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Shamans, Visions and Ghosts: Exploring spiritual and Religious Experiences

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

Shamanism



- An illustration of a shaman in Siberia, produced by the Dutch explorer Nicolaes Witsen in the late 17th century

Shamanism

- Term 'shaman' derives originally from the Evenk language (Tungusic) in Siberia
- In 15th century used by Russian explorers to describe indigenous belief in Siberia
- Later used to describe similar beliefs all over the world

Origin of term

- Term 'shaman' derives originally from the Evenk language (Tungusic) in Siberia
 - "The Tungus verb *sama* means "to shake the lower part of the body" when one speaks about wild animals and "to act in a shamanic manner" in a ritual context" (p. 285).
- Applied to male and female
- Used by Russian explorers for Siberian traditions since the 15th century

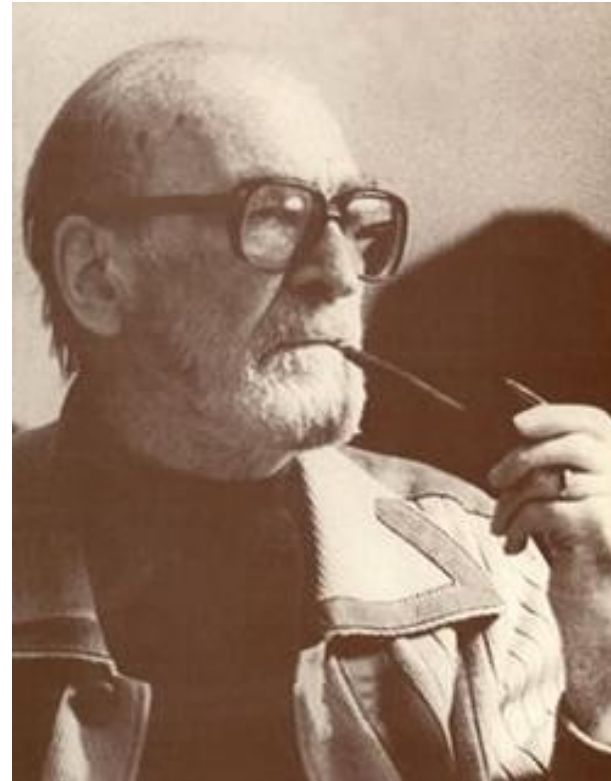


Mircea Eliade

- ...describes shamanism as “technique of religious ecstasy”
 - shamans are intermediaries between the human world and the spirit worlds
- Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton University Press 1972, pp. 3–7)

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)

- Born in Romania, worked and lived first in France and (since 1956) in the USA
- Historian of Religion (most importantly at the University of Chicago) and novelist



- Among his academic books are contributions about shamanism, yoga and the Sacred and the Profane
- Editor in chief of the Encyclopaedia of Religion (first edition)
- [Information about Eliade](#)

Roberte Hamayon

- argues that it is a Western concept developed in several stages
- And very different from shamanism of Siberian hunters before the Soviet era



- From the end of the 17th century, Russian Orthodox clergy used the term shaman for people they described as religious but also as dangerous rivals “suspected of being in service of the devil because of his extravagant cries and gesticulation” (p. 284)

Later portrayed as charlatans

- One century later observers, influenced by Enlightenment, described shamans as charlatans who exploited people
- Shamans and people going to shamans were regarded as credulous and ignorant



U-turn – romantic portrayal of shamans

- Later, 'a Romantic current' "took the shaman for a noble magician in touch with nature" (p. 284)



Then portrayed as “pathological ill”

- In the middle of the 19th century shamanic behaviour was regarded as “a sign of mental or nervous pathology” (p. 285)



Hamayon writes

- “Indeed, to defend themselves in the face of colonial pressure, indigenous peoples buttressed their rituals by claiming for them therapeutic value so that they could be tolerated by the authorities.” (p. 285)

Good for health

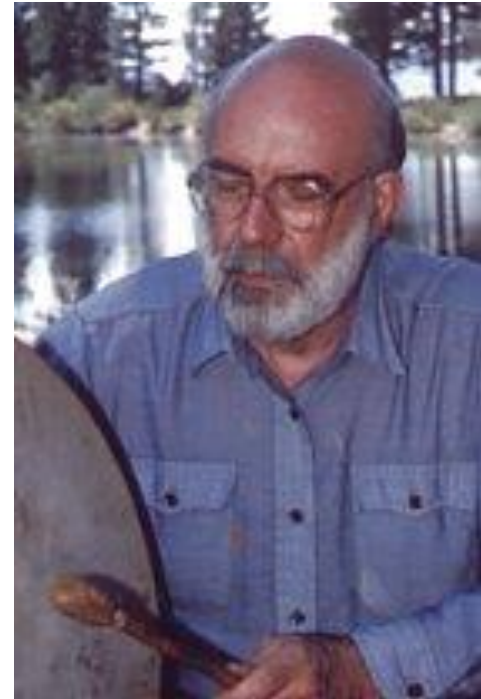
- “The idea that ‘shamanizing’ was good for the health became widespread.” (p. 285)
- -> time of psychoanalysis in the West
- > led to apprehension of shamanism in Western societies

Neo-Shamanism

- “The Californian counter-culture of the 1960s reversed these values, idealizing shamanism as a universal spiritual quest based on real embodied experience.” (p. 285)
- -> the birth of neo-shamanism

Neo-Shamanism

- Shamanism as New Age
- Michael Harner (1929-2018)
- [Michael Harner bio](#)
- [Link to his website](#)
 - Contains link to documentary “The Way of the Shaman”



Shamanism in indigenous societies

- Shamanism as a way of life
- Example: Siberian hunters
- "Humans are just one species among others" (p. 285)
- -> need to have relation to non-human species

Shamanism Today

- After the end of the Soviet regime Siberian people were free to reconnect to old practices
- Shamanism as authentic indigenous practice that became cornerstone of their identity
- -> shamanism as an emblematic identity (p. 291)