit the sudak house during sawa mahina.” I understood what he meant and told him that we did not have any problem. In Indian cultures, sutak (also sudak or chilla in Punjabi culture) is a term commonly used for the birth pollution of the mother (Jeffery and Jeffery 1993; Bayly 2001 [1999]; Bhattacharya et al. 2008). It makes the mother vulnerable and exposed to evil effects such as witchcraft. Childless, pregnant, or woman suffering from Athra (a disease that causes infant mortality) should not visit a house in sutak. We, having none of these issues, entered the house. Abdul-Razak, his wife Razia, and son Abdul Ghafar (father of the child) welcomed us warmly, and we all sat in a big room. Abdul Ghafar was holding the baby, who was swaddled in cloth, and his head was shaved. I asked about the name. Abdul Ghafar said, “We had a few names to choose from. My mother liked the name Naeem Hussain for the baby. We finalised it and named the baby a couple of days after the birth.”

I was curious about why the baby’s head was shaved and who had done it. Abdul Razak said, “The baby was head shaved and he was circumcised on the seventh day by the village barber. Besides paying the barber, we gave sadaqa to the poor.” Being native (and from my family experience) I knew that some parents bury the first hairs of the child after giving sadaqa; as the first hairs are seen as a potential device for practicing witchcraft. I asked about the hair, and he said: “After giving sadaqa, the hairs are buried in the courtyard.” About the amount of sadaqa, he replied, “It depends on what one can give away. Some people give away the price of the silver that is equivalent in weight to the weight of hair. Sadaqa brings health for the child and removes evil effects, if any.”

During the conversation, he mentioned sudak as a polluted and vulnerable state of the mother in which she is exposed to evil effects:

During sawa mahina, mother and baby do not go out. Women (other than close family members) avoid frequent visits. The mother becomes purified of the birth pollution in these days. Once she recovers her health and purity, she is out of sudak. Meanwhile, tea, with a highly nutritious food made from ghee (processed butter, locally called as panjiri) was served. This food is especially prepared for women in postpartum to regain their strength and to increase milk for breastfeeding. Panjiri is popular among new mothers for the same purpose in urban areas. Abdul-Razak insisted that I eat more, while he proceeded to tell me the ingredients of the panjiri and the energy they contained. He told me that his daughter-in-law’s parents also brought panjiri with them when they visited the mother and the baby.

Grandmother (Razia) took the baby, and my RA visited the mother (Zahida) with her. My RA reported the following observation:

The baby was handed over to the mother, who was standing in the courtyard and talking to a couple of women. Kalsoom [the wife of the old man who rented us a place to live in this village] introduced them to me. One of them was the wife of Abdul Razak’s younger brother, who lived in the neighbourhood, while the other
was her daughter. Kalsoom said that her daughter often stayed with them to help in the household. We entered a room, and Zahida started feeding her baby while covering her breast and baby with a shawl. I could see a plate with panjiri beside her bed on a table. I asked her about the food. She said, “I eat everything, whatever I like. This panjiri is an energetic and special food for me in this condition.” Kalsoom mentioned panjiri as a food that is good for healthy breastfeeding. After breastfeeding, Zahida placed the baby, who was now asleep, beside her.

In Punjabi culture, the child is perceived as an inseparable part of the woman during pregnancy. Pregnancy care practices inform about the beginning of infancy in the womb, as well as the mother–child dyad that extends in the postpartum period. Three major thematic categories emerged from this close observation, which I will discuss in the following section.

**REST AND PURIFICATION**

The literature review suggests rest and nutrition beliefs during postpartum as the dominant mother-care practice that prepares the mother for good motherhood (taking care of the child successfully) in a socially supportive environment.

Heidi Keller’s (2013) ethnographic study investigated independent middle class German and interdependent agrarian Gujarati Rajput and Cameroonian Nso communities, subsequently finding the mother to be the significant caregiver and closely attached to the infant in early childhood receiving practical support from the family women. Punjabi culture is consistent with this study, and many family women support the mother in several ways during postpartum. Sawa mahina is a period requiring complete rest for forty days – nevertheless, by their choice, mothers can take part in some domestic chores after a couple of weeks. One important purpose of this support is to help the mother in exclusive breastfeeding and building up an emotional attachment to the child. This attachment helps the mother to gain control and power in the patriarchal family set up, as supported by one mother who stated that, “these are children who make the life of a woman worth living”. This perception highlights the social value of the child in a woman’s life – it represents ‘motherhood’ for a woman as the identity of power and exalted social status (see also Qamar forthcoming). Development in feminist discourses on motherhood offers a shift from anti-motherhood (motherhood as a type of women’s oppression) to a motherhood that signifies power and control (Ribbens 1994). A Punjabi mother experiences social control and gains her desired status, which she most likely cannot acquire if she is childless. Sawa mahina, in this connection, is an important phase as it constructs a valuable mother–child relationship that serves the purpose of bringing status and power, especially for first-time mothers, who also achieve their fertile and reproductive woman-being status. The ‘social value’ attached to the mother and child in this phase constitutes mother–child vulnerability against the fears of loss or damage. The cultural notion of birth pollution (sutak) exposes the mother to the risks of evil such as the evil eye or witchcraft. Hence, birth pollution is culturally significant as it makes the confinement ritual more meaningful than merely a health recovery rest.

The concept of birth pollution is taken into serious consideration during the traditional postpartum period, although the perception of its intensity and contagious prop-
erties varies across cultures. *Chilla nahana* is a term used for the last ritual bath (*nahana* means ‘to take a bath’), which conveys the message about the woman regaining her purity and completing the *sawa mahina*. Impurity is a religious construct that means she cannot offer prayer (i.e. offering *namaz* or *salat*, the obligatory prayer ritual in Islam that is offered five times a day) or touch (or read) the Quran in this condition. Nazia said, “A woman is *napak* while she is not free from the bleeding and fluid discharge completely. She cannot offer prayer or touch the Quran.” In Punjabi Muslim culture, *napaki* is not contagious, as reported in some cultures (see Holroyd et al. 1997). The only restrictions are to not pray or read the Quran, and to avoid touching religious objects (such as prayer mats or the Quran). This pollution makes her vulnerable and exposes the mother to the risk of evil that may result in a deficiency in breastfeeding, poisonous breastfeeding, or weakness and body pains, all of which ultimately affect the child’s health. Fozia discussed the sensitivity of the pollution related vulnerability:

Fozia: My baby and I were not allowed to face an infertile woman or any women suffering from *Athra*. Such women were not supposed to enter the *sutak* house. Even listening to their voices may be dangerous for the health of the mother and child. They may also cast the evil eye.

RA: Could a woman who is not childless or has not suffered from *Athra* visit you? 
Fozia: Yes. But it is common that women do not visit during *sawa mahina*. Only close family women come to see or give help in different households.

Razia mentioned birth pollution as a risk for mothers and pregnant woman.

Razia: Childless, pregnant women, or women suffering from *Athra* do not visit mother and baby during *sawa mahina*. There is a risk of evil eye and other health issues caused by evil.

RA: Can a pregnant woman also cause a problem? 
Razia: No, but the woman in her *sawa mahina* is polluted [*sutak*]. Pregnant women do not visit for their own safety.

The sensitivity of pollution-related vulnerability also assumes a sympathetic connection between the mother and child. For the mother, any suffering will affect the child; this is common and a perception that is often taken for granted. Hence, it is important to limit interaction with people who may harbour some evil effects or possess evil intentions. For example, a childless woman might possess the evil because of the wistfulness she has about being childless (Qamar 2016). In addition, a woman suffering from fertility issues may be under the effects of witchcraft, and can thus transmit these effects (for example, a woman suffering from *Athra*). Rest, in this case, refers not only to medical bed rest, but also to a strategy to keep the mother confined for the sake of protection against evil effects, such as evil eye, witchcraft, and *Athra*, all of which are considered contagious. Thus, rest has further implications in a wider sense.

For instance, pregnant mothers do not visit postpartum mothers to be safe from the pollution that can be a medium of evil effects; rest in *sawa mahina* allows a mother to come out of pollution and its related vulnerability; and a Punjabi Muslim woman should take a ritual bath to be *pak* (clean and pure). Participants reported ritual bathing on the 3rd, 5th, 11th, 30th, and 40th days of the postpartum period. After the last ritual bath, the mother and baby wear new clothes and visit family relatives in the village.
This is the first symbolic announcement of the mother’s recovery in terms of health and purity after the birth and marks an open invitation for visitors to see the child without sawa mahina restrictions. The mother is now able to recite the Quran and offer prayers. People who were reluctant to visit during sawa mahina may now visit the family without fear of birth pollution. On this special occasion, sweet food (often sweet rice) is distributed. First-time visitors give gift money to the child. A customary completion of sawa mahina is significant for first-time mothers as they adjust to motherhood and experience their prominence in the family. A Punjabi mother enjoys her dignified status as a mother while her children are alive. Consequently, the health and survival of the children become a primary concern for the family, as exposed in pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care practices.

**Dietary and Breastfeeding Belief Practices**

Although data did not reveal specific dietary instruction or food taboos during sawa mahina, Punjabi women spoke about their beliefs regarding a mother’s diet and a child’s health. Breastfeeding was seen as central to causing either a positive or negative effect on the child’s health. Nazia discussed the perceived connection between diet and breastfeeding: “My diet can affect my baby. It is well known that if a breastfeeding mother is suffering from stomach issues (such as constipation or gastric trouble), the baby will suffer from the same.” Samina also discussed her normal diet:

> My diet was normal. I was careful not to drink a lot of water after eating. I understood that my baby felt stomach pain when I fed her. My mother-in-law told me that drinking water after food caused a gastric problem, which also affected the baby.

The health of the breastfeeding mother is a concern that is directly related to the infant’s health. Mothers are advised not to eat foods that could disturb their stomach or affect their throat. If the baby is suffering from loose motions, the mother should avoid cold water and should not walk bare-footed. Hence mother is not supposed to wash clothes or do dish washing. Besides allowing the mother to rest completely, these beliefs reinforce the notion of a sympathetic connection between the mother and the child, and are an important part of the breastfeeding training given by the experienced women in the family. During the course of the fieldwork, I noticed that the normal and frequently-taken diet is cooked vegetables with roti (called chapati in Urdu and Hindi, made from homemade wholemeal flour). When cooking vegetables they use garlic, ginger, and green chilli, together with salt, red chilli, and turmeric powder. Participants reported this as a normal dietary pattern during sawa mahina. The use of milk with desi ghee is also common. A traditional foodstuff that all my participants mentioned is panjiri. Panjiri serves two important purposes. Firstly, it provides energy and helps in health recovery. Secondly, it produces sufficient milk for healthy breastfeeding.

The social construct of breastfeeding connects several complex concepts related to childhood studies, such as an infant’s agency, motherhood culture, the emotional aspects of the mother–child relationship, as well as the embodied experience of child-rearing practices (Keenan and Stapleton 2009). In Punjabi Muslim culture, breastfeed-
ing is a primary concern. It is seen (both religiously and culturally) as the right of the child and an essential practice of good motherhood. In the past, mothers were used to breastfeeding ‘full term’ (two years – as stated in The Noble Quran 2:233); today, this period has been reduced to 12 to 18 months. Razia said, “In the past, women were healthier and more fertile. They gave birth to more children and would breastfeed for two years.” Razia and other elderly women who had informal discussions with the RA mentioned the richness of the diet and the substantial availability of resources in the past, stating that people had more cattle to fulfil the need for milk and butter for all the family, which also positively affected women health. Cow’s milk is seen as the best alternative to mother’s milk (if a mother cannot breastfeed sufficiently) and is also good for the mother’s health. Parents who can afford (and know that their daughter’s in-laws cannot afford) gift a cow to their daughter who is breastfeeding. Fozia said:

It is common to have goats or cows in families with breastfeeding mothers. For example, when Mudassar [pointing to her son] was born, my father gave me a cow, which I brought with me when I came back to my in-laws.

Breastfeeding has remained a significant feature of proper and good motherhood for Punjabi Muslims. The religious interpretation of breastfeeding connects it to obligatory motherhood and describes it as the great exertion (along with pregnancy and child birth) that a woman goes through. The Quran mentions this patience as rewarding and constitutes it as mother–child attachment and the exalted status of the woman as a mother (The Noble Quran 2:233; 31:14). Breastfeeding in Punjabi Muslim culture could be described as ‘natural’ (a motherhood norm – see Smart 1996: 46) for a mother, from which she can develop a skinship (in the words of Tahhan 2008) with the child. It ultimately contributes to the internalisation of mother–child bonding and maternal obligation which, if not fulfilled, may be seen as poor motherhood (a “maternal failure” in the words of Oakley 1979: 165). Further, social support in the family encourages and prepares the mother for breastfeeding. As other childcare responsibilities, such as cleaning, bathing, and dressing the child, are shared with family women, the mother does not take it as a stressor to feed the child even several times during the night. In addition, it is customary that family women educate first-time mothers on proper breastfeeding techniques; this is usually taught by the mother, mother-in-law, or married sister-in-law. Zahida spoke about her first-time breastfeeding experience:

When my daughter was born, I was trained by my husband’s cousin [a mother of four children]. She was here on the day my daughter was born. A few hours after the birth, she washed my breast with hot, slightly salty water. She pressed the nipples to remove any blackheads so that baby could feed comfortably.

The breastfeeding training also includes when and how to feed the child. Besides understanding the baby’s demand to be fed, Punjabi mothers often feed the child according to a routine. Two ways in which the babies are perceived as demanding a feed are either baby cries or if the mother feels her breast dripping. In both situations, the baby is attended to immediately. It is common that the mother positively responds to her child’s demand to be fed (baby-centred mothering and recognition of the baby’s agency, as stated in Keenan and Stapleton 2009).
A child is always close to the mother. Whenever he/she cries, the mother attends. Co-sleeping is the practice of attending to the baby conveniently during the night. Nazia said, “He sleeps beside me. Whenever he is hungry, he cries. Then it is easy for me to attend him while lying in bed.” Recognition of the infant’s agency is not limited to the baby crying; it goes to a further extent in which a baby’s agency is perceived through a sympathetic connection with the mother. A mother can understand the baby’s demand with her body. Mothers reported milk dripping from their breasts when the child was either crying or hungry, even though the baby was neither seen nor heard. Fozia said, “Whenever my child is hungry, my milk starts dripping.” I have heard mothers sharing similar experiences in the city where I live. Although this is a bodily phenomenon not limited to a specific cultural group, participants in this study perceived it as a sympathetic connection between mother and the child that is seen as a Divine attachment between a child and his/her mother. When Razia was asked about this sympathetic connection she expressed it positively. Saying, “this is from God. He created a mother with a heart that is full of love and emotions for her children.” Razia emphasised the mother–child emotional bonding as ‘natural’ and a Divine baby-care plan.

Regarding the sympathetic connection between the breastfeeding mother and the child, a general belief among Punjabis is expressed in a common saying that highlights the importance of the mother in a child’s life: Dudh te Budh. Dudh means ‘to breastfeed’, and Budh means ‘intellect’, which is also perceived as ‘personality’. Belief in Dudh te Budh encourages breastfeeding in order to develop the mother–child attachment. A breastfeeding mother affects her child’s habits and personality.

The baby has a special connection with the mother in the womb and while breastfeeding. A baby in the womb is nourished from the mother through the umbilical cord; after birth the embodied experience of breastfeeding develops an intimate mother–child attachment. Mothers, in western societies, often describe the sense of connectedness, oneness and ‘a part of me’ feelings with this embodied experience (Lupton 2013). Diana Adis Tahhan (2008) conceptualises this as skinship, and describes how Japanese parents develop family intimacy through co-sleeping and bed-sharing with the child. The infant, in several ways, is in close contact with the primary caregiver, such as in feeding, cleaning, cuddling, kissing, playing (Lupton 2013). For a mother and her child, pregnancy and birth are the leading experiences of embodiment (Longhurst 2005) that are strengthened during infancy with infant-care practices that aid the development of an inseparable mother–child bond in which both are active participants (Wynne 1997). For Punjabi mothers, pregnancy is highly valued for its social and religious significance (Qamar 2016). Moreover, a ‘blessed’ pregnancy, the social value of a Punjabi child, the embodied experience of the mother–child in the womb, breastfeeding during infancy, and co-sleeping contribute to the internalisation of the emotional value of the child in a Punjabi socio-cultural context. The social meaning of breastfeeding, in the Punjabi Muslim context, comprises fulfilling the infant’s immediate need (satisfying hunger), accomplishing normative maternal responsibility, intensifying the mother–child attachment, and establishing motherhood as a status.
According to my research reflections, with the birth of the first, healthy child a Punjabi woman gains the exalted status of mother, which completes her as a woman with a well-defined family (parents and child/children). In this way the child contributes to her social and emotional wellbeing. In patriarchal settings, women gain security and control, especially with sons (Oppenheim-Mason and Taj 1987). As child is central in Punjabi patrilineal society, his/her social value is interconnected with fears of loss. These fears lead to practice cares before experiencing the loss.

The perception of the child as a social being also allows for the conception of the child as one who may be personified (through sympathetic magic) in witchcraft in order to bring harm. This phenomenon places a child in an indigenous child-care system in which caretakers are attached to the child for his/her momentous social value. The burial of the placenta and the child’s first hair are examples of indigenous child-care practice in rural Punjab.

The placenta burial ritual has been reported in studies for different reasons. Bruno Saura, Maryann Capestro and Henri Bova (2002) discussed the placenta burial ritual in Polynesian culture because of its symbolic demonstration of human belongingness to the earth. After birth, losing its physical contact with the human, the placenta is returned to the earth as a symbol of eternal association. A cross-cultural study in New Zealand describes the placenta burial ritual as providing spiritual security and strength to the baby. In addition, placenta burial is a symbolic representation that the placenta and the land are sources of nurturing for the baby (Abel et al. 2001). The Nepalese also value the placenta burial ritual as it could affect the health of the new-born for his or her entire life if not buried or placed somewhere in the proper way (Sharma et al. 2016). Participants in this study reported the burial of the placenta and umbilical cord in the house for the fear of witchcraft, which may be practiced on the placenta to bring harm to the child. None of the participants had any experience or observation regarding this belief, although they had heard from their elders that they should take maximum care in its burial. Nazia said, “evil people who don’t like the family or have a grudge against the family might think about bringing harm. We heard they could practice witchcraft on the placenta and hair of the child.” The practice of witchcraft using the placenta as a device was not evident, yet a fear was attached. Razia explained it more clearly:

We have not heard of anyone practicing it in our village. This is what we have heard. It is said that people who do black magic look for the placenta, the umbilical cord, or the hair of the child [she emphasised the first born child] to practice magic. She went on to discuss its possible effects:

People who have bad relations with the family may practice witchcraft. The placenta is a device to practice witchcraft. If someone who wants to practice witchcraft for any reason will find the placenta and practice witchcraft; it will affect the baby to whom the placenta belongs.

Razia also mentioned an old practice used to bury the placenta.
Likewise, in the past, the midwife used to bury the placenta in the house. If the baby cried too much after the birth or vomited the breastfed milk, the placenta was patted and pressed further down to give the baby relief. This was practiced for only the first three days. It does not happen now.

The belief in the misuse of the placenta in witchcraft to bring harm to the baby or the mother is present today. However, this is a conformity of tradition set by elders. The belief in the placenta as a device to practice possessive sorcery is primitive, and its burial is recommended in many cultures (Klein 2000).

Similarly, burying the child’s first hair because of the fear attached to it (as a device to practice witchcraft) is another folk child-care practice. In Hindu and Muslim cultures of South Asia, a baby’s first hairs are seen as contaminated as they have been in contact with birth pollution (Jeffery and Jeffery 1993). Participants reported shaving the baby’s head within seven days of the birth and giving sadaqa afterwards. This belief is based on religious tradition. Nathal M. Dessing (2001: 36) described the tradition as an Islamic birth ritual and provided religious sources. Fozia and Nazia stated that the amount of money they gave as sadaqa was the price of the silver equal to the weight of the newborn’s hair. Concerning the fixed amount of sadaqa, they said, “it is Islamic tradition”. Samina and Zahida gave sadaqa in rupees without such consideration. They said, “It is what one can afford. Sadaqa is a must.” They spoke about giving wheat or rice as sadaqa. It is important to give alms to the poor for the sake of the child’s well-being. The most interesting and common aspect of sadaqa practice is initiating the physical contact of the sadaqa money with the child before distributing it among the poor and needy people in the village. Participants reported touching the sadaqa money with the baby. Razia said about the belief: “whoever gives sadaqa, the sadaqa [food or money] should be touched by the person who is supposed to receive its blessing.” On saying this, she stated that “a mother, before giving birth, gives her sadaqa for safe birthing. She touches the sadaqa [mostly uncooked rice or money] and then this is given away.” Three participants reported the burial of the child’s first hair in the house after giving sadaqa. Samina, however, threw it in the trash during her last postpartum.

Samina: For the first two children, we buried their hair in the house. However, last time after giving sadaqa, we threw the hair, like the other trash, outside the house.
RA: Why did you not bury it as you had before?
Samina: The hair of the first child is exposed to the risk. We did it the second time too, but it was not necessary. The first child is vulnerable.

Zahida buried the hair of the first and second children. Her mother-in-law Razia said:

For the first child, it is very important to bury the hair. However, to be careful, it is good practice to bury the hair instead of throwing it outside. The first child and male children are always exposed to the risk of evil effects.
RA: And why is it necessary to bury the hair in the house?
Razia: It is safe in the house. Outside some animal or someone may dig it up.

Initiating physical contact with sadaqa establishes a sympathetic connection with the Divine blessing (charity in the name of God). In my view, this sympathetic connection terminates the existing connection between the child and his/her (removed) hair, which could direct the evil influences of witchcraft practices (in which the child’s hair
might be used). The social value of the child (notably the first child and the male child) increases the fear and is the inspiration for such childcare belief practices. Further, giving *sadaqa* brings a sense of protection, as Zahida said: “*Sadaqa is for the child, and it protects it from evil effects,*” yet they prefer to bury it for the best possible care.

Is anything that comes into contact with a new-born infant potentially usable for witchcraft? This question came to my mind when I observed beliefs about the child (mostly the first child) and the child’s association with things based on physical contact. Nazia showed us some of the clothes that she used to put on her child during the first year. She said: “It is advised not to give the first child’s clothes to anyone. Clothes may be used to practice witchcraft.” Samina practiced this belief for her first child (a daughter). Zahida did this for her first child, and insisted on practicing this belief for the second child, who was a boy. Zahida went on to state that she believed the first child and the son are always exposed to evil effects. Fozia expressed a similar intention. The health and survival of the first child, as said earlier, confirms the fertility and reproductive health of the woman in societies where women bear the reproductive responsibility and the loss of a child is seen as a loss of status and visibility for the woman in the social network. Hence, the first child confirms the ‘motherhood’ status and completes the successful transition from ‘woman-becoming’ (incomplete woman) to ‘woman-being’ (complete woman) in traditional societies (Sandelowski et al. 1990; Whiteford and Gonzalez 1995; Bhatti et al. 1999; Letherby 1999; Sultan 2009; Ali et al. 2011; Qadir et al. 2015; Qamar forthcoming). In the Punjabi cultural context, children are seen as a blessing, and fertility for a woman is a divine gift that raises her status from a woman to an exalted ‘mother’ (Qamar 2015a; 2016; forthcoming). Similarly, male children are the backbone of the Punjabi patriarchal social system. They are seen as the family head and a support for the parents in the old age. They also continue the patrilineal family lineage and are the real heir to the father (Qamar 2012; 2016; forthcoming).

Following the Frazerian principle of thought, I use the term ‘sympathetic connection’ for all such beliefs in which a contact is so sharply embodied that it does not break, even if it is no longer in contact. A sympathetic connection helps to build an association (or attachment) using the law of similarity (like produces like) and the law of contact (things which were once in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance). The belief in sympathetic connection is used to interpret contagious evil (as in witchcraft practices) and contagious blessing (as in religious practices such as *sadaqa*).³

**AZAN, NAMING, AND CIRCUMCISION: ASCRIBED IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Parents are archivists of identity. [… ] the early foundation of identity – who you are and how you came to be here – are largely handed over by parents. (Allat 1996: 135)

Religious socialisation creates and continues the identity formation of individuals and helps develop a sense of belongingness to a group (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997). Apart from mother and childcare practices, *sawa mahina* is significant for presenting a child as a person with a distinctive religious and gendered identity. A life protected
and cared for in the womb is integrated as a person in the social network. The *azan* (the call to prayer in Islam), naming, and circumcision are important social practices in the Punjabi context that initiate religious and gendered socialisation, thereby reflecting the social need for ascribed identity construction.

*The Azan – Welcoming the New-born*

The *azan* is said as a ‘welcoming’ ritual after birth, illustrating two important aspects of the postpartum tradition regarding child-related belief practices. First, it is necessary to have the presence of a male community member before the child, as this male must perform the ritual. This male could be an Imam, or the father or grandfather. All the participants talked about the ritual, which is practiced soon after birth. As soon as the baby is ready after cleaning, he/she hears the first words about the fundamental Islamic faith in the one God and the Prophet Muhammad. The *azan* is a gender-neutral Islamic birth ritual that is equally obligatory for baby boys and girls. Abdul-Ghafar, who himself whispered the *azan* in his grandson’s ears said, “When the baby was ready [both mother and child were cleaned], I was called in. I held the baby and whispered the *azan* in his right and left ears.” Announcing the declaration of faith in the ears of the newborn is a symbolic presentation of the Muslim identity of a child born to a Muslim family. The ritual indicates the ‘natural’ inheritance of the religious identity (of the biological parents), as well as the formal social practice of ascribing the religious identity of the child. Ritual, although gender neutral for the child, is practiced by the male members of the community. Engendered ritual practice signifies the patriarchal interpretation of the religion in the Punjabi social system. In the Punjabi socio-religious context, the presence of men as imams and practicing religious rituals (such as the *azan*, circumcision) manifest male leadership in religious customs and ceremonies.

*Naming the Child*

Naming a child includes consideration of the cultural aspects of the name (Alderson 2008 [2000]) and varies in different cultures and sub-cultures. The culture of naming a child represents the cultural construction of social identities. ‘Islamic naming’ is the second most important practice of ascribing the child’s identity and the foremost criteria for naming that all the participants in this study mentioned. They believe that the name of the child should label him/her a Muslim child.

Although the participants did not report a ‘ceremonial’ naming culture, they did disclose their serious concerns about naming a child. According to the participants, the name of the child may be suggested before birth and people have no problem naming the child as soon as possible. Further, the participants reported naming their children within a few days of the birth. Nazia and Fozia mentioned that they both received name suggestions from close family members before the birth. From the point of view of the child’s social value, it has already gained its significance as a person. Anyone (male or female) in the close family can suggest a name; however, the names suggested by paternal elders are generally accepted, although this is not mandatory. Most of the
names of the people in this village that I remember are the names of the prophets, their family members, or their companions. Other names are the names of famous Muslim men and women in history. Males are also named after the attributed names of God and Muhammad. Other names given to children in the village are common Muslim names. For example, Naeem Hussain (Abdul Gahafar’s child) consists of two names: they had heard Naeem somewhere, and Hussain is the name of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson. Regarding the naming of her son, Nazia said:

In the two or three days after the birth, we named the baby. It was decided by the family that the name must start with the prefix Muhammad. His name is Muhammad Ali [pointing towards the child].

Here, Muhammad is the name of the Prophet, and Ali is the name of his son-in-law (the husband of prophet’s daughter Fatima). Samina also named one of her daughters after Fatima. Fozia’s husband named his son Mudassar, which is an attribute name for the Prophet Muhammad and appears in the Quran. Hence, a common perception of naming is that ‘it should be Islamic’. On what a name may present, Gary S. Gregg (2007) provided an interesting analysis of Muslim names in Moroccan culture. Gregg explored three aspects of the Moroccan naming culture. First, the name represents family patrilineal lineage (patrikin-centric); second, a religious manifestation (religion-centric); and third, a nickname for individuation (ego-centric). The Islamic ruling for naming children depends on three principles. First, the name should not be against the fundamental religious philosophy (i.e., the Oneness of God, Monotheism). Second, the name must have good meanings. Third, the name should not be like those personalities who are famous for their evil deeds, for example, arrogance, cruelty or injustice (Abdul-Rahman 2007).

In light of the above question, it is important to understand how names disclose a child’s identity in Punjabi culture. In short, in Punjabi culture, names have a historical significance along with a religious commitment. Pakistan came into being because of the two-nation theory that divided a previously united India into two religious majorities: Hindu and Muslim. Punjab was thus divided between India and Pakistan. The Muslims of Punjab, living with Hindu and Sikh communities in united India, maintained their distinguished religious existence. As converted Punjabi Muslims, they shared several rituals with non-Muslim Punjabis; however, rituals of ascribed identities (the azan, naming, circumcision) always used to distinguish a Muslim child in the wider Punjabi community explicitly. They annotate their religious identity in their names. Muslim names (in Urdu, Arabic and Persian) are inspired by the several attribute names of the one God (in Islam), the names of the prophets, the Prophet Muhammad and his attribute names, the names of his companions, his family, and famous Muslim saints. In rural Punjab (Pakistan), people use famous Islamic names that are easy to pronounce and explicitly represent their religious and gender identity. A baby’s name comprises two parts, the first and the last name. The last name may or may not be the father’s name; hence, presenting patrilineal lineage in the name is not mandatory. Similarly, it is not necessary to have nicknames. Two aspects to consider when naming a child are religion and gender. As mentioned, religion-centric naming has its history, whereas gender is an explicit social norm in Punjabi culture.
Male circumcision, as a part of Abrahamic faith, is practiced among many religious groups belonging to the Abrahamic religions (Jews, Christians, Muslims – with the exception of some churches who oppose this practice). Muslims are the largest group who practice circumcision as a religious practice (Rizvi et al. 1999; Chigondo 2014). Circumcision is known as Khatna in the Punjabi language. Punjabi Muslims consider circumcision an obligatory ritual for a male Muslim baby for his religious and cultural identity. I asked several people why circumcision is necessary and what happens if it is not performed. The response was unanimous: “This is Sunnah" and confirms a male child as a Muslim.” Female circumcision is not practiced in the state of Punjab.

Participants reported practicing circumcision within sawa mahina. First, it helps the mother to take care of the child as she is free from several domestic chores. Second, they relate it to religious teaching to circumcise the child (if healthy) in seven days. The majority of Muslims confirm the practice of circumcision on the seventh day as the recommended practice because the Prophet Muhammad circumcised his grandsons Hassan and Hussain on the seventh day (Dessing 2001). Punjabis, on the other hand, prefer to do it as soon as possible so that the wound heals quicker, as supported by Abdul Razak, who said, “It is good to circumcise the baby during sawa mahina because it heals quickly during infancy. The baby does not move his legs too much.” If the baby is in good health, he is circumcised a few days (within seven days) after birth. Some parents wait a little more and circumcise the baby after two or three weeks. The practice of circumcision quite early in childhood is common in urban and rural areas. Traditionally, the village barber circumcises the baby. After the circumcision, the baby, as usual, is breastfed and remains with the mother. Participants did not report any formal ceremony or festive setup for circumcision, though cooking something sweet and distributing it in the neighbourhood is common. The religious manifestation of the circumcision ritual is a significant cultural practice.

The Ahadith (the sayings of Muhammad) cites circumcision as an Islamic birth ritual and an act of Fitrah (i.e. it is natural) for males. It also recognises the Sunnah (actions) of the prophets (who were all male), first initiated by Abraham when he was eighty years old (see Khan 1994; Al-Mundhiri 2000). In Jewish and Muslim traditions, male circumcision is followed as an Abrahamic ritual. Abraham is said to have been the first to practice the ritual by the will of God (Dessing 2001). The male circumcision ritual represents culture, history, and identity. Although not mentioned in the Quran, the circumcision ritual is based on prophetic traditions reported in Islamic history records and interpretation offered by classical scholars. The circumcision ritual identifies male Muslims and is taken seriously in Muslim societies. The stance on circumcision of converted Muslims is debated among classical Muslim scholars; however, in Muslim families, male circumcision is practiced religiously “even when circumcision serves as an identifying mark that could lead to their detection and persecution” (Abu-Sahlieh 1999: 139). In the cultural and historical context of the Punjab, the circumcision of male children is an obligatory religious act that physically identifies a Muslim male (distinguishing him from Hindus and Sikhs). Unfortunately, this distinctive identity was used as a reason to incite violence during the religious riots in India and Pakistan after the division of
united India (Ahmed 1997; Kamra 2002). The historical presence of religious identification in Indo-Pak culture indicates the identity realisation of Punjabi communities in effect from early childhood. Punjabi Muslims, in this respect, practice *khatna*, thereby ensuring the fulfilment of an obligatory ritual, a mark of religious identification, and a feeling of religious submission. A child at birth is perceived as male or female following biological essentialism (sex difference based on different genitals). Naming, as described earlier, is the first formal practice to identify gender. Circumcision in rural Punjabi society is an initiation rite practiced for the social care of the child to integrate the male child into the social group and a symbolic conformity of the status ‘male Muslim child’.

**CONCLUSION**

Postpartum traditions are social cultural practices that are often studied with an emphasis on nutrition beliefs and the care practices addressing the physiological condition of the mother, as perceived in different cultures. However, a significant side of the postpartum traditional belief practices is the social construction of infancy and corresponding social construction of motherhood that has been rare in scholarly work on postpartum traditions in the global south. Postnatal care in its traditional form provides a rich exposure of the cultural fibre that connects the several social realities related to the status of women and children in the community. A Punjabi Muslim child, as a status giver with high social value (comprised of familial, religious and emotional values), contributes to family formation in the Punjabi socio-cultural context. Motherhood and childhood are both ritualised to seek care, protection, and strength. In this regard, *sawa mahina* is a noteworthy tradition in Punjabi culture. It constitutes the inseparable mother–infant connection and the corresponding social values (the woman as an ‘exalted’ mother and the socially valued child) by ritually integrating mother and child in the social network with their ‘valued’ identities.

Rest and confinement, as a major aspect of *sawa mahina*, primarily address the transition of a woman from impurity (birth pollution) to purity, weakness to health (recovery from a physically vulnerable state), and from a married woman to motherhood. The practical support from the family women ensures help for the mother and a good quality of childcare during *sawa mahina*. This support is part of Punjabi women’s social provisions and helps women to a position of power and control that is achieved through successful motherhood. On the other hand the perceived vulnerability of the mother, which exposes her to the risk of the evil influence (which congruently affects the child) instrumentally marginalises childless women and women with fertility issues.

Preparing the mother for motherhood includes encouragement and training for breastfeeding that is seen as a socio-religious construct defining the woman’s role as primary care giver, reinforcing in reward the exalted status of motherhood, and building up a strong emotional and social bond between the mother and the infant. Further, recognition of the child’s agency in the embodied and inseparable mother–child dyad induce the mother–child attachment. This sympathetic connection serves the purpose of the woman empowerment as a mother in Punjabi patriarchal social context. The notion of the sympathetic connection is not limited to mother–child attachment. It can
be observed in several other childcare practices, such as the first hair of the child and placenta burial rituals. This belief ultimately reflects the cultural cognition of the Punjabis, which connects people and things in a cosmological sympathetic relationship.

Another important aspect of sawa mahina is a particular focus on ascribing religious and gender identities to integrate the child in the Punjabi socio-cultural context. Welcoming the child with the azan is an assertion of receiving a ‘Muslim’ baby in a Muslim family. Later naming and circumcision rituals provide the basis for the socially constructed religious and gendered social identity of the child. Hence, sawa mahina remains a significant period in the cultural lives of Punjabi people exposing several aspects of the social construction of infancy and motherhood that (in close connection) are rarely investigated in sociological and anthropological studies.

The study opens a research horizon to investigate the social value of the child, the sympathetic connections in childcare belief practices, and the social construction of the mother–child dyad in early infancy. The study also promotes the idea of investigating postpartum traditions in different cultures with the analytical lens of socially-constructed infancy.

NOTES

1 A woman is considered polluted after birth. The word purudu means birth pollution and is also used for the post birth seclusion of mother and child until the removal of birth pollution (Saavala 2013 [2001]).

2 Research is carried out at the Norwegian Center for Child Research (NOSEB), Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. The title of my research project is Infant Healthcare Belief Practices in Rural Punjab, Pakistan, funded by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan.

3 Voluntary charity, named as sadaga, is a religious ritual that sees the believer give something to the poor and needy in the name of God to please him by benefiting poor people. Quranic incantation or amulets and sadaga are two significant religious practices in Punjabi society that are believed to be powerful and divine devices against disease, loss, or damage (Qamar 2013; 2016).

4 Napaki – birth pollution, a state of being dirty and impure. Napak refers to a dirty and impure person.

5 A former study conducted in southern Punjab (Nielsen et al. 2001) describes Athra as a feared illness caused by the evil eye or witchcraft. I have discussed this disease, which causes infant mortality, in detail in another article (Qamar forthcoming).

6 Fieldwork observation was that after combing their hair, women did not throw their fallen hair in the trash, but rather tended to bury it. It is believed that a woman’s hair can be used in witchcraft to bring harm to a mother’s reproductive health.

7 James Frazer (1925 [1890]) refined Edward Tylor’s (1974 [1871]) principle of association into the law of similarity and contact, and applied this law in sympathetic magic. For further information on the persistence of belief in sympathetic connection related to childcare practices in rural Punjab, see Qamar 2015b; 2016.

8 During my research in rural Punjab I found belief in the sympathetic connection in several other childcare practices, see Qamar 2015b; 2016.

9 Islamic cleric or religious teacher in the local mosque.

10 The azan is a collection of Arabic sentences declaring faith in the one God (Islamic monotheism), belief in the prophethood of Muhammad, and the call to worship the one God.

11 Sunnah is an act recommended and practiced by the prophets.
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ABSTRACT
The article addresses a conflicting encounter of two ideologies of kinship, ‘natural’ and ‘religious’, among the newly established Evangelical communities of Nenets in the Polar Ural and Yamal tundra. An ideology of Christian kinship, as an outcome of ‘spiritual re-birth’, was introduced through Nenets religious conversion. The article argues that although the born-again experience often turned against ancestral traditions and Nenets traditional kinship ties, the Nenets kinship system became a platform upon which the conversion mechanism was furthered and determined in the Nenets tundra.

The article examines missionary initiatives and Nenets religiosity as kin-based activities, the outcome of which was twofold. On one side, it was the realignment of Nenets traditional kinship networks. On other side, it was the indigenisation of the Christian concept of kinship according to native internal cultural logic. Evangelical communities in the tundra were plunged into the traditional practices of Nenets kinship networks, economic exchanges, and marriage alliances. Through negotiation of traditional Nenets kinship and Christian kinship, converted Nenets developed new imaginaries, new forms of exchanges, and even new forms of mobility.

KEYWORDS: kinship • blood • Nenets indigenous people • Evangelical Christianity • missionary movement • Russian Arctic

INTRODUCTION

In spring 2011, during my fieldwork in the Polar Ural tundra (Russian Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area), one family conflict happened. A married Nenets woman, who lived a nomadic life in the tundra, had run away from her husband. The woman was hiding at her relative’s home in a local village called Beloyarsk. The story was not extraordinary for Nenets society. But suddenly, the family fight erupted into a big religious
conflict involving several Evangelical churches, the local administration, and even the police. The husband’s relatives revealed that the woman had recently converted to Baptism. She stayed with her converted relatives, in the house that hosted prayer meetings for the local Baptist community. It appeared as if the converted woman had severed her family ties, breaking up with her non-converted husband. People rumoured that it was the Baptist church and its leaders that incited this divorce. “These sectarian destroy Nenets traditional culture”, argued one of the local officials in Beloyarsk. “They arrive at Nenets campsites in the tundra and force indigenous people to burn their sacred sites. They break traditional clan ties and ruin Nenets families!”

From the late 1990s, the Polar Urals and the Yamal tundra – the lands of nomadic reindeer herds and fishermen – attracted Protestant missionaries from all over the world. Many Nenets and Khanty indigenous people, both nomadic and settled in villages, turned out to be open to religious changes, embracing various types of Evangelical Christianity. With that, numerous tensions and conflicts arrived, as religious conversion triggered the question of how to adapt new faith to the traditional nomadic life.

There is a popular joke in the Yamal: in the tundra, all Nenets are relatives. The issue of kinship was particularly discussed within newly established Protestant communities, as the impulse of rupture that carried the notion of Christian second birth was often turned against the family ties, tundra clan networks, and what would be called the “ancestral curses” (cf. Meyer 1998: 329).

As a range of scholars stress, kinship ties are essential for the social organisation of Siberian native people, and kin networks play an important role in social regulations, the subsistence economy, and resource allocation (Dolgikh and Levin 1951; Ziker 1998; Ventsel 2004). In the Nenets case, too, bonds of kinship keep Nenets society integrated, and the kinship system has essential cultural and economic significance in the tundra. Mutual assistance, reciprocity and exchanges within groups of kinsmen are considered the foundation for the economic system in the tundra. The interconnectedness in Nenets tundra society is popularly described as “Nenets radio”. The tundra is covered by kin webs where every nomadic campsite – seemingly separated, isolated, and geographically distanced – is bound to others dispersed across the immense expanse of the tundra.

In this essay, I argue that although Protestant missionaries were largely accused of destroying ‘traditional culture’, severing kin ties and causing family conflicts in the tundra, it was the Nenets kinship system that became a platform upon which the conversion mechanism was furthered and determined in the Polar Ural tundra. Nenets kinship practices, as well as Nenets ‘kin thinking’ (when kinship becomes Foucault’s grid of knowledge) significantly influenced the way the Nenets appropriated Evangelical Christianity. Nenets kinship also affected missionary work in the tundra. The missionary trajectories were often determined by existing Nenets extended kinship networks, by internal regulations within Nenets kin groups, and exogamy.

I examine below missionary initiatives and Nenets religiosity as kin-based activities, the outcome of which was twofold. On one side, the outcome was the revaluation and realignment of Nenets traditional kinship networks. On other side, it was the indigenisation of the Christian concept of kinship according to native internal cultural logic. I analyse how converted Nenets ‘played’ with kinship as a strategy to adjust social relations, and interpreted the conflicting encounter of two ideologies of kinship. First, Nen-
ets kinship, based on the idea of blood, land, time, and extended to the supernatural world. Secondly, kinship as a Christian category, as an outcome of the ‘second birth’, according to which all believers become related as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Through negotiation of traditional Nenets kinship and Christian kinship, converted Nenets developed new imaginaries, new forms of exchange, and even new forms of mobility. To put it in Janet Carsten’s (2004: 9) words, “kinship constitutes one of the most important arenas […] for creative energy”.

CHRISTIAN KINSHIP AS SUBSTANCE AND CODE

It was Nadia with whom the story of Beloyarsk Evangelical community began. Nadia, a widowed Nenets mother of nine, had been living in the tundra all her life, fishing and herding reindeer. She was one of the first in the tundra who had converted to Baptism. The Beloyarsk Evangelical community I observed consisted mainly of the members of her extended family. In one of my visits to Nadia’s chum, we were sitting near the fireplace, having tea and she was telling me the news about their congregational life in the tundra. They had new ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in the community, while some other members had broken away from the church and therefore were no longer ‘sisters’ or ‘brothers’. Finally, she said to me, “Tanya, if you would repent, you would become our sister, and no one would be closer to us than you”.

Relationships in her religious life were cast in an idiom of kinship, but what meanings and social practices underlie her notion of ‘sister’ and ‘brother’, and how did the Christian ideology of kinship correlate with Nadia’s understanding of traditional Nenets kinship and her native tundra kin network? In other words, what did it mean to be a ‘sister’ or a ‘brother’ among converted Nenets and how did this new category fit the native ideology of kinship?

In his study of American kinship, David Schneider (1977; 1980: 28) examines the distinction between a relationship as substance (conventionally called “blood” or “natural” kinship) and a relationship as code of conduct (socially constructed and culturally specific aspects of kinship), a dual aspect upon which kinship is built. Likewise, the Nenets often describe their kin relations through the notion of shared blood and flesh, though what they call blood kinship is also structured upon various social aspects and implies a code of conduct element. Religious conversion furthermore re-assembled the relations between substance and code of conduct.

It is the relationship between substance and code that I analyse below. My argument is that the case of Nenets conversion shows that both substance and code are heterogeneous and flexible idioms: that ‘blood’ crosses its domain of corporeality, while code is ‘naturalised’. In short, “‘substance’ is as constructed as ‘code’”, to use Marshal Sahlins’ (2011: 3) reply to Schneider’s dichotomy.

Nenets conversion experience led to the denaturalisation of kinship: those aspects of kinship believed to be natural or inherent are now taken out into the field of social construction. At the same time, the creation of Evangelical communities in the Nenets tundra implied ‘naturalisation power’. When religious community relationships that seemingly had no basis in substance, were interpreted and built according to the ‘natural’ understanding of kinship. Silvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (1995) define it as a process of naturalisation at work, when relationships are cast in an idiom of kinship.
The notion of kinship is a grounded concept in Christianity. The use of kinship terms, ‘kin thinking’, is distinctly functional in the life of Evangelical Christian communities. As Schneider (1977: 69) argues, Christianity made a shift from substance to code, “so that commitment to the code for conduct becomes paramount as the defining feature and the substantive element is redefined from a material to a spiritual form in Christianity”.

Yet, Christian kinship, spiritual brotherhood in Christ, is also based on the idea of embodiment. It implies the importance of blood as a substance of spiritual kinship (Englund 2004: 304–305; Cannell 2013). United by the blood of Jesus or being born again in His blood, Christians organise a spiritual unity that is, therefore, experienced as corporeal unity (Englund 2004: 305). Harri Englund (ibid.) provides an example of Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo (Malawi), who believe that the blood that Jesus shed on the Cross runs in the veins of every believer. Similarly, Caroline Bynum (2007) has demonstrated how Christ's saving blood was “alive” in blood relics in late medieval religious life.

This corporeal unity, however, is not a matter of inheritance but a relatedness that is gradually constituted. It is a matter of on-going verification through religious practice, something that is not substantively given, but a matter of perfection, which can be temporarily or forever lost if one stumbles morally. In Beloyarsk Evangelical community, there was a practice of temporary or permanent exclusion of a member from the community that saw a person disallowed from participating in the religious life of the church. This was perceived as detachment from Christ’s body, and of course from His blood too, as this person was not allowed to participate in the Eucharist. Usually community members were cautious about calling a violator ‘brother’ or ‘sister’.

Thus, spiritual re-birth establishes relatedness that is built on both elements: substance and code. And this fluctuation of ‘corporeal’, ‘substantive’, constructed and socially regulated becomes an arena where two kinship ideologies meet and negotiate.

NENETS KINSHIP AS SUBSTANCE AND CODE

The Nenets have historically had a distinctive clan (Nenets yerkar) and phratrial (Nenets tenz, ‘a group of clans’) system (Verbov 1939; Khomich 1966: 141–155; Dolgikh 1970; Vasil'ev 1979; Golovnёv 2004: 37–70). Members of each group call one another niam (Nenets nia ‘brother’), or nyanzanipelia (‘a piece of my flesh’) (Verbov 1939). It is believed that clan members are united as brothers with a unity in blood and flesh. The heterogeneous meaning of blood transcends the domain of materiality and bodily substance and refers to both Nenets kinship and ethnicity. “Doctors came here the other day and they did blood tests among the Nenets. And it was revealed that the Nenets don’t have pure blood anymore – everything is mixed: Nenets, Khanty, Russian”, a Nenets woman once said to me.

The idiom of blood however is not paramount for understanding Nenets kinship. The wide practice of adopting and ‘sharing’ children (within a polygamous family or between different families) in Nenets society is, perhaps, the most striking example of how the importance of ‘blood’ and procreation can easily be ‘forgotten’. There are furthermore aspects that constitute both the structure and the social life of Nenets kinship.
Besides the relationship in blood and flesh, Nenets kinship also implies an aspect of territoriality, when a clan or a group of families is marked by its own land, pastures, fishing and hunting territories, cemeteries and sacred sites (Zhitkov 1913: 205–208; Verbov 1939: 65; Brodnev 1959; Dolgikh 1970: 92–95; Yevladov 1992: 153–156; see also Stammler 2005: 207–238). Property relations and land tenure, which endured through time, constituted the concept of descent and of affinity, as Edmund Leach (1961: 11) argued. Despite Soviet attempts to destroy the clan system among the Siberian natives and to replace it with territorial organisation and territorial administration (Dolgikh and Levin 1951), the principle of clan lands and the territorial integrity of Nenets clans has retained its vital importance in Nenets social and economic interrelations to the present (Stammler 2005: 129, 131, 218–219).

The principle of social interaction in the tundra is also kin based. A Nenets nuclear family household is not an economically independent or integral unity, but rather, of crucial life importance is ŋesy, a nomad campsite comprising integrations of several nomadic households usually related to each other and migrating on a particular territory. The multiplicity of social ties integrates dispersed Nenets tundra ŋesy into a clan. And the responsibility of mutual assistance between kinsmen is a basic rule (cf. Brodnev 1959; Stammler 2005: 172).

Kinship is not a stable idiom for the Nenets, but implies an aspect of changeability and fluctuation. As scholars point out, although the integrity and solidity of Nenets clans are of great social importance, they never functioned as stable units. Kin-based economic associations were relatively unstable, depending on the season, migration routes, availability of resources, as well as animal epizootics, which could at times realign the power structure within a kin network. This network can either be organised into a well-structured body or can disintegrate. (Slezkine 1994: 5–6; Golovnёv 1995: 51; Stammler 2005: 172, 225–226; Volzhanina 2013) When reindeer herders, for instance, who used to live in kin-based nomadic campsites, lose their herds because of epizootics or other reasons, they can settle down on river banks and become fishermen, living as relatively isolated families, or they can move to a village until they are economically ready to return to the tundra. In this case, the kin-based economic association disintegrates, although it is never fully broken, and temporarily or permanently settled Nenets can maintain ties and reciprocal exchanges with their tundra relatives (Khomich 1966: 153; Brodnev 1959: 73; Volzhanina 2013). In different seasons, times and places, different patterns of this potential network can be realised.

Whereas a previous kin network can be deactivated in practice, in contrast long-term social ties within a neighbourhood can generate kinship. Endurance through time is one basis for the construction of an alternative kinship ideology (Carsten 2004: 144–145) in which permanence is the source and simultaneously the proof of the authenticity of kin ties. The Nenets heterogenous clan system is a proof of that point. Since the 19th century, the territories of the Polar Ural tundra were a place of intensive and prolonged contact between the Nenets, Enets, and Khanty groups. Some Khanty and Enets groups were eventually integrated into the Nenets clan system and marriages alliances, and today several Nenets clans are considered of Khanty and Enets origins (Castrén 1860: 192; Verbov 1939; Dolgikh 1970: 74–77).

Nenets kin networks also extend into the spiritual sphere. Among a variety of Nenets ritual objects (khe-khe) are doll-like wooden images dressed in traditional Nenets
clothes – the images of some deceased relatives. The Nenets call them \textit{ngytarma} (usually an image of a deceased shaman) or \textit{sidriang} (an image of any deceased adult relative). Both can be interpreted as an extension of a person’s life, as it is believed that the spirit of the deceased continues to live in the \textit{ngytarma} and \textit{sidriang} (Golovnёv 1985). Nenets treat these spirits as living people, talk to them and include them into their everyday lives. \textit{Ngytarma} and \textit{sidriang} live in the chum, sleep on the same bed as other living relatives, eat with them sitting at the same table, get their portion of tobacco and participate in rituals (Khomich 1966: 208–209). Eventually, after several years of extended life, \textit{sidriangs} are buried according to traditional Nenets funeral customs.

To sum up, territorial integrity, lifestyle, extended temporality, economic collaboration, and even spiritual beliefs create an alternative foundation for Nenets social life. The fluidity in Nenets kinship relations corresponds to what Leach (1961: 146, 305–306) and Beattie (1964: 101–111) wrote on kinship: it is not a thing in itself, but a way of thinking about social relations. Similarly, Schneider (1984: 50) described kinship “as idiom or code in terms of which social relations are expressed, formulated, talked, and thought about”.

Nenets kinship is rather a potential repertoire of kin interactions, potential ties between kinsmen and neighbours, and a way of thinking and talking about land use and about social and economic relations. As I will demonstrate below, this logic was extended for newly established Nenets Evangelical communities, which were built according to Nenets tundra kin-based networking. Kinship became an idiom in terms of which religious community relations were codified. And it was the fluidity and flexibility of Nenets kinship that allowed the Nenets not only to embrace the Christian ideology of kinship, but also to use it for the reproduction of the nomadic system, although the reconciliation between the two ideologies of kinship was not so easy and came at the expense of broken families and kinship ties in the Nenets tundra.

\textbf{ANCESTRAL CURSES}

Christianity is targeted against “ancestral blood” and struggles against the “the dark side of kinship” (Geschiere 2003). The discontinuity impulse in Christian conversion leads to a significant revision of traditional kinship and to a cutting of ‘blood ties’. Being suspicious of extended family networks, Protestant Christianity aims rather to separate people from kin ties, reconstituting the person within new social relationships and creating new forms of community. It therefore acts as a “surrogate family” or “family-like community” (Englund and Leach 2000: 235; Meyer 2004: 461). Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2001: 86) writes:

True conversion means cutting the links with one’s personal past, not simply the ungodly habits and sinful pastimes, but also friends and family members who are not born-again. Such individuals provide the greatest threats to a ‘new life in Christ’, precisely because of the power in ties of blood and amity […] The social grounds for creating bonds – blood, common pasts, neighbourhood ties, language – are foresworn for the new bond of the brother and sister in Christ.
In her study of Ghanaian Pentecostals, Birgit Meyer (1998) observes that the newly converted seek to liberate themselves socially and economically from extended families, thus delivering themselves from the ancestral past and repudiating sins committed by any of one’s preceding generations. All family ties are represented as potentially dangerous. The newly converted inform their families of the fact that they are breaking the covenant which linked them with Satan through their family. “Indeed, in practice the ‘complete break with the past’ boils down to a break with one’s family” (ibid.: 329). Kin ties are regarded as a matter of the past.

Evangelical conversion was understood by both Arctic missionaries and Nenets converts as directed specifically against ‘ancestral blood’ and the genealogical grid. Below is how a Baptist missionary in Beloyarsk once explained it to me:

In general, genetics is of great importance here, because the curse is transmitted by inheritance, through generations. And I am grateful to my service in the North, because it showed me how strong this coherence of generations [stseplennost' rodov] can be. [...] I believe in genetics. Here the curse is inherited in genes [...] and our task is to break this coherence, this curse of sin transmitted in a clan.

‘Blood’ and ‘genes’ were believed to transmit the Devil’s curse, and sin. “The Devil played one cunning trick – he split them [the Nenets] into clans and descent groups”, argued a Baptist evangeliser, who continued that the curse and sins are transmitted to all by generation. Therefore, to cut blood ties meant to cut off the vicious chain of sins and curses. The very foundation of Nenets kinship meant to be converted – now it was Jesus and his blood that were the foundation of the new kinship.

Many missionaries working in the Polar Urals believed that evil spirits operated within the frame of families and groups of descendants. Therefore, spirits got access to a person through blood ties. Yevgeniy, an Evangelical missionary who worked in the Nenets tundra, expressed this in the following way:

[A family] is held by a team of spirits, evil spirits! And there is real worship! And when you stop worshipping spirits, the latter begin to demand that you worship them, if not – people die, drown, commit suicide... There was one chum keeper [Russian khozyayka chuma, Nenets miad' pukhutsia – a female chum spirit in the form of a wooden doll]. She was 500 years old! Can you imagine? [...] So, all these years she has been keeping the whole family in dependence […]. And the Holy Spirit eventually liberated them from this dependence.

‘Ancestor worship’ or ‘ancestor religion’ reveals here the blurred boundaries between kinship and religion, as these domains are structured by the same terms (cf. Schneider 1977: 70; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 11). What is defined as Nenets ‘ancestor worship’ is perceived as something inherent, similar to people born into a family or nation. Therefore, religious conversion and the renunciation of Nenets traditional faith were interpreted by the non-converted Nenets as breaking Nenets kin ties, as betraying Nenets ancestors and the whole idea of ‘Nenetsness’.

In the Nenets tundra, some stories were tragic, including stories about families who punished unfaithful members by converting to an alien faith, fully excluding them from the kin network. Parents disinherted their ‘sectarian’ children, taking back all the reindeer. Others were cast off from the crucial tundra economic system and were forced to
settle in villages. Rumours have been told about a young woman killed by a relative for ritual betrayal. Her dead body was found in a cemetery, tied to one of the graves. “She was ritually killed – little by little, by seven knots, strangled by that shaman [her relative] because she gave up her ancestral faith and accepted Christ in her heart”, people said.

Not only was faith itself regarded as a breach of kin and neighbourly networks in the tundra, but the social and economic lives of the newly established religious communities were also regarded as damaging. The wealth of a tundra dweller and even his/her survival – which greatly depends on the functionality of well-arranged kin and neighbour interactions – was now under threat. One of the frequently discussed issues was the practice of tithe in the tundra (which in the tundra is normally paid in reindeer and fish). A Nenets woman in Beloyarsk said:

They [converted Nenets] give money to some strange community, they slaughter reindeer. Because they say, if you enter our community and follow our way, you have no right to look in a different direction and to go a different way. So, looking for money, they [converted Nenets] slaughter reindeer every year! At the end of the day they lose their sense of living in the tundra. Being left without reindeer, what can they do?

By the same logic, a leading Nenets politician in Salekhard argued:

They [missionaries] want to take away from us the most valuable thing – our land, our territory. And now they [tundra Nenets] pay with reindeer. Thus, little by little, all reindeer will go over to those who made them believe in this religion.

In other words, unlike the Ghanaian Pentecostals in Meyer’s (1998) case, it is difficult in the Arctic tundra to get rid of relatives and networking reciprocity, because outside the family and kinship system a nomadic Nenets simply cannot survive in the tundra. Finding themselves in a conflict between two different kinship ideologies, many born-again Nenets were not ready to make that complete break with their families and kin networks. Shifting between the two systems, they neither straightforwardly rejected nor simply reproduced the dominant mode of kinship. In rupture, they tried to find continuity, bridging the two idioms of kinship.

As I will show below, there were two ways to bridge these idioms. First, born-again Nenets denaturalised traditional kinship, they realigned and legitimised what they called ‘blood’ kinship in terms of religious kinship. Essentialisation of religious kinship was another strategy, when new forms of relationship were couched in an idiom of ‘natural ties’. The Nenets used their new religious networks according to their traditional understanding of kinship and according to the traditional practices of a kin-based community. That meant that brothers and sisters in Christ became engaged in traditional Nenets economic and social reciprocity. While establishing an alternative kinship network – based not on ‘blood’ kinship but on Christ’s blood – native born-agains sought to plunge it into the traditional practices of the tundra kin web.
Once, two tundra dwellers visited Irina, who was my hospitable hostess during my fieldwork in Beloyarsk village. Irina was a Nenets woman in her fifties, recently settled in a village, after more than forty years of nomadic tundra life. Pasha and Sasha were her nephews from the tundra, visiting Beloyarsk briefly to buy provisions (snabzhat' sya) and to get some petrol. I noticed that despite the Nenets hospitality tradition, Irina did not invite them to tea. They were talking for a while staying on the porch of her house, and she was grumbling at them in an unfriendly tone. Then she pointed at the darkness of her narrow entrance corridor and said more loudly, “Behind this door there is a believing brother, a missionary. Go in there and listen to God’s Word, let him talk a little about God. Go, go there! For you think only about vodka!”

I was surprised that these two robust men obeyed the small woman and knocked on the door to Sergey’s room, a Russian Baptist missionary who also stayed in Irina’s house at that time. Irina grumbled, “Pasha! Take off your hat! Take off your coat! How are you entering a house? You can leave your shoes on.” Pasha was nervously bustling, not knowing where to leave his clothes. Obviously, they were feeling ashamed. Finally, they entered the missionary’s room. They stayed there for about half an hour. And when they came out, they were holding some Christian magazines. This time Irina said, “Once they have become our brothers, once they have listened to God’s Word, then we can invite them for tea. Lena, make some food for them.” Lena (Irina’s niece) began to cook macaroni and fry sausages for the guests. Irina said to the men, “Once you’ve listened to God’s Word, you can have tea then”.

Irina’s life in the village was always like that. During almost the whole year missionaries from different parts of the world lived in her guest room. At the same time, her house was always full of tundra relatives who frequently visited the settlement to buy provisions or get social welfare payments. Sedentary relatives were not separated from the tundra kin-based system of social and economic reciprocity; they were fully integrated into all social practices of their extended families. Irina was a communicative node of her extended family; she was its informational, social, and economic junction. In every family fight or conflict (both in the tundra and in the village) she played the role of controller or arbiter. Since mobile phones are available even in the tundra, she could control her family online.

Irina was also an inner missionary guide within her extended family network. Missionary trajectories in Beloyarsk and the surrounding tundra were determined by native missionary guides like Irina, who were usually female members of an extended Nenets or Khanty family. A guide coordinated missionary movement in the tundra and villages. She was supposed to assist visiting missionaries, opening the geographical and social landscape of the tundra with its nomadic trajectories, the location and the composition of campsites, inter-clan and inter-family relations. A missionary agent also helped with translation. Yet she did not merely work as a language interpreter, she socially translated the missionary message, preparing a potential recipient for conversion and providing a welcoming and cooperative background for evangelising. A guide eventually opened her kin network for the missionaries. At the same time, she carefully made sure that missionaries did not breach the conventional regulations of social relations within a kin-based society and observed the boundaries of a provided kin network.
This was Irina’s role – to be a node in the missionary web. Being a knower and a junction point in her extended family, she was responsible for preparing a member of her kin network for conversion. She decided which relatives, families, or campsites were now ready to hear the Christian message and which ones were not worthy of it. She directed missionaries according to her inner understanding of the tundra and the power relations within her extended family. As an outcome, this practice caused power redistribution within a kinship group, and the inclusion/exclusion of kinsmen from the religious community indeed became a means to regulate kin-based interrelations and reciprocity.

When expecting missionary visits, Irina would accumulate the necessary information about the life of her extended family: conflicts, family fights, marriages or divorces, births or deaths, economic relations, and nomadic directions. She would negotiate with a relative, gradually preparing him/her to meet the missionaries. At the same time, she would use her authority as a missionary guide as a tool in regulating family conflict and power redistribution. When Irina said, “I might send a brother [missionary] to Kolia this year, let [the missionary] speak to him, let him repent [pust’ on pokayetsya]”, behind these words there were some internal family realignments, conflicts and power redistributions. In fact, it meant that Irina intended to include this relative in a new kin-religious community. By including him in her church she legitimised traditional kinship and kin-based economic reciprocity with this person, making this relationship both ‘religious’ and ‘blood’. And vice versa, the exclusion of a kinsman from the religious community could be a matter of his/her exclusion from networking kin reciprocity. In both cases internal cultural logic underlay the practice of inclusion in and exclusion from the newly organised religious-kinship network.

**PARTICIPANT CONVERSION AND ‘CLAN CHURCHES’**

Native kinship became the platform upon which the mechanism of religious conversion was performed, meaning that missionary trajectories depended on its internal logic. This is what I call participant conversion – the techniques for creating alternative (converted) kin-based networks in the tundra, when missionaries were actually plunged into the reproduction of Nenets culture patterns. Missionary trajectories depended significantly on which clan and which families they collaborated with and which families and kin webs would be opened to them by their guides.

In the Polar Urals, the determination of missionary trajectories according to existing clan networking resulted in the creation of ‘clan churches’. As during the Soviet period, when Nenets kolhozy consisted of members of the same clan (despite the resistance of the authorities), newly established religious communities were also built according to Nenets kinship principles, even though missionaries consistently struggled against traditional Nenets kin bonds.

The kinship principle, of course, was not fully observed, and sometimes ‘blood’ relatives were excluded from the converted kinship network, while non-relatives could be included in the alternative kinship systems of the converted. In both cases, it was the discursive technique of realignment and reinvention of the kinship ties that entailed such exclusions/inclusions. Believers tended to articulate kinship relations with those who were to be included in a new religious-kinship community. When a new member
entered the Baptist community in Beloyarsk, Irina started recollecting her family memories: the man turned out to be a distant relative on her mother’s side. It was important to her to stress that new brother in Christ was a legitimate person to include in the religious/kin-based community. At the same time, converted Nenets would rather forget existing relations with those who were excluded from the religious yet kinship-based community.

The clan principle of small-scale Evangelical communities in the Polar Urals led to the division of major mission churches along ethnic lines. Two Evangelical missions dominated on the religious landscape of Beloyarsk and the Polar Ural tundra: the Baptist church and the Charismatic Pentecostal. The former consisted of almost all the Nenets, while the latter was entirely a Khanty community. The Charismatic church was known as the church of Tayshiny (a Khanty clan), meaning that it consisted of the members of this clan and those families that had traditional marriage relations to the Tayshiny. Sometimes I got the impression that one could study traditional marriage contacts by studying the family compositions of the Polar Ural churches.

In the case of a breach of this principle, the community always experienced internal conflicts. A pastor from the Khanty Charismatic church once said to me: “You know, all those in this community who caused a disturbance [korki mochil] and later left the church, were Nenets […]. They [natives] simply do not accept that Nenets and Khanty can be together in one church.”

In the same way, if a religious community consisted of members of different family groups, this inevitably increased tensions within the church. This was the case in the Nenets Baptist community in Beloyarsk, which had two parties from different unrelated Nenets families – the camp of Irina and the camp of Galina and her family. These competing family parties were always a source of on-going tension, conflict and squabbles within the community. Two families always competed for the right to provide missionaries with their resources – i.e., with their tundra relatives who were supposed to be converted. And when missionaries arrived in Beloyarsk, Irina and Galina always argued about where the missionaries were supposed to go: to Irina’s campsites or to Galina’s. At the same time, both parties tried to shift some of the hosting responsibilities onto each other, such as accommodating and feeding missionaries or providing them with transport, duties that were sometimes quite costly.

To summarise, the social life of religious kinship functioned according to the traditional logic of Nenets kinship. At the same time, the traditional concept of kinship was realigned and legitimised within the frame of Christian understanding of kinship as something that can be acquired, controlled or lost. Who would be considered a new kinsman and who would be excluded from new kin ties, and therefore excluded from all traditional economic and social exchange systems, was of great importance within the community of Nenets believers. The new constructions of kinship became a tool in internal power redistribution within the Nenets nomadic network, in the realignment and the re-actualisation of existing social networks in the tundra and sedentary space. Kinship became a space for social construction and power struggles.
MISSIONARIES AS MEDIATORS AND MARRIAGE MATCHMAKERS

Finding themselves ‘hostages’ of existing Nenets kin-based networks and traditional nomadic trajectories in the tundra, missionaries further became involved in the reproduction of traditional Nenets practices, functioning as mediators in the tundra.

In winter 2011, the Beloyarsk community was notably agitated. Believers were expecting the arrival of missionaries. They already knew that the missionary leader was going to arrange two marriages this year. Two young women from the Baidarata tundra – the church members whose destinies were going to be decided – were the subject of rumours, jokes and general excitement in the community. Who would be their bridegrooms, chosen by the missionary leader? From what part of the tundra? What are their names and how wealthy they are? What about other unmarried brothers and sisters, when will the missionary arrange their marriages? Some families ‘showed’ their sons and daughters who had reached marriageable age, trying to put in a good word for them.

Evangelical missionaries in the Polar Urals and the Yamal tundra often functioned as Nenets traditional marriage matchmakers (who are responsible for providing a marriage partner for a member of a church). In many cases a couple did not know each other and quite often lived in different parts of the Nenets tundra. If a Nenets man was ready to get married, a missionary would make a trip to a potential bride and negotiate the marriage with her parents. In the Nenets tradition, the bride did not participate in such negotiations and so it was in newly created Evangelical communities. Here is a story of the engagement of a young Nenets woman, a tundra dweller from the Baidarata tundra:

Sergey [a Beloyarsk missionary] and Aleksey, a minister from that place [Bol’shezemel’skaya tundra] brought the groom with them. Sergey explained to the groom that there was a good girl here in our tundra, a believer, and her mother is a believer too. So, they arrived, two matchmakers [dva svata], Sergey and Aleksey. They arrived at Beloyarsk. My mother was in the village at that time. They were holding a sermon in the village and then they travelled to the tundra together with my mother, to our chum. We did not know anything. They did not even say anything to my mother. So, they arrived at our chum and held a sermon there too. They prayed. And then they said to us: “We have one more thing to talk about, on another topic.” Then Sergey opened a Bible and read a passage, I think it was from Genesis, where there is a passage about a husband and a wife. And then he said to my parents that I am already grown up, that I am already a marriageable girl and that they already have a groom. I was taken aback! All this was so sudden to me!

The story looks like a traditional Nenets marriage arrangement ritual (cf. Khomich 1966: 164–165), with the exception that the matchmakers were Russian and Ukrainian missionaries. They took on the traditional Nenets social role of matchmaker within Nenets marriage arrangement institute. Traditionally, Nenets marriage alliances sought the redistribution of wealth and the restructuring of social relations between clans. In the community of the converted, marriage arrangements were no less significant. They functioned as a method to consolidate believers into a united religious community. Missionaries tried to control this sphere, since they believed that only the creation of new Christian families could consolidate born-agains into a strong church.
Finding a marriage partner was always a significant issue in the tundra, because of exogamic rules and complicated brideprice regulations (Islavin 1847: 126; Shrenk 1855: 429; Zhitkov 1913: 216–217; Verbov 1939). The existing exogamic rules forbid marriages between members of the same group of clans. As far back as the 1930s ethnographer Gennadiy Verbov (1939: 47) wrote about the issue of finding marriage partners in the Nenets tundra because a limited number of Nenets clans lives in a particular territory. The Nenets were quite consistent in following traditional exogamic rules and cases of breach were rare (ibid.: 51; Brodnev 1950: 96–97; Khomich 1966). Young Nenets men could travel hundreds of miles from the very north of the Yamal peninsula to the south (the lower reaches of the Ob’ River), or to Gyda peninsula in the east in order to find potential wives (Verbov 1939: 47–48). To find a proper marriage partner in the Nenets tundra was always a big problem, and the situation has hardly changed today.

Young Nenets girls often complained to me about the deficit of grooms: “It’s so difficult nowadays to find a proper husband in the tundra, who is not an alcoholic and who can properly support a family!” In addition to this, increasing contact with sedentary space also breaks the ideal image of the traditional Nenets marriage. Although traditional clan exogamy rules still regulate most Nenets marriages, statistics report the increase of inter-ethnic marriages, single-parent families and the violation of exogamic rules and other marriage and family regulations in Nenets society (Volzhanina 2005). Nenets often discursively frame these changes in terms of cultural loss.

Religious conversion made the marriage issue even more complicated, because of a strict religious endogamy: a church member could only marry another church member; if a believer married an unconverted person the rule breaker would be excluded from community life. And as I noted earlier, in the Nenets case exclusion from congregational life could imply exclusion from kinship and kin-based reciprocity.

In order to prevent the violation of a fundamental principle and to strengthen a recently built community, missionaries got the role of marriage mediators. Simultaneously, the Nenets shifted the traditional role of marriage matchmaker onto new religious leaders, seeking to solve quite typical social problems in the tundra.

**RENEWED MARRIAGE ALLIANCES**

In missionary mediation, there was another aspect, that of territory, which bridged Christian and Nenets ideologies of kinship and strengthened the tundra kin networks.

In the Nenets tundra there was a tendency to look for marriage partners in remote places. In Nenets society, this practice was developed due to exogamic norms that saw young Nenets men travelling hundreds of miles to find wives from different clans. Today, as my research participants often noticed, Nenets also tend to arrange marriage between people from different villages and parts of the tundra. However, the exogamy principle, if it existed, was not articulated. A Nenets woman from the Baidarata tundra explained it in the following way:

> Often matchmakers come from other villages. They come to us, we go there. We won’t know the people yet, who they are. But here we know everybody inside out [znayem kak obluplennykh]. It is better to marry a stranger so that you don’t know
[him/her]. Or maybe she [a bride] would not show what she is made of [pokazyvat’ sebya] in front of strangers. She would be ashamed and quiet.

In their evangelisation work, using snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles, Evangelical missionaries travel across all parts of the Nenets tundra. They cover a larger tundra space than traditional Nenets nomadic routes. Therefore, they united Nenets families in new marriage alliances, maintaining social contacts with those Nenets groups that could not meet each other on their traditional nomadic routes.

In some cases missionaries even re-established previously lost marriage alliances, for example between European and Asian Nenets. In the 19th and 20th centuries, nomadic routes across the Ural Mountains (dividing European and Asian tundra regions) were more widespread than in the present. And in the mid-19th and the early-20th centuries, some groups of European Nenets migrated across the Ural Mountains to Siberia (Khomich 1966: 151; 1970; Vasil’ev 1985). Intermarriage relations between Yamal clans and European Nenets (from the Bol’shezemel’skaya tundra) were widespread (Verbov 1939: 48). However, Soviet territorial re-administration led to a significant reduction of contact between the European and Asian tundra dwellers. Newly established kolkhozy, sovkhozy and rural districts changed traditional migration routes (cf. Volzhanina 2005). The increasingly widening religious network in the tundra restored previous contacts across the Urals. I observed some cases of Christian marriage between Siberian Polar Ural Nenets and Nenets from the Bol’shezemel’skaya tundra, which Nenets considered to be a return of old marriage partnerships.

Every year, more than two hundred converted Nenets from all over the Yamal, Polar Ural, and European tundra travel to Vorkuta city (Komi Republic) for a big religious event – the all-tundra Christian conference. They come to pray, to study the Bible at the Bible school, and to listen to God’s Word. These annual gatherings became a unique frame within which Nenets from different regions – from Bol’shezemel’skaya tundra and Vaigach Island up to the northernmost parts of the Yamal peninsula – could meet each other. Of course, this was a place where most of the marriages were being arranged and most Christian weddings were celebrated.

Although the marriage arrangement principles were altered among converted Nenets (it was no longer clan exogamy, but congregational endogamy that formed the basis of marriage strategies), the mono-ethnicity of Christian Nenets’ marriages in the tundra was still observed. Missionaries often encouraged converted tundra Nenets to marry believing tundra Nenets. When they searched for potential marriage partners, they were careful to maintain the tundra framework.

Evangelical missionaries travelled for months and years in the tundra of the European North, the Polar Urals, and the Yamal, Gyda, and Taimyr Peninsulas. They acquired deep knowledge of the tundra, with its landscape, migration routes and campsites. In order to build a Christian church in the tundra, they sought to establish more Christian families in the tundra – those cells within the network that were regarded as strongholds of spreading the Gospel. This was how missionaries created a foundation for new tundra marriage alliances, and thus, for an alternative kin-religious network. And the creation of this new extended network throughout the Nenets tundra realigned and strengthened the Nenets nomadic system.
CONCLUSION: TUNDRA WEB

At the northernmost point of the Yamal peninsula, near Malygin Strait, there is one of the biggest Nenets sacred sites, called Si’iv’ mia’ – Seven Chums. Seven chum-like hills are made of reindeer antlers, and each one referring to a particular Nenets clan, with a central one that is believed to be all-Nenets.

In winter 2011, at the foot of the Yamal peninsula near the Polar Urals, a big Nenets nomadic campsite was set up. It had seven chums, one of the biggest tundra gatherings organised by converted Nenets. They celebrated a Christian wedding, and many missionaries from different parts of the world arrived at this place. It was a new Nenets sacred place, the Christian Seven chums, people said.

Nenets kin-based practices and Nenets notions of kinship were being realigned and revised within the Christian paradigm. However altered and revised they were, the new religious-kinship network contributed to the reproduction of traditional Nenets economic reciprocity, marriage alliances and eventually Neneiil’ – ‘authentic Nenets life’. The consolidated community of Nenets believers created a new extended alternative network of brothers and sisters throughout the Nenets tundra, thus building a new foundation for the traditional nomadic system.

The Christian category of spiritual kinship was indigenised according to the Nenets internal logic of ‘natural’ kinship. And the indigenisation process developed in such a way that newly established communities of brothers and sisters in Christ coincided with the tundra kin network or created an alternative tundra network that still functioned according to traditional nomadic logic. Hence, tundra economic and social networking (traditionally based on kinship) was revised and reinforced in the framework of conversion.

Facing contemporary problems of increasingly frequent breaches of clan exogamy and other traditional marriage norms and family regulations, the Nenets saw in the cultural mediation of the missionaries the possibility to restore their cultural continuity and traditional tundra social bonds mainly because kinship relations and marriage trajectories were now carefully controlled and managed, if not by clan elders, who had lost their power, then by new religious leaders.

Once, a young Nenets man explained to me his understanding of the system of traditional Nenets sacred places. He compared them with the Internet, the world wide web. Located in different parts of Yamal and the European North, it is believed that the Nenets sacred sites are interconnected with each other in such a way that they create a hyperlink. So, when you are at one sacred site, you actually can make a sacrifice that will be referred to another site. In this way, the sacred web embraces the entire Nenets universe. The contemporary Christian web in the tundra developed with the same logic. Distanced from one another, newly created religious communities were interconnected and thus organised a new base for Nenets integrity. And many Nenets I met in the tundra saw in this new web of controlled and regulated religious/kinship communities a hope to return to the ‘pristine Nenets tradition’ – be it lost, imagined or desired.
NOTES

1 I conducted fieldwork in Beloyarsk village and the Baidarata tundra between 2006 and 2012. During this period, several international Protestant missions worked here, and a core group of converted Nenets and Khanty from Beloyarsk and the tundra changed their religious affiliation several times. The Beloyarsk religious community also turned out to be at the epicentre of many conflicts associated with religious conversion among the natives.

2 Whereas I acknowledge that both Nenets and Christian kinship ideologies are highly gendered, and Nenets religious conversion reconstructed gender roles and practices, in this article I focus on more general discourses and practices of kinship. Gendered aspects of kinship and Nenets conversion will be the topic of my next article.

3 Even during Soviet-era reforms on the Yamal, Nenets reindeer herding kolkhozy and fishermen brigades were, despite the resistance of the authorities, built according to kinship principles. So, the territories of the kolkhozy coincided with original clan territories and kolkhoz members came mainly from one clan (Brodnev 1950; see also Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 48).

4 There is no term in the Nenets language for ‘family’: the word is usually borrowed from Russian – sem’ya (Volzhanina 2009: 117). In literature, the term ‘family’ is used to refer to a household, a group of kinsmen living in one chum or a large extended kin group. In Nenets society, family relations can be expressed through the Nenets terms miad’ter (a chum dweller) or qesy – a nomad campsie.

5 Another example is Nenets nomadic temporal economic associations of different households, cooperating for seasonal work. Nenets reindeer herders (mainly in central and southern Yamal) can cooperate into parma – united summer camps when several herd owners consolidate their efforts in joint pasturing of their herds during summer time (Maslov 1934; Terletskiy 1934; Brodnev 1950: 95; Golovnёv 1995: 53; Stammller 2005: 132, 195–196). The temporal economic bonds are usually formed according to kinship principles, although not necessarily. In other seasons the associations disintegrate.

6 This is a particular concern of the European side of the Polar Ural tundra. During my field research in winter 2011, I met a Nenets family in the Ural Mountains. The two daughters were in their thirties and were still unmarried, while their 30-year-old brother had recently married a 39-year-old woman; this did not seem normal for Nenets society, in which people usually marry young.

7 Interestingly in the European part of the Ural Mountains tundra the principle of religious endogamy has led to the opposite social problem. Here most the Nenets were converted, and few families left unconverted. Therefore, it was the latter who experienced difficulties in finding marriage partners because converted Nenets refused to marry them.

REFERENCES


NOTES AND REVIEWS

THE CONCEPT OF WORK IN YUPIK ESKIMO SOCIETY BEFORE AND AFTER THE RUSSIAN INFUX: A LINGUIST’S PERSPECTIVE

How people’s attitude to work changed with time, place, and circumstances [...] – our knowledge of it is fragmentary, uncertain and disconnected (Febvre 2009 [1948]: 364).

INTRODUCTION

The Yupik language, like probably most languages of the world, has a stem meaning ‘work’ – qepgha(gh)-. In Yupik, verbal and nominal derivation is very well developed: the language is considered a prototypical polysynthetic language (see de Reuse 2006). Consequently, the stem qepgha(gh)- is broadly used for word formation, for example qepgha-q ‘work’ (noun), qepghagh-tuq ‘he works’, qepghagh-ta ‘worker’, qepghagh-yugunga ‘I wanted to work’, qypgha-qiisek ‘one having nothing to do, bored person’ (see Jacobson 2008: 408).

This stem and its derivatives were and are widely used in Yupik speech; however, the scope of meaning of these derivatives has changed drastically after the Russians came to Chukotka to stay in 1930s. The present paper* describes this change.

I will first very briefly describe the group of speakers and the contact situation of the language, list the methodology and the sources of the research, and then show first the pre-contact, and then the post-contact usages and meanings of the derivatives. I will show that, although the phrases containing qepgha(gh)- derivatives in today’s Yupik remain syntactically and morphologically Yupik, semantically they are a replica of Russian. I will conclude with some analysis of what this fact can mean for the understanding the transformation of Yupik society over the last 60–70 years.

THE GROUP AND THE PERIODS OF CONTACT

Siberian Yupik (Eskimo) is a highly endangered language of the Bering Strait area, currently spoken by not more than 200 people on the Chukotka peninsula (the extreme north-east of the Russian Federation), primarily in the villages of Novo-Chaplino and Sireniki and in the towns of Providenia and Anadyr, and by approximately 1,000 people on St. Lawrence Island (the extreme west

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of the USA) in the villages of Gambell and Savoonga (see Badten et al. 1987; Jacobson 1990; 2001; de Reuse 1994; Vakhtin 1997 for details). This paper deals exclusively with the data from the Russian side of the area.

Briefly, there were the following periods of language contact in Chukotka: (a) the pre-contact period (that is, prior to contact with the incoming ‘white’ population: contact with the neighbouring Chukchi people and their language was always present); (b) the late 18th and early 19th century: first contact with Russian merchants and Cossacks; (c) mid-late 19th century: contact with American merchants and whalers; (d) 1930s: increasing influence of the Russian language through school education, administration, new jobs, etc.; (e) from the late 1950s onwards: intensive contact with the Russian language when the policy of ‘industrial development of the North’ was created by the central government in Moscow and thousands of Russian-speaking ‘newcomers’ poured onto Chukotka. The economic crisis of early 1990s caused many Russian newcomers to leave Chukotka, decreasing the total population drastically and consequently increasing the proportion of the indigenous population. Table 1 illustrates the demographic changes in the area (for more details, see Menovshchikov 1965; Vakhtin and Lyarskaya 2004).

Table 1. Yupik Eskimo Population in Chukotka: Percentage of the Total Population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Total Population of Chukotka</th>
<th>Of which, Yupik Eskimo</th>
<th>Yupik Eskimo, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>9.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>21,456</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>46,689</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>2.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>101,184</td>
<td>1,265</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>132,859</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>157,528</td>
<td>1,704</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>53,137</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>3.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>50,526</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>3.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Sources and Methodology

My sources belong to two different epochs: (a) Yupik Eskimo texts recorded by Yekaterina Rubtsova in the 1940s (Rubtsova forthcoming), that is, in the pre-(intensive) contact period, and (b) a modern Russian-Yupik dictionary compiled by Natal’ya Radunovich (2014), a teacher of Yupik Eskimo in the Anadyr college, published three generations later. I also use some data from another Eskimo language – Sirineq – recorded in the 1940s by Rubtsova, and in late 1950s and 1960s by Georgiy Menovshchikov.2

Comparing word meanings and usages from those two bodies of data allows one to see the difference that can be interpreted as a result of the language change under heavy pressure of Russian, the dominant language since late 1950s.
'PRE-CONTACT' MEANING AND USAGE

For the pre-(intensive)contact times, we have texts of three types. In folklore texts, the stem qepgha(gh)- is used to convey three types of meaning:

a) qepgha(gh)- 'house work'. Examples: aghnáq siinumi qepghaamalghi neqméng 'the woman in the storeroom began to cook meat'; naanga kingúnganéng uglávniqá qelghi, allághhiinaq qepghághaqéhkanga 'his mother after him [after he returns from hunting] becomes busy, various work she does';

b) qepgha(gh)- 'processing the carcass of a killed animal'. Examples: kaasaghtúghyaqenní angyálghun aghvéghteng kängllúluku qepghághaqéftat 'when he came closer [he saw that] a group of skin boats surrounded the whale and are processing it'; [...] aghvéngelghím paniiga tamaani qepgháyuhtáqeftuq neghilimikun alíghluní ' [...] daughter of [the man who] killed the whale, it appeared, was working [ = cutting the meat] pulling one arm out through the neck of her overalls';

c) qepgha(gh)- 'workman, help'. Examples: llaaghanhwá aghnaaghaq alígnaghnílukú umélgughtésqumákanga puuruu umiillkuvíngghaq qepghághtengúghlluni 'and so he took the girl for a shaman and made her the head [of the village], and the former head became her workman'.

These three kinds of usage exhaust the scope of the stem meaning. In narratives, however, the number of meanings and usages increases, and qepgha(gh)- acquires new meanings. In following example, the narrator is referring to his work for an American whaling boat. These boats used to hire Yupik men who were experienced whale hunters: [...] anglíyalghiinga qepghqáyuhtaanga amárakáni ' [...] when I grew up I began to work for the Americans'. Clearly, in this sentence the stem already means something different.

Next example is a telling sentence – llaaghanhwá maaten qepghánemtá akilegh-túnginkút maningemtá – llangáqa whangkúta faktuuri sanqítifu 'and so now when we work when we are paid, we are given money – as if there are our goods in the trading post'. The narrator apparently had just discovered the meaning of money and was expressing his surprise: lo and behold, with money we can go to the trading post and take whatever we want as if it were ours!

The third text type where we encounter the stem qepgha(gh)- is ad hoc songs. This genre was widespread among the Yupik people, especially younger people: these were short, two-to-three line songs containing meaningless chants (vocalisations like a-ia-ia-ia-ia or a-nga-nga-nga-, etc.) as well as some meaningful words. The singer (usually a man, but not necessarily) sang what he saw, felt, or wished to express; sometimes the song was mocking. To give the reader an idea of this song type, here are English translations of a couple of songs: "What a nuisance this man is who sings non-stop, why are you singing all the time?" A song may be an expression of one’s emotions: "Oh, I suffer, oh they offend me, oh they offend me, oh I suffer, I suffer because of my life." Sometimes the song borders on shamanic incantation: "Why do they say that you don’t trust me? I will walk you around the tent, will spin you, why do they say you don’t sing songs smiling, laughing?" Some resemble Japanese tanka: “I am getting bored here in Mainyrak because of a long spell of bad weather and a north-easterly wind”.

In the 1940s, new topics appear in these ad hoc songs (I will skip the Eskimo line and provide just the translation): “Members of the kolkhoz, sing your song, remember the work we have to do, it should result in fulfilling the plan with the help of our girls by the New Year.” Evidently, the content of this song is evoked by Soviet administrative reform: collectivisation, which began
Notes and Reviews

POST-CONTACT MEANING AND USAGE

Let us start this section with examples of the Old Sirineq language. When looking at narratives (accounts of everyday events) recorded by Menovshchikov in the late 1950s and 1960s (also published in Vakhtin 2000), we see a drastic change in both usage and meaning. In just three short Sirineq narratives (five and half pages of Eskimo text), there are 16 occurrences of afte- (compared, let me reiterate, to 8 occurrences of both stems out of 460 pages of folklore texts!). The meaning is different from that of folk tales (compare to the examples presented above under folklore texts, section b): ‘now we behave well and we really want to go to work’; ‘If we don’t work, we won’t eat; if we do work, we will eat’, and ‘You have finished working; now you will do whatever easy work you wish’.

Some more meanings include ‘we must work harder’, ‘the head [of the Kolkhoz] doesn’t give work to me’ [=doesn’t tell me what I must do; hardly possible before the kolkhozes]; ‘people began to work together’ (as if they didn’t before); ‘instruments of work [mechanisms] appeared and it became easier to work’, etc.

To explain modern Yupik usage, I use as the source the Russian-Yupik dictionary compiled by Rodionova (2014). There are literally hundreds of contexts for the stem qepgha(gh)- ‘to work’; all usages and meanings of the word fully copy the Russian model.

Compare: to work = to have a job

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{to work} & = \text{to have a job} \\
\text{aghnam} & \quad \text{Kayusiminkut} \\
\text{woman} & \quad \text{qayughllak} \\
\text{helped us} & \quad \text{because} \\
\text{already} & \quad \text{she worked} \\
\text{in camp} & \quad \text{store still works}
\end{align*}
\]

‘The woman helped us because she had already worked in the camp.’ Syntactically, this is a Russian sentence, but all the slots are filled with Yupik words.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{to work} & = \text{to be open, to be functioning} \\
\text{amik} & \quad \text{qellpalnguq} \\
\text{door} & \quad \text{awilleqa} \\
\text{is open} & \quad \text{this means} \\
\text{store} & \quad \text{still} \\
\text{works} & \quad \text{qepghaghauq}
\end{align*}
\]

‘The door is open this means the store is still working.’ In this sentence, the stem
qepgha(gh)- ‘to work’ has an inanimate agent, which was impossible in the previous period: only humans could work, not a shop or a tractor.

**to work = to do any kind of work**

\[ naka \quad qepghaghaquq \]

my mother works
\[ atunekilluni \quad atammun \]

same as my father

‘Mother works in a line with father.’

**to work = to work as, to have a profession**

\[ qepghaghaqunga mumihtistengulunga \]

‘I work as a translator.’

**to work = to do homework at school**

\[ qepghaghaqanka silleqsaghqanka maalghuk uziivellghek \]

‘I usually work on my homework [for] two hours.’

The number of examples could easily be increased; it is clear, however, that the meaning of the stem qepgha(gh)- changed considerably between the 1940s and 1960s.

**ANALYSIS**

We see that already in the late 1950s in everyday Sirinek-language narratives not only is the meaning of the stem changed but the frequency of its occurrence also became much higher: unlike in the earlier period, people seem to be talking about work much more. In pre-contact times, people almost never mentioned work; it was natural, they just worked; later, they started reflecting on the new content of the concept ‘work’, and started talking about it.

The meaning of the concept changed perceptibly: ‘work’ was no longer something done voluntarily by every healthy member of the community; ‘work’ turned into a (wage) job, into something where the goals, the length, and the expected results were determined not by the person who worked but by somebody else: by a superior. Consequently, the meaning of the words ‘to work’ was expanded to cover the new concept. The new meanings were borrowed from Russian. Not only the semantics, but also the syntactic contexts of the word became a replica of Russian: the word acquired new dependent NPs, like evaluative adverbs and adjectives, as well as inanimate agents.

This new language apparently reflected the new world where ‘work’ acquired new qualities: one could now work little or much, hard, willingly, much better, for a good salary or for free, etc. Compare some further examples (only English translations are given): my friends both work, so they live affluently; I work a lot but I am getting a good salary for it; he works hard; he works gladly; finally he was fed up to the back teeth with working; he began to work better; a teacher’s work is important, it is the best, although it is hard.

‘Work’ can now be useless, uninteresting, collective or individual. ‘Work’ turns into an object that one can have or not have, can get or lose, that can be permanent or temporary. The dictionary (Rodionova 2014) gives Eskimo equivalents: to temporarily have no job; to leave somebody without a job; to find a job; to lose a job. Note that, in order to convey this new meaning, one has to use a different English translation for the above example: ‘job’, not ‘work’.

‘Work’ now has limits in time – within a day (work starts at half past seven; we finished working and went home) or within a lifetime (I do not work, I am a pensioner). The dictionary gives 13 expressions containing the stem qepgha(gh)-, of which, not one single occurrence corresponds with the old meaning: there is no ‘cutting the meat’ and no ‘work in the house’. There is only
abstract ‘work’ – a job, something people do for money. The alienation of the worker from the work\(^3\) is complete.

**CONCLUSION**

When a new object, artefact, or concept appears, human language has only three mechanisms to create a word for it: to borrow the term from another language, to invent a new word, or to extend the meaning of an existing term to cover the new territory. Like any other language, Yupik has used all three techniques in the past: it borrowed a lot, first from Chukchi, later from American English, and in the recent decades extensively from Russian (de Reuse 1994; Golovatskaya 2008). It created new words to name phenomena like hospital, school, or book. In the case analysed in this article, Yupik chose the third way: extending the meaning of \textit{qepgha(g)}-, which used to mean ‘housework, etc.’ to cover the vast territory of the wage job.

For the traditional Yupik society,\(^4\) work was an inalienable part of everyday life: people lived because they worked; people worked in order to be able to exist; work was life, life was work. During the early Soviet period, this understanding of work was first complemented and later substituted by a new concept, work as something opposed to leisure or free time; now people worked in order to earn free time during which they could afford not to work.

This change in the concept of ‘work’ reflects the serious social changes that took place in the Yupik world as a result of the modernisation process of the 1950s and 1960s. It is a sign of the deep transformation that Yupik society underwent under Russian (Soviet) influence. This case can be regarded as a tiny speck in the global mosaic of “the great transformation” (Polanyi 2001 [1944]).

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1 According to the 2010 census, 39.3% of the Yupik population claimed Yupik to be their ‘native language’ (compare 84.0% in 1959); however, as a source of information about actual language competence the census figures are understandably extremely inaccurate, one of the reason for this being the unclear and ambiguous meaning of the term ‘native language’.

2 The present author has studied and documented the Yupik Eskimo language since 1974, when his first fieldwork period in Novo-Chaplino, Chukotka, took place. Between 2009 and 2013, he prepared the above-mentioned Yupik texts, collected by Rubtsova, for publication (Rubtsova forthcoming). He also has a connection to the other source, Natalia Rodionova’s dictionary, as he was one of the reviewers of the dictionary.

3 The alienation of the worker from his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him (Marx 1844).

4 Not only Yupik, of course. Similar processes, in all probability, were taking place all over Siberia and the North in the mid-20th century. An interesting parallel can be found in a recent book (Mikhaylova 2015) about the life of Varvara Kuznetsova with the Chukchi. The author describes awkward social position in which Kuznetsova found herself: she was an ethnographer who spent three years (1948–1951) with a nomadic Chukchi family. From the point of view of the Chukchi, the only justification for her lengthy stay could be her ‘work’ as one of the women in the tent. Kuznetsova, on the other hand, regarded her role in the tent in a totally different way: she was a researcher and a Kulturträger, and could not and would not ‘work’ with skins or cook. This collision of two different understandings of ‘work’ is convincingly described in Mikhaylova 2015: 127–131.


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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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